

Sinn Fein goes respectable

By Thomas Dubh Carolan

AMERICAN politics is, heavily, ethnic politics. Poles, Italians, Germans, Jews, Irish constitute major distinct constituencies. Americans of the third or fifth generation may still bracket themselves as Poles, Germans or Irish. Politicians court them for votes and respectfully go through their ethnic festivals and rituals with them. Some of these "national" groups have powerful lobbying organisations. In this American jumble of ethnic building blocks the Irish are very important.

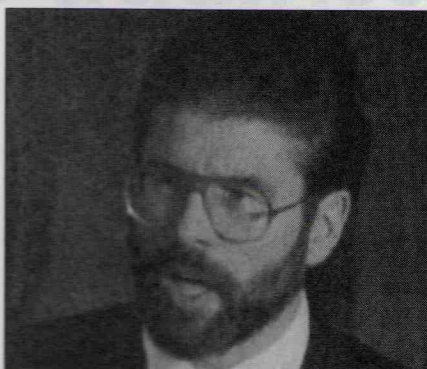
Five million people live in Ireland now, but nearly ten (ten!) times as many Americans claim, in the US fashion, to be Irish. St Patrick's Day is therefore a very big ethno-political festival in the USA — a far more important festival there than it is in Ireland itself. This year on 17 March President Clinton celebrated St Patrick's Day at the White House in the company of the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister), John Bruton and Gerry Adams, President of Provisional Sinn Fein, the political wing of the Provisional IRA. Not only was Adams allowed into the USA and — despite public protests by the British Government — into the White House to be honoured in this way, but Sinn Fein is also being licensed to openly raise money in the USA.

According to one estimate, Sinn Fein, which represents perhaps five per cent of the total Irish electorate (about 12% of the Northern Irish electorate and perhaps 40% of the Northern Irish Catholic voters) stands to become the richest political party in the European Union as a result of this decision.

Bruton and Adams in the White House dramatises the underlying truth about what is happening in Northern Ireland: to a considerable extent, control of the framework of events is no longer in the hands of the British government. The so-called "Pan Nationalist Alliance" and its allies are setting the pace. This is a block of parties stretching from Provisional Sinn Fein/Provisional IRA at one pole to the Dublin Government at the other, with the constitutional nationalist SDLP and others holding them together. The great strength of this alliance lies in its alliances with US politicians. One far-reaching result of the 31 August ceasefire has been that this grouping has now made Sinn Fein part of the 'respectable' bourgeois political world.

In order to placate Northern Irish Protestant opinion, which is acutely sensitive to all this, Major has put up a show of demanding that the IRA disarm — "decommission" weapons — before official Britain-Sinn Fein negotiations start. Britain will probably settle for gestures without a great deal of substance from the Provisional IRA.

Everything is now coming together to press the Protestant politicians into talking



Gerry Adams

seriously about the "Framework for Peace" published by London and Dublin on 22 February. The Framework proposes a Catholic-Protestant powersharing Northern Irish government which would then combine with Dublin to form a powerful

Council of Ireland to administer common Northern Ireland-26 Counties affairs, including all Irish relations with the European Union. Protestant responses so far have not been as explosive as was to be feared, but there is no substantial movement either. If the Protestant politicians do not move then, backed by Washington, Dublin will have much greater clout in Northern Irish affairs from then on. Under the 1985 Agreement, Dublin already shares with 'London' in political decision-making for the Six Counties.

Sinn Fein is naturally triumphant about all this. They have the political initiative. They campaign now for "lasting peace", and have already mounted a broad international campaign — "Saoirse" (freedom) — for the release of all Provisional IRA prisoners.

The junketings of Gerry Adams with Clinton and Britain are, of course, seen by the Northern Ireland Catholics as their victory, and as a recognition of their **page 10**

To out or not to out?

By Janine Booth

THE MEDIA'S reaction to Outrage's so-called 'outing' campaign has been quite hysterical. Tabloid editorial writers and columnists have written bigoted diatribes. The BBC barred any Outrage representative from speaking live on their broadcasts. The *Daily Mail* used the term 'homosexual terrorism'; the *Daily Express* preferred 'homosexual fascism'.

Peter Tatchell and Outrage have been portrayed by the media as bitter, hateful, bitchy queens, the unacceptable face of the campaign for sexual equality.

"We don't mind people being gay", they claim (probably some of their best friends are a bit that way inclined), "but this 'outing' business is entirely reprehensible". The press's attitude is that if these homos must demand equality, they should do it in a nice, polite, non-offensive way. Indeed, we should crawl, beg and generally debase ourselves in the hope of catching a few crumbs of rights.

The hypocrisy of the media is astounding. The most vitriolic have been those tabloid papers who routinely snoop and pry into the private lives of anyone whose story they think will sell newspapers. Peter Tatchell knows this — they did it to him in 1983 when he was the Labour candidate in the Bermondsey by-election.

What has Outrage done? It has written to some Church types — priests, bishops and so on — and MPs suggesting that they 'come out' openly and declare their homosexuality. Some — including Tory MP Michael Brown and Church of England bishop Derek Rawcliffe — responded and

came out. That's it. That's what the media have got so upset about.

They are a sorry assortment of liars, hypocrites and bigots.

But what of 'outing' itself? My opinion is that in general, it's wrong; but that, when targeted at those closets who attack lesbian, gay and bisexual rights, it is not so much wrong as a tactical mistake.

One problem is that outing implies that a person's sexuality matters, and that it matters who is gay. As socialists, we fight for full equality and liberation for all lesbian, gay and bisexual people. I am yet to be convinced that having 'out' Tory MPs or bishops makes any positive difference at all to that fight.

A second problem is that outing implies that a homophobe who has secret homosexual tendencies is worse than a homophobe who is heterosexual. While there is of course the element of hypocrisy, I worry that outing lets straight bigots off the hook. They have no need to be frightened or pressured by the threat of outing.

The actions and attitudes of homophobes need to be challenged politically — the problem is their bigotry, not the contents of their closet.

Finally, outing is a stunt. It creates a big media splash — but a splash about the rights and wrongs of outing, not about the need for full sexual equality. It is not a serious attempt to build a mass movement for sexual liberation.

Such a movement should take up the fight against the laws, institutions and homophobes who oppress us — it can not be built by peering into people's closets nor by finding and 'outing' gay priests.