

## My Comrade Ted Howell



Chris Deehy, Kevin Callaghan and Ted Howell

By Kevin Callahan

I first met Ted Howell in August 1980 in Belfast at a semi-clandestine meeting. I had said to people I wanted to do work in Montreal to support the Republican POWs on the blanket protest. I was then told to go to a particular place at noon and someone would meet me who could give me some guidance. I sat for about five minutes before a tall man with keen eyes entered and approached me as though we were old friends. We talked about the potential for support for the Irish Republican Movement in Quebec, and he listened carefully to what I said. When he left, he said to keep up the work, and he would be in touch. I had no idea who he was then but assumed he was someone who mattered. I would only learn later how much he did indeed matter.

I next heard from him when he called me early one morning in November to say that Raymond Crane, a former Blanket man, would be arriving in Montreal in a few days and would I look after him and get press and meetings for him. To paraphrase the film *Casablanca*, this was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

The next time I would meet him was in December 1986 when the late Georges Beriault and I were both in Belfast. By then, Ted was in charge of the Sinn Féin Foreign Affairs Bureau. He told us he thought solidarity work in Canada was very important but that it needed to be more coordinated. At the end of the meeting, he said that next time we were in Belfast, we should go for a pint. In 1988, I was back and had the pleasure of being in Kelly's Cellars with Ted and some of his friends like Pat O'Hare and Brian Moore (Cormac). The craic was mighty. I also was honoured to be invited to dinner at his house and meet his wife Eileen, who was a true force of nature. Dinner at Ted's was a culinary marvel and became a fixture of my visits to Belfast (along with pints at Madden's).

I noticed his drink of preference was rum and coke so from then on any visit to Belfast was not complete without our delivering a bottle of Havana Club to Ted's office. This once almost caused a split in the Republican Movement when Gerry Adams kidnapped a bottle of Cuban rum we had sent over. Ted then retaliated by holding Gerry's Christmas turkey hostage. Eventually an exchange was agreed upon, and peace was restored.

Ted was always available to give advice. I would often call him and he was always happy to chat (except for one time when I called him during the All-Ireland hurling final). He was our mentor, and I remember Georges Beriault once saying that before we took any political initiatives to ask ourselves "What would Ted do?".

Ted valued the work that was done in Canada and wanted Canadian support for the nascent peace process. Georges and I were in Belfast shortly before the first IRA ceasefire in August 1994, and Ted called us into a private meeting to inform us that there would indeed be a ceasefire and that he wanted activists in Canada to get Gerry Adams a visitor's visa. We were really honoured that he valued support in Canada enough to tell us about the ceasefire before it was formally announced.

He stood by his friends. When Georges' partner Joyce died, Ted called Georges and was clearly saddened by the news. When Georges passed away, Ted called me to give sympathy, and that meant a lot to me.

Ted was a brilliant leader, a shrew politician, an apt negotiator, a legendary cook, and overall great craic. He was also very humble. Despite his major contribution to Ireland's freedom struggle, he is rarely mentioned in accounts of the conflict. While avoiding the limelight, Ted was always at the forefront.

Ted Howell, a legend, has left us, but his legacy lives on and will lead to a united Ireland.

Slán a Chomrádaí