

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

AUGUST, 1976.

10p

VOL. 5. NO. 8.

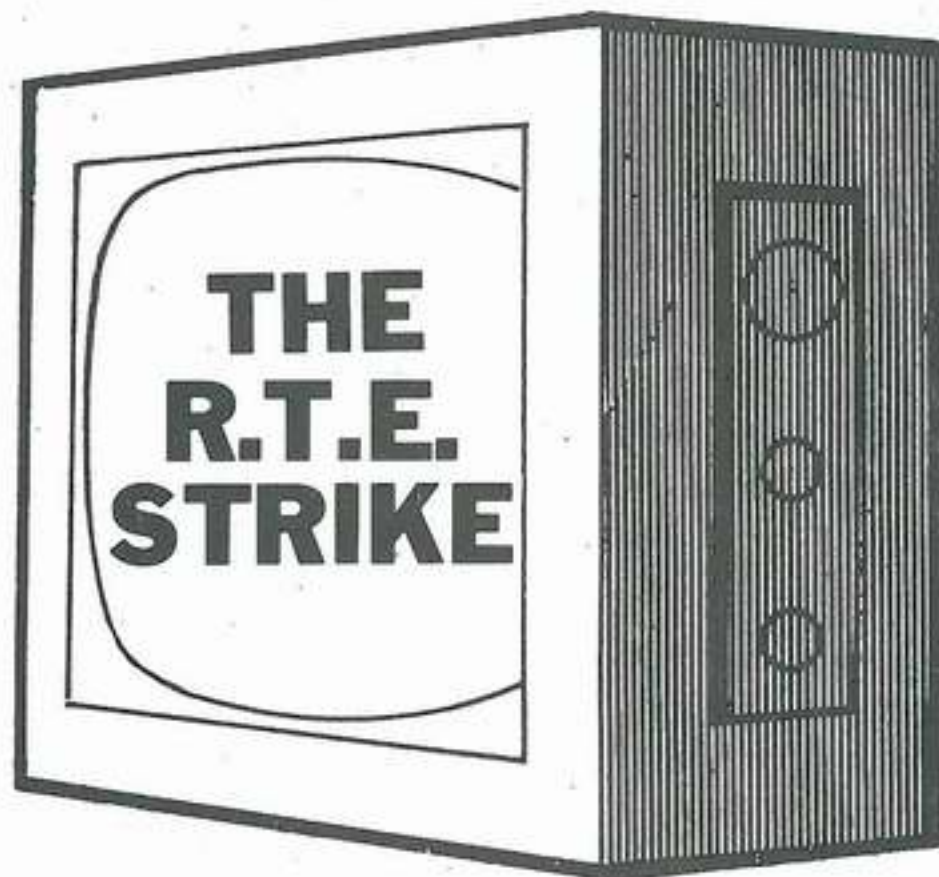
THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER

That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic ... James Connolly

## AGONY IN THE GARDEN



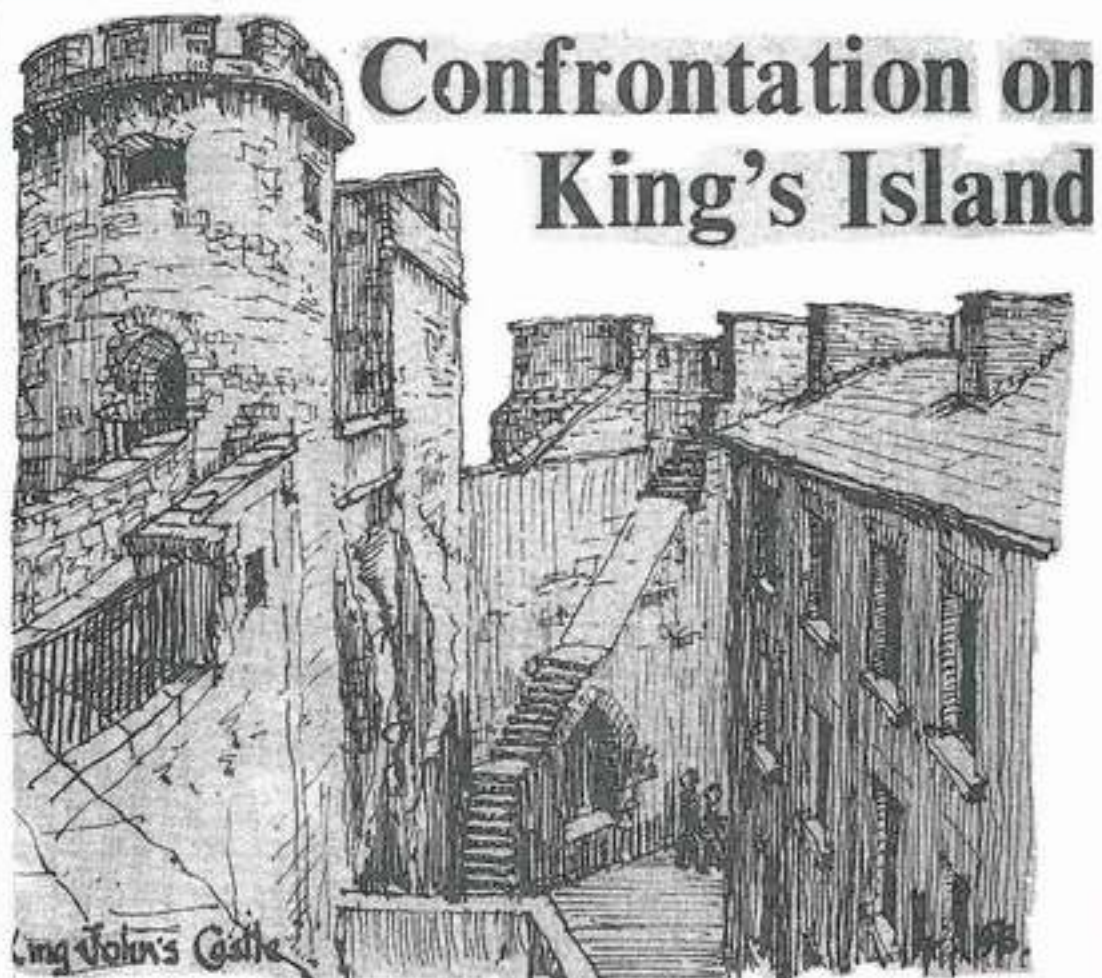
JIMMY CARTER



## JUST A SLUG OF TWILIGHT



MAYOR RUSSELL



THE FOURTH SIEGE OF LIMERICK

# JUST A SLUG AT TWILIGHT

CRITICS COME in all sorts of guises and sizes; usually they have their own hobby-horses and are upset because other people won't ride them. All have one thing in common: they shy away when you suggest they might usefully start their own paper and put forward the points of view they are so keen should be advanced on their behalf. Of course, they see the catch: that would involve them in work, *voluntary* work. With due modesty and having regard to our own limitations, we venture to suggest their own paper might expose a lack of literacy, an inability to articulate, perhaps a shallowness of thought.

One critic, especially of these notes, finds that the *Limerick Socialist* has no 'soul', that it is not pointing the way to "real revolution" (whatever that may be). But we do point the way to honesty in public life and, taking a look around at goings on here and there, even a partial success would be a great big revolution because, by and large, public persons are as venal and devious here as any moustachioed aficionado in a banana republic — and we don't even have benefit of bananas.

My young critic, who never gave an hour of his time to any cause, is just another proposer of resolutions that other people should do the work; he merits the description Dr. Oliver St. John Gogarty applied to Irish labour leaders, 'they have the rhythm of labour without the work'. Incidentally, the collection of individuals with disparate views on every national topic that is loosely called the Irish Labour Party, does not run to an organ of opinion. Too much trouble, or too many points of view to accommodate? What point of view, for instance, has Mr. Stephen Coughlan T.D., on any subject, local or national? He doesn't let the people know, in the Dail or outside it. Yet he is able to price horses at the Junction Races to rustle up business among the punters; pollsters should be given similar information or they'll feel entitled to take their business to someone who is, shall we say, less shy. It could be, of course, that Mr. Coughlan's business is entirely his own business and by no means your business. In that case, he should fund it himself. Perhaps the electors will help him in due course to make up his mind?

Such points of view as Fine Gael and Fianna Fail have — and they are not all that easy to discern — are adumbrated in the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*.

The Provo view is to be found in *An Phoblacht* and, among other places, in the *Irish Times* where much fuss is made of the mistreatment of I.R.A. prisoners and less fuss of the murder and maiming of victims of Provo violence; the *Limerick Leader*, which is 70 per cent paid advertising and does not rank as a newspaper, expresses no opinion about anything except, occasionally, the well-known effect of bad weather on the harvest.

The *Limerick Socialist* stand is clear and unequivocal: we believe there are two states in Ireland, the North and the South, and that it is the duty of the people in the Republic to improve the conditions of living in the Republic and, never mind Conor Cruise O'Brien, there is no other 'Irish dimension'. Little Irelanders if you like, but that's the way it is. We deal in bread-and-marge and the immediate care of the victims of the class-struggle and, as far as we are able, we expose the tricks of politicians of all parties. Of course, we are working on a small canvas. *Would our critics have us go as mercenaries to suborn the Ballyfermots at £100 a throw?* We'll beaver away on our own thank you. The *Limerick Socialist* is at least real, not pie in the ionosphere like that Second Channel — and who'll be the first to mention *that* again in Limerick? That'll be a fire when it lights, as the fox said when he saw the steam rising after he pissed on the rock?

\*\*\*\*\*

SUPPORTERS of the Provos have made great play of the unfortunate case of David Thornley, not that they give a damn

about him. His colleagues in the Labour Party are equally uncaring. Though I found his conduct in standing on a Provo platform inexcusable and said so in the *New Statesman*, I do not think all is lost; he has only lost a battle, not the war. He has no grievance though against the *Limerick Socialist* as Jim Kemmy was forced to make clear last month. The future is up to David Thornley himself, and his first step should be to sever all connections with the Provos and publicly apologise for his behaviour.

\*\*\*\*\*

IT IS holiday time. May I suggest that a handful should club together and let the winner have a ticket to Dublin? He could spend the journey counting the tilled fields and cultivated gardens. I did not see any on my last few trips up and down, but then I am prone to waste time, as our native gabbers have it, reading books and wrestling with crossword puzzles. Perhaps the owners of these fields and gardens have long since concluded that there is a certain amount of work involved in growing vegetables and flowers and that it is easier, while the going is good, to drive to town and buy processed (i.e. chemically treated) vegetables and as for flowers, what good are they anyhow? It is a point of view; it is prevalent and it is by no means new.

As a schoolboy in Ennis I used to grow peas, beans, marrows, carrots and so on and was regarded by my native Irish-speaking grandmother as an oddity without 'a stim of sense'. Now, after a lifetime, I'm at the digging again. Last year, new to the game, I managed to grow enough vegetables of all sorts to supply the kitchen for three months. This year, I am doing much better, but I've had problems. Some of these were of my own making. In absolute defiance of EEC regulations I planted Kerr's Pinks (please don't ask me why there are such regulations against pink potatoes; ask Dr. Hillery) and saw my otherwise lovely scrop providing sustenance for monstrous slugs.

A bottled slug specimen was identified at the Kinsealy Plant Pathology centre as *Milax budapestensis* and the resident guru recommended, in case I intended to continue my defiance of the EEC., a regular dusting of my potato drills with a specific manufactured by no less august a concern than Imperial Chemical Industries. (The *budapestensis* part of the name of this keeled, convoluted slug does not, Irish Catholic farmers will be relieved to learn, indicate association with Buda-Pest, the Hungarian capital under Red Russian domination, nor has it anything to do with its fondness for pink-skinned potatoes). It was disappointing though to learn later from a BBC broadcast — the details were suppressed by Kinsealy — that our native *Milax* is a sort of second-class slug; the English variety is *Milax Superbus*. Another injustice to Ireland! Other useful information for IFA Chairman Paddy Lane and his friends is that *Milax* is such a slow mover and normally unlikely to meet another *Milax* of the opposite sex that Nature has provided for this by making it hermaphrodite, or as Gore Vidal puts it ambisexual. Say what you like, the cards are stacked against the farmer!

Of course in this situation I have surrendered to the EEC and DR. Hillery; I'm not one to encourage illicit, underground sex so I planted British Queens this year and so far so healthy. Anti-Irish bias again you say, but isn't it better than encouraging sexual deviants in my garden? That is, of course, if *Milax* continues to recognise that my potatoes are Queens, not queans. And a final bit of information for Paddy Lane's tax-free cohorts: *Milax* is edible protein, every bit as tasty as those foreign snails (*escargots*) — these are simply *Milax* in evolutionary armour — so much favoured by our Euro T.D.'s. What a farmer was lost in me! Am I your choice then for Euro T.D. at £20,000 a year? Let me be the first to promise, nay to

guarantee, that you can throw away your can of worms; you'll have *Milax Superbus* with the best of them!

\*\*\*\*\*

WHEN IT comes to wheezes to make money out of the customer, more money than usual, the Irish shopkeeper is no slouch. Dublin shops, Arnotts is one of them, are cashing cheques at a discount of 5p in the £. Assuming the bank clerks' strike lasts a month, this represents an interest rate of more than 60 per cent per annum. In Russia, they shoot the occasional profiteer *pour encourager les autres*; in Warsaw, proposed price rises are stopped when the customers march in protest; in Dublin, Mr. Justin Keating, the Minister for Industry and Commerce, a Labour T.D., has lunch as usual in the Shelbourne and does precisely nothing. By the way, in case you're worried about how our Ministers, T.D.'s and Senators are faring with their own salary cheques, you can stop worrying the Department of Finance in Merrion Street cashes them on presentation. No discount is charged; neither Mr. Cosgrave — he's the Taoiseach of All the Irish People including especially the directors of Arnotts — nor Mr. Keating, would hear of it. Only Socialists think it all stinks and, of course, we are positively anti-Irish. You bet we are! That kind of Irish!

\*\*\*\*\*

ANOTHER man who has the Irish taped is Dr. James B. McMahon who has returned after a lifetime in England to settle in Cootehill, Co. Cavan. In a letter to the London-published *Irish Post* he tells the Irish in Britain to stay put, to cancel any plans for returning home. "Corruption at all levels is worse than ever, social services scandalous, the attitude of the people extremely backward", he says, "My God, how disillusioned I am". Dr. McMahon should be living in Limerick; a few drinks with Steve Coughlan and he'd be scribbling out a scrip for Valium and Librium and checking on the planes out of Shannon. Only tough babies who can recognise bull at a distance survive here and come up smiling — and kicking.

\*\*\*\*\*

I HAVE already paid tribute to the Late Late Mayor of Limerick for turning the kidnapping of Dr. Herrema into a publicity stunt and for his Good Turn on the telly; to the new, well almost new Mayor, party-switcher Senator George Edward Russell, now in the twilight of his years, his family and forbears, GREETINGS! and this little excerpt from *Shawn-na-Scoob* by a Limerick versifier Michael Hogan who had some earlier and apparently not altogether satisfactory dealings with another Russell brood of miserly millers.

A slave-driving firm of bigots and knaves  
Without principle, mercy, or honour's high trust  
As cold as the clods on their ancestors' graves,  
And as rotten in heart as their ancestors' dust.

There's lots more like that, but can a Mayor be blamed for the shortcomings of his parents? Obviously not, and while we're in a versey mood here's a suitably *apropos* verse, by Philip Larkin, Mayor Ted can usefully quote back

They fuck you up your parents do,  
They may not mean to, but they do.  
They fill you with their faults  
And for good measure add a few for you.

I am personally glad that the mayoralty has gone to a Stonyhurst boy but I cannot agree with last month's statement in our paper that Mayor Ted "completed his education at Stonyhurst". The only safe thing you can say about any boy is that he *attended* school; it is unsafe to say that a boy, for instance, was a *student* at Blackrock College (one County Clare fellow I knew whose parents did not think St. Flannan's good enough used climb over the wall at Blackrock; at 14 he was the father of TWINS!). It is fairly safe to say that he did not study *that* at the Holy Ghost Fathers. As for completing one's education, it is never completed: I have a few more

lessons for Mayor Ted!

The day I heard of Mayor Ted's elevation I was puzzling over two random phrases one I'd heard on the radio: "Sheep have a good future" and then the time signal, the other I'd dug up from the recesses of my mind; it was Frantz Kafka's, "There are possibilities for me certainly but under what stone do they lie?". I found a conjunction between the phrases and the new Mayor it struck me that, beyond a peradventure, under a stone marked Russell there's a slug, keeled, convoluted, revolting.

\*\*\*\*\*

WITH HOLIDAYS in mind I called into a Dublin bookshop for something suitable. I fingered "Latin Made Easy"; I never found it all that difficult though I know now that the "actresses" Cataline was always dodging around with in the Roman Hiltons were by no means actresses; they were no better than they ought to be or perhaps could afford to be, but the priest was too shy to say so (assuming he knew). No use. I tried "Calculus Made Easy". The title is a downright lie where I'm concerned. Yet I know a bit about mathematics. The practical stuff. How many Irish punters realise they are being conned mathematically in accepting 11/10, 6/5, on or against paid as Evens? Try it. 11/10 against paid as evens — you lose one-tenth 10/11 paid as evens — you gain one-eleventh. So you lose a tenth, gain an eleventh. Who's the sucker? You are. I hope you agree that for run-of-the-mill living I'm able to manage without Calculus. I eventually decided to take The Dail Speeches of Stephen Coughlan and its companion The Dail Speeches of Michael Herbert. They're in Irish and English. On Vellum. Illuminated by the monks of Scattery Island. The half-sheet will come in handy.

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The management of the economy has, as we are all aware, a direct effect on the living standards of Irish workers. In an effort to boost its viability and profitability, Irish industry, with Government backing, launched a national "Buy Irish" campaign. This exercise has been given large coverage by the media, with the emphasis on the slogan "quality" Irish goods. But, even allowing for the limitations of such a campaign in a situation where we are seeking to sell more of our own exports to other countries, the Government itself has shown little serious intention of adhering to the self-help philosophy.

Many examples have already been given of the Government's inconsistency, and private enterprise is no better. For instance, let us look at one aspect of the buying policy of Roche's Stores. This company has always prided itself on being one of the most progressive of Irish firms. Roche's Stores started in Cork in 1919. The company prospered; a second and larger store was opened in Dublin in 1928, and a third branch was established in Limerick in 1937. The firm's latest venture is a shop in Galway, built this year.

The designers of the Galway store are the Dublin firm of architects, Newenham, Mulligan and Associates. When it came to the selection of building materials for the building and finishing of the shop, Roche's Stores appeared to go out of its way to buy non-Irish products. This policy became obvious when it came to the purchase of mosaic for the toilet floors and carpets for the shop itself. An order was placed with Mosaic Assemblers Limited, Dublin, to supply the one hundred square yards or so required. But, consistent with current trends, the architects changed their minds and switched the order to a firm in Malaysia. The Malaysian product, in comparison with the Irish one, was pure rubbish. A quarter of the imported mosaic disintegrated when it was unpacked.

It would be interesting to speculate on just how much Malaysian money was spent in the branches of Roche's Stores since the year 1919. The Buy Irish Campaign, as far as the Government, Roche's Stores and other companies are concerned, is nothing short of blatant hypocrisy.

AUSTIN McCOY.

**PART  
NINETEEN**

**BY  
P.J. RYAN**

### CONFRONTATION ON KING'S ISLAND

On the King's Island, the Staters held the Courthouse, St. Mary's Cathedral and the pub at the corner of Nicholas and Athlunkard Streets. They also held Mary Street Police Barracks and Pa Healy's house at Park Bridge. In each of those posts they had up to twenty men. Four bridges connect the Island with the City and the Staters held three of them. The fourth, Thomond Bridge, connected the King John's Castle with the Clare bank of the river.

The Diehards held the Castle and St. Munchin's Protestant Church with a splendid sniping position on its square tower. There were nearly one hundred men in the Castle. This was a ridiculously small number of men to maintain a minimum of five sentry posts with daily reliefs under conditions of potential massed attack.

Day by day and slowly but surely the Staters leisurely approached the Castle, their nearness being indicated by the rifle fire of the snipers. The Staters were in no hurry. Their purpose was attrition, to wear down the garrison by keeping them continuously on the alert. They had no intention of a massed attack, as they had not enough men for this purpose. They hoped that the Diehards would evacuate the Castle without bloodshed.

It became clear to the officer in command of the Castle that his position was untenable. A line of retreat lay open to him at night, across Thomond Bridge to the Clare side of the river. A Lewis gun on St. Mary's Cathedral tower would deter even the most foolhardy from crossing by day, and the nights are short in July.

A speedy evacuation of the Castle was vital to avoid surrender or death. The O/C could not escape from the Island except by boat. The fast flowing river could not be crossed by boats except when the tide was almost in and ere it ebbed. This was a period of almost three hours. These were the hours of watchfulness by the Staters. As the Staters had a post on the Metal Railway bridge across the Shannon above the Castle, it was seen that the Island, besides being surrounded by water, was also surrounded by Staters—a geographical precaution employed by the Staters.

It was decided to remove all sick men from the castle in a Red Cross van. The plan was put into action and in a short time the van made several journeys to the Strand Barracks. The route from the Castle to the Strand is downhill, so that a laden van would have little difficulty in making the short journey.

The speedy movements of the van attracted considerable attention. It seemed to indicate that the van was being loaded at the Castle with dead or wounded men. The dreadful thought arose that the garrison had indulged in mutual slaughter, or that some explosion or accident had occurred and that the ambulance was removing the men to the Strand for medical treatment. As the nearest hospital was at the Workhouse, it was considered odd that the van did not take that uphill journey.

As the van moved along the Strand for what proved to be its last journey, it stalled. Two men got down and, by pushing, managed to get it in motion again. It was then seen that these were not sick men needing medical attention but militant men needing militant attention. These things being noted, fire was opened on the ambulance. There were no casualties.

### THE BIG GUN

The story of the Staters firing on the Red Cross ambulance quickly spread throughout the city. In plaintive tones the infamous deed was condemned by the Diehards. The citizens

# The Fourth Siege of Limerick

were assured that the few men in the ambulance were in for a joy-ride only. The whole affair was explained away as a mere boyish prank carried out by youngsters who as soldiers of the Republic would do nothing mean or low.

In ringing tones and with flashing eyes the question was asked: To what depths of depravity would the Staters sink? In voices appalled with horror it was even suggested that the Staters might bring down the Big Gun from Dublin and start shelling the brave defenders of the Republic. As everything which went on in the rival camps was known to each side and to the citizens, the various events of the day were discussed with homely and spirited candour. As the city prepared to bed down for the night, the possibility that the Staters might bring down the Big Gun was freely discussed.

In the four military barracks there was quiet and confident calm amongst the garrisons. The possibility of the Big Gun being used against them was also freely discussed. It was felt that the gun would come in by the Dublin Road and that its progress would be resisted and halted. It was felt that Patrick Sarsfield of glorious memory looking down from Celestial Orbit would smile approval on their noble efforts and bless their brave hearts.

While some discussed and others mused and some lay quietly dreaming, the gun came South over O'Brien's Bridge. It crossed the Shannon again at Crobally Bridge and continued on by the Corbally Road. It crossed over the Abbey river by Park Bridge and entered the City before ten at night.

The gun was towed by a covered heavy motor lorry and travelled at about nine miles per hour. If it travelled any faster, the iron-shod wooden wheels would fall to pieces. The gun slowed down to a crawl to pass the barrier at the humped-back, narrow Park Bridge. The gun was called Sean McKeon's 18-Pounder. It entered the city on the evening of Wednesday, the nineteenth of July, 1922.

### THE SHELLING OF THE STRAND BARRACKS

The gun was taken to Arthur's Quay that night. Next morning July 20th, the gun was set up alongside the Curragour Mills and forty feet from the quay wall. The gun was manned by three Limerick men, Jim Leddin, John and Michael McNamara, all from the "Island". These three men had been in Artillery regiments of the British Army and had been demobilised in 1919 and 1920 at the end of the First World War. The officer in charge of the gun was Colonel Fraher, an ex-officer of Artillery and also a Limerick man. By 10 a.m. in the morning, the whole city was aware of the arrival of the gun and that the Strand Barracks was to be shelled. Crowds of citizens flocked to every vantage point to view the scene of impending horror. The Staters were unable to stop the onrush of spectators except at Arthur's Quay where masses of barbed wire prevented entry. Almost dead on 10.30 a.m. the gun was ready. The range across the river was about 150 yards. At such short range aim is always taken through the barrel of the gun. Colonel Fraher and each of the gunners in turn looked through the barrel of the gun. Some few privileged officers also had a look through the barrel of the gun. It was considered improper to invite the Major and the two city Bishops to have a look; there was but little time for such courtesies. The view

through the barrel was true; it gave a telescopic view of the Strand Barrack's gate. The shell was then inserted in the breech in correct military manner; the gunners then saluted their officers and the officer returned the salute.

This gun was one of a pair left behind in Athlone Barracks by the British when they evacuated, and the Barracks was handed over to General Sean McKeon. They were old 1912 vintage guns, and were badly worn. With the guns was a supply of solid shells. The shells did not contain an explosive charge and so did not explode, in fact, like the guns, the shells were obsolete. It was a solid shell that was inserted in the breech of the eighteen-pounder. Now that everything was ready a great hush fell upon the military and spectators and a last consultation was held between the officers. Everyone realised that this was an historic occasion, a momentous event. Not since the Siege of 1691 had a siege-gun been fired in Limerick city. Standing twenty feet from the gun, Colonel Fraher waved his arm. Michael McNamara then pulled the lanyard and fired the gun. It was 10.30 a.m. With the roar of the explosion the gun jumped eighteen inches in the air and recoiled backwards, the "trail" of the gun narrowly missing the gunners. The shell travelled forward and struck a telegraph pole, thirty feet to the left of the Strand Barrack's Gate, cutting down the pole. The shell ricocheted and then struck the second window to the right of the gate. It skidded along the road and later was picked up near the Treaty Stone.

The spectators were happy with the spectacle and the loud bang which was heard for miles away. They were unhappy with the result and expressed disapproval of the gunners until it was pointed out that this first shot was a trial shot to get the

feel of the gun. Better results would follow the next shot. A consultation was held between the Colonel and the gunners; it was agreed that the soft mud and stone of the roadway at Arthur's Quay was not the best surface for the spade of the gun. A deeper hole was then dug for the "trail" of the gun. Once more the gun was mounted and aim was taken through the barrel of the gun. From the first shot it was realised that the gun was shooting thirty-five feet to the left at one hundred and fifty yards range. This represented a lateral deviation of about fifteen degrees. To allow for this lateral deviation the gun was aimed at the window near the red brick house on the right of the Strand Barrack. Once more into the breech was slammed a solid shell. Once more the gunners saluted and the Colonel returned the salute. The Colonel's hand dropped the signal and McNamara fired the gun. The gun belched smoke and flame as it again jumped almost two feet in the air. It then moved forward, swung round and a wheel became embedded in the hole dug for the "trail" of the gun. The gun was now pointing at Strand House.

After this odd behaviour of the gun, no further shells were fired, as it was feared the gun might swing around and shoot the gunners. The tenants in the tenement houses on Arthur's Quay complained loudly saying — take that damned yoke away before the houses are knocked down on top of us.

The second shell struck the Barrack's gate knocking it down. It bounced off the barrack square and disappeared over the roof at the back of the Barracks, and thus ended the shelling in the Fourth Siege of Limerick.

(To be continued).

---

# FAMILY PLANNING

## PART ONE

BY CARMEN CULLEN

It is estimated by the International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.) that at the present rate of increase it will take 35 years for Ireland's population to double in size. This great and accelerating increase, more dramatic in Third World countries, comes not from a rise in fertility but from a dramatic fall in death rates, produced by improvements in food, medicine and hygiene.

Just how many people our planet can support depends on our ability to harness our natural resources, on land, in the sea and in the solar system. In Ireland, where the density of population per mile is relatively low, the prospects of insufficient resources to meet the needs of an overlarge population does not seem so alarming. We might argue that we have not even begun to make use of our resources and that the uncontrolled trend in population growth might be allowed continue unchecked for the present. But there are other factors to be considered. Ireland, existing for so long outside the mainstream of European cultural thought and economic activity, has now committed itself to an integrated Europe and an assumption which exaggerates our isolation is no longer valid.

Industrialisation is a key factor in agricultural policy and in the population growth in this country. Looking back in history, the predominance of agriculture and the outlet provided by emigration disguised the possibility of a swamping of resources. Previously, the meagre plots held by farmers were further reduced in size through sub-division and the plight of the holders made more desperate as a consequence. Before the famine, when Ireland supported a population of eight million, an abundance of these small holdings dotted the countryside,

each tenant's and labourer's cottage probably containing a large family. The hunger and disease that followed decimated a people bereft of outside help and advanced scientific techniques. A disastrous dependence on home-grown agricultural produce, chiefly potatoes, played havoc with a state of supposed sufficiency. Hopefully, nature will never again have such a free hand in population control. Yet we can learn from past disasters.

The idea of self-sufficiency inspired by a desire to return to the land must be carefully considered. In an era of advanced farming techniques, it is estimated that a minimum farm size of 40 acres is needed to maintain an average family with a decent standard of living. However appealing the idea of community farming might be, present trends in agricultural policy point in the opposite direction. The alternative of a return to the land is not a realistic one for the majority of people and, though there are inequalities in the sizes of present-day farms, a more, even distribution of land would do little to alter the overall situation.

In the context of industrial concentration in cities, urbanisation and the shifting pattern of population growth from country to town, family planning becomes more relevant. While the world's population is expected to double in the last three decades of the century, the increase will be only 50% in the rural areas, and it is expected to approach 250% in the towns. Efforts at decentralisation have been largely unsuccessful and the growth of population in the urban areas, with its attendant social and economic implications, is a fact of modern Irish life.

The Limerick Family Planning Association is concerned with helping to alleviate the stress and strain inherent in modern life to help create conditions for the better fulfilment of the individual, regardless of marital status, class or creed.

(TO BE CONTINUED).

# THE R.T.E. STRIKE

On Tuesday, April 27th R.T.E. management made what was probably the greatest *faux pas* in industrial relations in the history of the organisation to date: Conor Sexton, the head of Personnel, authorised the lock-out of 30 painters and carpenters, the act being euphemistically described as being put "off the pay roll". The pickets went up on Wednesday morning; curious workers passing by remarked, "Another strike". This made it the fourth official strike since December and an equal number of unofficial stoppages had taken place leaving a well of bitterness and resentment throughout the organisation.

To understand the present situation the background has to be looked at. Radio Eireann was originally a section of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and, though R.T.E. is now a semi-state organisation, it remains under the direct control of the Ministry for Posts and Telegraphs. Because of its civil service origins, there is a built-in suspicion and hostility towards trade unionism amongst management and this was, clearly shown by Oliver Maloney's speech on the internal radio some months after taking office as Director General of R.T.E. His warning that those embarking on militant trade union action "could expect the worst" was seen by some as throwing down the gauntlet. Nor was this position helped by the appointment of Conor Sexton as Director of Personnel: he seemed to believe that if one stonewalled on every issue, cancelled meetings with union representatives and in general sat on every issue, big and small, the unions would get tired and go away.

R.T.E. pleaded inability to pay increases — due under the N.W.A. in November and January. R.T.E. Relays had a ban on overtime operating in September; the Vision Section in T.V. did the same in October, the W.U.I. held a ballot on a ban on overtime because of non-payment of rostered duty allowances to clerical grades. The ban was carried by an 11 to 1.

R.T.E. finally agreed to pay but kept deferring the date of payment. A hard line was being drawn between the workers and the people in the Hilton, or the Pirana Pool, as one wit named it.

Another factor behind every dispute in R.T.E. is the system of paternalism or patronage found in the politics of most Roman Catholic countries run by Christian Democratic parties. Many believe that appointments and promotions are rarely made on ability or work records but on a patronage system. It is said that not only are the best programmes made in Madigan's pub in Donnybrook but that promotions have been decided in the smoke and beer of closing time. Some of the older generation find this acceptable, but most of the younger generation view it with disgust.

## GENERAL STRIKE

The picketers handed out leaflets at the gate. The temperature began to rise. The W.U.I. were the first to call a general meeting. This union represents producers, production assistants, researchers and clerical staff. The W.U.I. was in an angry mood. In December, Joan Carmichael, the Branch Secretary, reportedly told the members that the union would have to shut shop if something didn't happen. Not alone were management not discussing issues, they were refusing to even meet her. Denis Larkin had been snubbed by the staff relations department. The radio producers struck in January; they returned to work with a promise that their grievances would be ironed out by May 1st. This did not happen. Instead, a victimisation campaign had been launched against a creative young radio producer for what many believed was a reprisal for trade union activism. Oliver Maloney had had a meeting with the television producers in the Montrose Hotel which ended viciously and bitterly. The treatment of the craftsmen was seen as an attack on trade unionism. A motion of support was passed and the branch secretary was instructed to determine the best way to support the strikers. The W.U.I. has

within it a hard core of intelligent and militant trade unionists and it was this hard core that walked out through the gates on Friday on unofficial strike.

Meanwhile, other unions were meeting. The committee of the N.U.J. and the programme members — presenters of "Seven Days", "Here and Now", etc. favoured strike action. But they were outvoted 34 to 17 by members from the newsroom. The hardliners muttered about well-heeled members in the newsroom crawling out of the woodwork to vote. A number of stormy meetings succeeded each other.

In the meantime, Conor Sexton was being named as the villain of the piece. Maloney and Mac Conghail were at the I.M.I. meeting in Killarney when the strike took place.

Mac Conghail gave a lecture on dealing with trade unions. When the strikers and staff relations department failed to make progress, Maloney pulled out Sexton's men and set up a 3 man committee on which R.T.E. was represented by Brendan McDonald, head of Production (Television). This was seen as a snub to Sexton and his staff relations colleagues, and one newspaper reported internal rows between Sexton and Maloney. The strike by the W.U.I. producers and production assistants was taking effect, with management frantically plugging gaps in the television and radio schedules with films from the archives and gramophone records.

The picketers waited for the I.T.G.W.U. to meet. But the branch secretary Mick McEvoy deferred the meeting. He saw a general strike looming and thought rightly that the issue for a general strike was non-payment of the N.W.I. But he couldn't hold back some of the members. The printing section, previously out on an unofficial basis, struck again. The postboys, the most lowly paid employees, all in their teens, went out, came back on the advice of supervisors, but when their boss, Mr. B.A. Sheehan, ordered them to distribute 2 days' mail in an hour they walked out again. The postboys became the darlings of the picketers standing at the gates in rain and hail. The riggers and the E.T.U. members never crossed the picket. The craftsmen applied to Congress, for an "all-out" picket. On Thursday, May 6th, W.U.I. members returned, pending the decision of Congress.

Inside the malaise of a general strike crept throughout the buildings. All food supplies stopped. One canteen remained open offering beans, bread and black tea. Ventilation was cut off, the post piled up on tables and the toilets went uncleaned. Hostility amongst pro and anti-strike factions arose. Frantic bulletins from staff relations gently gathered dust. Clerk-typists took 2-hour dinner breaks in surrounding hostels. Producers and presenters did their work and fled the buildings. A creeping paralysis began. The I.C.T.U. sanctioned an "all-out" picket to take effect from the morning of Friday 14th.

Behind the scenes, the Government tried to get Congress to withdraw. The I.T.G.W.U. unhappy with the support they were receiving on the N.W.A. question, and believing that the offer made to the craftsmen was reasonable, were not in favour of the "all-out" strike. On Thursday afternoon, the strike was deferred, pending further discussion on the following day.

Management believed that they were saved. Oliver Maloney assured all that there would be no general strike. One staff relations officer, however, maintained that it was coming. But this opinion was dismissed. The unions met at Congress House on Friday morning. The craftsmen were angry at the deferment and at the stance of I.T.G.W.U. They put their case; at 2.30 p.m. the "all-out" sanction was given. The diamond went up; shop stewards roamed the buildings ordering members to cease. Silence descended at 3 p.m.; frantic staff relations men trying to answer telephones shouted into jammed switchboards, "It is hopeless, everyone has left". Nutley Lane was chock-a-block as 1800 workers closed down the national network.

The picketers counted the cars each day, "150 managers,

the place is full of Sitting Bulls". A person working inside remarked that he had never seen some of them ever working before. They manned switchboards where they were berated by Fine Gael delegates, T.D.'s and Ministers (in their personal capacity). The Fine Gael Ard Fheis was enjoying the darkness of a Galway ballroom. Oliver Maloney stood at the Montrose gate and muttered, "I never knew" as the craftsmen listed their grievances. As these extended back over 15 years, it was reasonable to ask why he didn't know before.

In Madigan's and at union meetings the accusations flew about: the thousands of pounds spent on job-evaluation, which Maloney was said to have now dismissed as a washout, the 7 to 1 ratio of administration to production, the globe-trotting of some divisional and department heads, an abortive £76,000 schools-radio project, a £25,000 piece of Swedish engineering equipment that rusted to uselessness and which nobody would admit to ordering, the bungling of personnel and their hostility to production people, the coloured television sets for department heads, the extravagant parties for the top-brass, the secret salaries of senior management. Others countered that the strike was wrong: 30 craftsmen shouldn't be allowed to shut down the station, put

1,800 workers out of work and deny television to people living in single-channel areas; the unions had been divided, which was what management wanted; a general strike suited management.

Inside the station the night lights burned and the management proved that they didn't want a general strike. All night meetings with representatives of the craftsmen went on. Formulae for settlement were drawn up, discussed, discarded or accepted as the days dragged on. The craftsmen originally had asked for supervisors because of a C grading. Now they increased their demands: they wanted more money, a regrading and promotion openings into the design section.

The strike lasted 13 days, the most serious strike the organisation has ever known. The Department of the Public Service refused to ratify a £200 increase. But a private agreement between R.T.E. and the crafts unions sent the craftsmen home happy. The only question remaining is whether there will be further strikes and the answer to that is a definite yes. Staff relations admit to having 50 possible strike issues on their books. It will only take time for one of these to detonate unless the industrial relations machinery at R.T.E. gets an immediate and thorough clean-out.

Tony Fitzgerald.

## Guernsey Letter

BY ARTHUR LA BERN

I came to Guernsey to finish a novel. I couldn't think of a better place to finish a book. After all, Victor Hugo completed *Les Miserables* here, didn't he? That should be encouraging enough. On the other hand, it can be somewhat daunting. Rather like a selling plater in the hoof prints of a Nijinski.

I visited Victor Hugo's house, high above St. Peter's Port, on Bastille Day. Not surprisingly, the place was full of young French people — the house is maintained by the city of Paris — and it's the one place on the island where the Tricolour flies.

Here Victor Hugo planted an oak tree in his garden and prophesied that when it reached maturity there would be a United States of Europe. I looked at that oak. To my non-woodsman's eye it appeared to be nearing maturity. I wish one could say the same about Hugo's prophecy.

A political exile himself, Hugo had a great admiration for Garibaldi and when that patriot was running for his life he offered the Italian redshirt sanctuary. The best room in the great novelist's house was prepared lavishly for the revolutionary, rich tapestries draping the walls, the biggest bed in the house moved in for him, bedside books, every creature comfort anticipated.

The story was the opposite of *The Man Who Came To Dinner*. Garibaldi never arrived. Over a hundred years later the room Hugo prepared for him is still known as the Garibaldi Room.

The Channel Islanders don't know how lucky they are, or perhaps they do. For nine hundred years a feudal appendage of the Crown, they were spared the centuries of holocaust and hunger, pillage and plunder, mass murder and mayhem that became the sickening but almost monotonous features of England's long and dismally unsuccessful attempt to subdue Ireland. Yes, the Channel Islanders were spared all that.

There is a lesson to be learned here, a lesson so simple, that one hesitates to point it out. If England had respected Ireland's right to independence to the same extent that she has respected the constitutional rights of the Channel Islands over the centuries the last seven years of horror, in Ulster, which shows no sign of abating, would never have happened.

There would have been no ghettos. There would have been no Blood Orange Lodges. There would have been no Stormont Castle, no Brookeboroughs, no ghastly Carsons and no shrieking Paisleys. Moreover, there would have been no obscene Provo louts having the impudence to give themselves military titles for their bloody, cowardly deeds.

Yes, it is as simple as that. Or am I being naive?

Even the German jackboot had a soft tread in the Channel

Islands — *Les Illes Anglo Normande* as the French call them.

Alderney, in fact, benefitted from the German occupation one regrets to admit. Mains water was put in where they had been no mains water before. Main drainage was extended and improved. The island's only cinema was built by the Germans, for the edification of the troops of course, but the Aldernese and holidaymakers happily flock to it now. Electric power stations were installed where there had been none before.

In any case, almost the entire population of Alderney — not many more than a thousand — was evacuated to England in 1940. Nineteen refused to leave.

It cannot be said that the German soldiers enjoyed their paid holiday on Alderney. They called it '*das arschloch der Welt*' — the arsehole of the world. But they did not have to fight on the beaches. There was no *maquis* to contend with, and French prostitutes were imported for their pleasure. They should have been more grateful.

### SALT OF THE EARTH

I sometimes think that English judges and learned(?) counsel are apt to talk more arrant nonsense in their jobs than politicians even. The Bar, of course, has long been considered a rung on the ladder to a successful Parliamentary career and Cabinet rank.

If the ability to talk twaddle is essential to a bright future in politics then Mr. John Owen, QC., should put his name down for a safe seat now.

Mr. Owen has been defending four of the warders — sorry, prison officers, at Birmingham Crown Court accused of assaulting IRA pub bombers in Winson Green prison.

"They are the salt of the earth", this twit in a silk gown told the jury. "They are just men who have earned the respect among those they work with".

The very thought of describing four turneys of one of Britain's worst prisons — if not the worst — where it is policy to recruit only 'hard men' on the staff must have given one hell of a laugh to all the villains who have had the misfortune to enjoy its hospitality.

Following John Owen's preposterous protestation of his clients' sanctity of character I would not have been surprised if his opposite number had described the bombers — if indeed they are the bombers — as the 'cream of Irish society'.

John Owen QC should go a long way — the further away the better.

### SHOCKING

England has been shocked by the Angolan shooting of the mercenaries, including that brave chap 'Callan' who served with a Parachute Brigade in Ulster.

The most shocking aspect of the execution, however, was shooting a mercenary sitting in a wheelchair.

No civilised people would permit that. Of course, there was a similar occurrence involving a British Army firing squad in Kilmainham Gaol just sixty years ago. But that was different.

# AGONY IN THE GARDEN

BILLY LEONARD – NEW YORK

SOME WIT said that when the Democrats organise a firing squad, they form a circle. Not this time around, though. The delegates and alternates who crowded Madison Square Garden to appoint Jimmy Carter as their presidential nominee were all sweetness and light. They were not, in short, their old selves, picking a fight just for the hell of it. Instead, they were acting like Republicans, civilised and bland. The Garden was one vast love-in. Incredible.

Carter's choice of Senator Walter ("Fritz") Mondale of Minnesota got a big plus from the liberal wing of the party. The liberals, especially the New York brand, were a trifle leery of the born-again Christian from Georgia. Mondale, by the way, got the biggest hand on closing night when he said: "We have just lived through the worst political scandal in American history and are now led by a President who pardoned the person who did it". The vast hall erupted in one giant roar that lasted a good two minutes.

**Convention Briefs:** Carter, praise be, has come around on Watergate. He has given up that tiresome contention of his that people "are sick of it". In his acceptance speech, Carter got his biggest hand when he said: "I see no reason why big-shot crooks should be free while the poor must go to jail".

Martin Luther King's father prayed over the delegates at the close in tones which would have raised the dead. Then everybody sang the moving anthem of his son, "We Shall Overcome". Eight years ago in the streets of Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley's stormtroopers were beating the hell out of people who dared to sing that song. Times have changed. The Democrats are united and they smell the sweet smell of victory in November.

A deep hush fell over the convention when a former Marine sergeant was guided in a wheel chair to the podium. He had come to speak on behalf of war-resisters. He began with these words: "I am the living dead, your Memorial Day on wheels . . ."

Some of Jimmy Carter's more enthusiastic evangelical supporters like to point out that he has the same initials as Jesus Christ. We overheard one irreverent newsman suggesting that Carter might choose not to have a Vice President at all. If he died in office, the newsman said, he would simply Rise Again.

The streets outside the Garden were alive with the sounds of protests. The most vocal – and the funniest – were the Yuppies who passed out free marijuana. They sang old protest songs of the '60's, chanted anti-Carter slogans, and huge banners proclaimed: "Stop the Police State" and "Nobody for President". An army of cops eyed them warily.

There were more media than anyone else at the convention – 11,000 writing press, photographers, TV reporters and their support technicians. It was a mob scene in the Press Gallery and backstage.

\*\*\*\*\*

In 1955, the jobless rate for black teenagers was 15.8 percent. As of June 1976, that rate was 40.3 percent, compared with 16.1 for whites of the same age. These black youths are regarded as part of a secondary labour class. They have little chance of moving out of the perpetual state of joblessness or of escaping the vicious cycle of low-paying jobs. The American Way of Life.

\*\*\*\*\*

FBI director Clarence M. Kelley has booted out the agency's second-ranking official, Nicholas P. Callahan. The

firing is part of ongoing inquiries into the conduct of agents in the last five years. The gumshoes reportedly committed widespread acts of unauthorised lawlessness while conducting internal security investigations. These included the burning of automobiles, assaults and illegal wiretapping. Militant antiwar activists were one target of illegal electronic surveillance.

\*\*\*\*\*

Madalyn Murray O'Hair is a doughty atheist leader from Maryland. Some years ago, after a series of legal battles, she got the United States Supreme Court to agree with her position that praying in public schools was unconstitutional. Ms. O'Hair has hit the campaign trail again. Her latest action is a suit filed in Detroit to stop the practice of weekly prayer services in county courtrooms. At the same time, she has announced plans for a dude ranch out West where young atheists of both sexes can meet and do their thing with nary a Christian in sight.

\*\*\*\*\*

Judith Campbell Exner's efforts to parlay what she describes as a "close" relationship with President John F. Kennedy into big bucks is beginning to pay off. Serial rights to a 436-page manuscript on the subject of her life and loves have been sold and, so far, have netted 750,000 dollars. That's a lot of bread.

\*\*\*\*\*

The residents of the West 46th Street block in Manhattan between Ninth and Tenth Avenues are not amused these days. Increasingly of late, that old Irish neighbourhood has been turned into a noisome place with hundreds of slow-moving cars tying traffic into knots. The drivers are visiting Johns – Lotharios on the prowl – seeking to purchase a little female companionship in that "valley of the dolls".

Bleary-eyed from lack of sleep, the residents have hit on a novel idea. They have erected a banner across their street that reads: "If you're here to pick up a whore, your licence number will be traced and a letter sent to your wife".

\*\*\*\*\*

Automobile bumper stickers with both religious and anti-religious themes seem to be popular these days. Here's a sampling sighted on the busy Garden State Parkway: "Be a Christian. It's Good for Your Health and Especially Later" . . . "Love Your Neighbour, It'll Drive Him Crazy . . ." "Do Unto Others Before They Do Unto You" . . . "God Is A CIA Agent".

That's it, folks.

## THANKSGIVING

*Most grateful thanks to St. Barbara (Protectress from thunder storms); to St. Martin de Porres for his wonderful help in a serious operation and for minor sickness – a constant client. ("Limerick Leader", July 12th, 1976).*

## SOLDIERS

Soldiers who wish to be a hero  
Are practically zero,  
But those who wish to be civilians,  
Jesus, they run into millions.