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Workers Solidarity Movement
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1994

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YOU DON'T have to break the law to get hassled by the gardai. The Class War Federation planned a small public meeting, entitled "the politics behind the anger", in a Dublin pub last March. This group, who describe themselves as "communists", have gained lots of media coverage in Britain by organising publicity stunts like their 'Bash the Rich' marches (where no rich people got bashed!) and publishing a poster of a cemetery with the caption "we have found new homes for the rich".

As soon as advertising for their meeting appeared Progressive Democrat TD Michael McDowell got on to the Evening Press demanding that the Minister for Justice investigate with a view to taking action against them under the Offences Against the State Act. The gardai then visited the pub owner and "advised" him that the meeting should not be allowed to go ahead. They also "advised" him that another small group, the marxist Red Action, should not be allowed to hire rooms. Not wishing to fall foul of the guardians of the peace he cancelled Class War's booking. [The meeting went ahead in another pub].

Class War is not a banned organisation. Red Action is not a banned organisation. They are every bit as legal as any other

political grouping. But if the cops don't like you they are free to ignore your democratic 'right' to organise and explain your views. Hurrah for democracy!

Meanwhile in Cork they prosecuted Sinn Fein member Paul Walsh on a charge of membership of the IRA. Their evidence was that he possessed a republican song book that is legally on sale and a republican calendar that is also legally on sale. Added to this was the word of a senior guard that he believed Walsh to be in the IRA, but he couldn't tell the Court why he believed this. This was good enough for the juryless Special Criminal Court. It found him guilty but then, in an unusual twist, deferred sentence. Why? Paul Walsh has been active in Sinn Fein in Cork for years. This was the real target of the Special Branch. Over the years harassment has been fairly routine. Now the Branch have been given a new licence. Walsh has been released but only on condition that he "considers his position and adjusts his way of life."

Anytime the Branch want they can apply to have his sentence enforced. Which is the best of both worlds for them. They don't have to pay the cost of imprisoning him but they still have a hold on his political activity. A sign of what's to come? Another hurrah for democracy!