

socialist republican

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ONE CLASS—ONE NATION

For Republicans Easter is traditionally a time for honouring Ireland's dead. In recent weeks we have seen even more of our bravest and best cut down by British and loyalist assassins. It is indeed right and fitting that we should honour and remember our fallen comrades with pride at this time. However, even more importantly we must focus our minds again on the objectives and goals for which the finest of this generation suffer and die in struggle.

Death in war, as in life generally, is inevitable and any notion of a "Normal" life in Ireland under British occupation, particularly in the 6 counties is only a myth. At every stage of Republican resistance since 1798 Irishmen and women of 1916 have been repeated time and time again. Whether in Gibraltar or Crossmaglen or Milltown cemetery our people have paid with their lives for a future society free from British interference in Irish affairs.

Yet how many of us can be happy or content with the quality of life offered to our people in what now passes for the Brit-less Free State? The 26 county state now rates as a third world economy and one of the poorest regions in Europe.



And although no Republicans would or should accept responsibility for the mess that now exists it was the sacrifices of people like Connolly, Pearse and Mellows, among countless others that give rise to the corrupt state than even now seeks to pass itself off as an Irish Republic. This fact as much as every death amongst our comrades should be a source of anger to our people.

Even more than anger; we must stop and analyse and ask why this is so? why was the selfless sacrifice of so many so horribly abused and distorted? Why do our children emigrate and our factories lie idle? At Easter it is these questions which hold most meaning in understanding exactly what is at stake in our struggle. At this time in the Republican calendar we would do well to remember Connolly's words

to the Irish citizens army on the eve of the 1916 rising.

"In the event of victory hold onto your rifles. Those with whom we are fighting may cease before our goal is reached. We are for economic and social as well as political liberty".

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EDITORIAL

The Socialist Republican is published by a group of political activists engaged in the struggle for National Liberation and Socialism in Ireland. Organised nationally we represent a geographical spread covering most of the country. The aims and objectives of our group and our paper are the establishment of a 32 county Socialist Republic based on the principles of Scientific Socialism as interpreted in the Irish context by James Connolly and his followers.

Believing that only the Irish working class can and will liberate the country in the process of its own emancipation the Socialist Republican stands for the creation of a Broad Front and the simultaneous creation of a revolutionary vanguard within such a front. In this way we can maximise the forces mobilised in struggle while ensuring that its political leadership and direction are not subverted by reactionary or populist elements in the existing establishment parties.

For far too long the creators of wealth in Ireland - the working class - have been divided, dispersed and dispirited. These divisions fostered by corrupt social values under imperialism are now deeply entrenched in the thought-processes of the Irish people. It is our intention through our columns, campaigns and debate to contribute to the rediscovery and development of a revolutionary class consciousness amongst Irish workers. To this end we reject those who would tell us to "Know our place", or wait patiently for some mystical deliverance in the "Next Life".

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With these few words Connolly places socialism at the very core of our struggle for true national and social liberation. With these words Connolly firmly rejects any nominal change in the management of this country. The SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN, in this its first issue, pledges to give prominence to Connolly's vision of an Irish workers Republic. To this end we feel we must draw attention to the limits and weaknesses of traditional Republicanism. In Connolly's own words later to be echoed by Mellows and Seamus Costello "The two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland, the socialist and the national, are not antagonistic but

complementary" this fact is all too often ignored by the more elitist members of both the Republican and socialist traditions in this country.

If the sacrifices in life and death, of our people are over to be fittingly rewarded then we must all come to understand and share a revolutionary perspective, strategy and set of tactics which recognises the primacy of the creators of all wealth; the working class, without this we shall be guilty of permitting only a change of management throughout the whole island such as we now see in the 26 counties.

In conclusion then we should do well to remember

The Socialist Republican does not claim a monopoly on ideological correctness nor will we quietly accept the arrogance, elitism and chauvanism current in many political organisations in the country. We rest our right to struggle on OUR oppression and we recall the warning of Karl Marx who pointed out that all political groupings are merely "moments in the history of the working class". No individual or collective political ego can ever have pride of place over the needs of the workers. It is not a matter of "WHO" we represent inside bourgeois democracy today but "WHAT" that really counts.

Amongst the many issues facing us today are the continued partition of our country - leading to a dishonest National Debt, the repatriation of profits by multinationals. Increased repression, north and south and massive cuts in public services, employment, health, education and the welfare state. This combined onslaught by native capitalism and imperialism on the Irish people must be SERIOUSLY addressed by all elements of the left who claim to represent the working class. Armed struggle alone - no matter how courageous or technically expertise - can't emancipate the working class; anymore than numerous precise political analyses. Theory and practice must be harnessed together, without these there can be no revolutionary practice. The Socialist Republican calls on all sections of the working class to rally around a Broad Front which would allow maximum use of the various talents and experience available within that class. To do otherwise or to doggedly pursue some "SECTIONAL INTEREST" is to actively work against the long-term interests of our people.

who and what Connolly was fighting for in Easter 1916 when he said "We are out for Ireland for the Irish". But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum-owning landlord, nor the sweat grinding capitalist... but the Irish working class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared. Without this sacrifices of our people will be used to build a monument to our oppressors.

Jimmy Brown

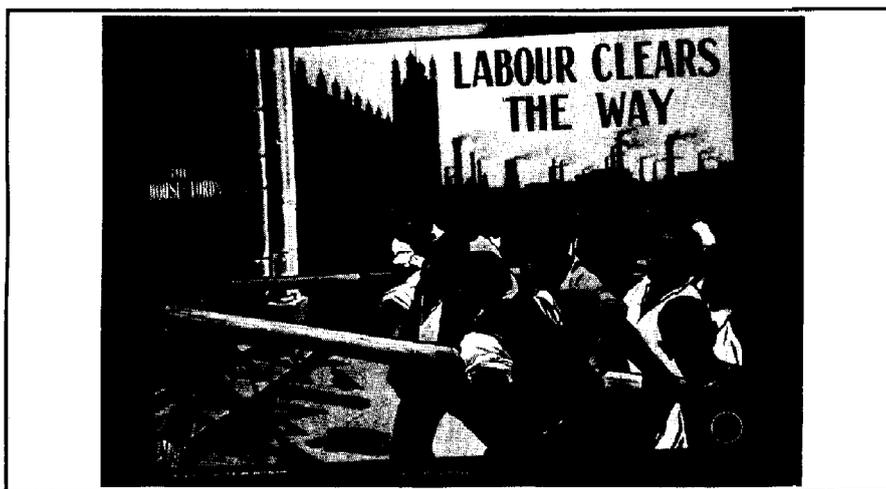
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A WAY FORWARD

The cries of "FREEDOM 74" and "VICTORY 73" have long since given way to a grimmer reality and talk of a "30 YEAR WAR". People once high on the prospect of a quick victory over British Imperialism in Ireland now slog their way through struggle; often from one defensive struggle to another. To go from campaigning in defence of basic democratic freedoms to struggling for liberation and the reconquest of Ireland is a step we have not yet taken. Why is this and how can it be remedied? That the six county state is presently deadlocked with neither the British nor Republican forces able to affect an outright military victory is now widely recognised. The Dublin and London governments through the Anglo-Irish Agreement seek to update, reform and harmonise the rule of Imperialism in Ireland while Sinn Fein hope to spread their appeal through increased electoral activity in the 26 counties.



The race is now on for the hearts and minds of the voters; what Gramsci called the ELECTORAL TROOPS. Yet while this continues the REAL power of the working class as the agents of their own liberation is ignored. There can be no parliamentary road to liberation and while the various progressive forces in the country pursue complimentary or diverse aspects of struggle, often in isolation to the working class, our collective talent and energies are being squandered as in some Quixotic fable. **THIS** is why we are at such an impasse and why our enemies feel increasingly confident to continue their onslaught against our people. The remedy proffered here is neither new nor unique; that it has been long abandoned is utterly disgraceful and indefensible. It was James Connolly who stated "Our people have glided at different periods from moral force agitation....to physical force re-

bellion; from constitutionalism into insurrection, meeting in each the same failure and the same disaster and yet SEEM AS FAR AS EVER FROM LEARNING THE GREAT TRUTH that neither method is likely to succeed until they first insist that a perfect agreement upon the end to be attained should be arrived at as a starting point of ALL OUR EFFORTS".

For us as Socialist Republicans the concept of the Broad Front leading directly to the creation of a new Republican Congress represents the most credible and likely basis upon which to forge "THAT PERFECT AGREEMENT". Such a Broad Front, to be brought into existence through a series of organising conferences, would enable debate and clarity on issues to be reached in advance of the inauguration of the Congress itself. Which once established would in Frank

Ryan's own words "be in effect the parliament of the PLAIN PEOPLE and would plan their campaign and direct it towards its goal of a workers republic". Without this attempt to synthesise the struggles of the various sections of the anti-imperialist movement the working class have no real prospect of revolutionary leadership. As Marx was clear to point out the working class under the pervasive influence of capitalism will only develop a limited or "Trade Union Consciousness".

To re-assert this finding now is not to slavishly accept the teaching of Marx. Our history and any analysis of the so-called labour movement to date in Ireland shows how they limit the demands of workers and compel them to remain wage slaves under capitalism. It is therefore essential that the most revolutionary class conscious elements act now decisively to create unity and strength in planning the strategy and tactics for all our struggles in the period ahead. The supremacy of the working class in struggle was repeatedly stressed by Connolly who as our foremost revolutionary may readily act as the prison or clearing house on matters of theory and practice. Indeed it was he who predicted with historic certainty that "The Irish working class must emancipate ITSELF it must, perforce, free its own country". As a cornerstone for theory and practice Connolly will prove indispensable.

The call for a Broad Front must also accurately analyse the diversity of forces and their relationship inside the working class. At present the level of consciousness may be said to be spread across the spectrum of ADVANCED CONSCIOUSNESS through MIXED CONSCIOUSNESS to the RUMP (or reactionary) element. Under capitalism the "Middle" element will comprise the majority and indeed it is precisely this group that gives more or less unquestioning allegiance to the establishment

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parties. This mixed consciousness element will only be detached from bourgeois politics by a combination of polemic and struggle specifically designed to challenge and expose the contradictions inherent in capitalism. For this to happen a revolutionary vanguard must be created - simultaneously - within the Broad Front in order to properly direct the energies of all who will participate. The coming together of the most advanced class conscious elements inside one platform will allow for a cross-pollination of revolutionary theory and practice and so place **'THAT PERFECT AGREEMENT UPON THE END TO BE REACHED'** within our grasp. All forces supporting the agreed programme would retain the right to independent practice with agreed procedures for criticism where it arises.

As surely as we raise the issues of a Broad Front; Republican Con-

gress and a Vanguard our detractors and the faint-hearted will cry: But who should join such a Front (and who should be excluded)? The short answer to this question is simply: All who accept its agreed minimum programme. The most advanced elements of any social revolution must work with whatever forces adopt progressive positions, even on short term demands. That one element may stop before our final journey's end is no reason for not travelling some distance along the road with them; provided we never compromise the position of our class. The days of "Labour Must Wait" are gone! Today we follow Connolly's maxim, "As Socialists we base our Political Policy on the **CLASS STRUGGLE OF THE WORKERS** because we know that the self-interests of the workers lies our way". And just as Connolly advised the I.C.A. on the eve of the Easter Rising to fight for Socialism this will be our message in

the face of any compromise. Scattered around the country today are countless comrades conducting diverse struggles many are non-aligned or unorganised. The recent spate of single issue campaigns, stretching back as far as the Hunger Strikes of 1981-82, contain many lessons for us in struggle. Despite the opposition to him Seamus Costello never shirked from his advocacy of the Broad Front. Since his murder in 1977 few had dared match his vision, conviction and faith in the working class. Those of us who continue, relegate, or negate the revolutionary role of the Irish Workers will indeed be judged harshly by history but perhaps more importantly they will be guilty of enslaving us all even further under the yoke of imperialism.

**Build the Broad Front A
Republican Congress And
Revolutionary Vanguard
NOW!!**

The Quest for Unity *Des Wilson*

In the mid-thirties the Asturian miners could see the Franco troops coming against them to quell their revolution. But even at that awful moment the multitude of left parties, socialists, anarchists, communists etc., could not unite against the common enemy. It was not a local problem. It is a universal problem of people in opposition.

Parties within sight of high office can unite - the Irish Labour Party can unite with Fine Gael, churchmen can unite with politicians, business people from Dublin and Belfast can sit around the same table, profit and high office being the catalyst which brings even enemies together.

Can some formula be found which would unite those in opposition? The question is a practical one for people who are striving towards the creation of a democracy in Ireland.

It would be bad enough if oppositional parties

simply opposed each other, but in fact they are often used by those in power to destroy each other. For instance in a constituency like West Belfast two parties SDLP and Sinn Féin who should be united in opposition to the government have to waste their energies fighting each other. Admittedly there are big differences between the two parties regarding economic, social, educational policies, but the overriding ethos is one of opposition to the policies of the government. The spectacle of a colonised people splitting into warring camps to fight the coloniser's battles for him is too familiar in Ireland and elsewhere to need describing.

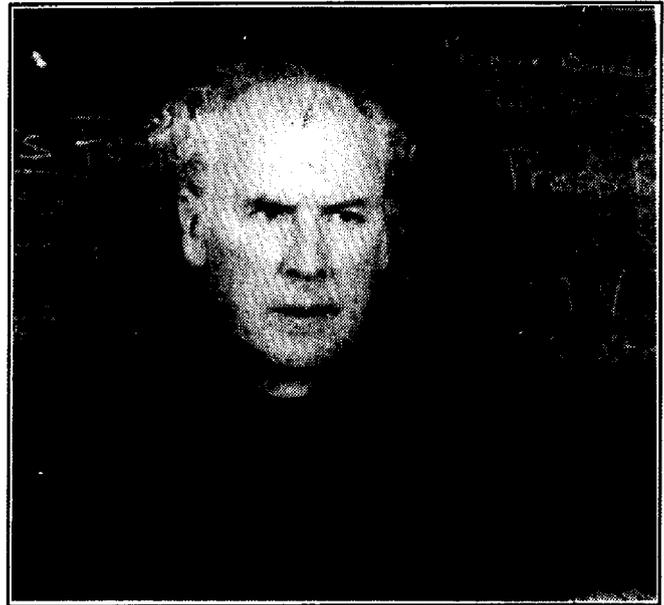
There are a number of formulas which can be used to help forge the kind of unity needed by weak opposition parties to oppose oppressive governments effectively. One is that while parties should freely criticise and evaluate each other's policies there should be a moratorium on abuse. Criticism can create strength, especially if it is made with respect for

other people's views but abuse can only destroy opposition parties in the long run; making the distinction between criticism and abuse is a politically educative process in itself.

Another formula is the creation of practical policies with which parties can broadly agree. For example, it should not be difficult in the Irish context for radical parties to agree that schools etc. should be managed by committees elected by teachers, students, parents, local authorities. Here again, a "radical" statement is contained in such a policy, namely that public functions should be elective and that no group, e.g. clergy, have a right to hold office because they belong to an institution. The conservative wings of political parties could not complain that clergy etc. were **excluded** by such a policy.

There are other areas of life in which similar policies could be proposed and accepted. The discussion of the issues, especially where such new policies are seen to be practical, is also a politically educative process. Control of industrial enterprises, control of "welfare" services, control of political parties, discussion of these is a matter of very practical politics. If oppositional political parties were to agree for instance to sponsor a series of public discussions on such matters or on the nature of democracy, the problem of police in a modern state and a host of other issues, even this alone would be a show of unity of purpose which would be quite frightening to those who hold power. And none of the integrity of the oppositional parties need be lost.

There is always need, however, for bodies which do not describe themselves as "parties" to help inject ideas into the political and social system. It is possible for example for independent groups to inject ideas into the system about things as different as policing or divorce or abortion, ideas which can be taken up or not by political parties; the political parties may be unable to do this for fear of losing votes or potential voters, but an independent group is not looking for votes and so can afford to take some risks. Oppositional political parties far from looking on independent groups as a threat should look on them as valuable sources and promoters of ideas which they are not in a position to put forward themselves. Needless to say, for any political party to extend this idea and use independent groups as a front for putting forward their own ideas would be to corrupt the whole idea of the free creation of ideas. The groups in power do it consistently - church based groups uphold the idea of restricted ownership of wealth, power groups in business uphold their own ideas in the guise of political enlightenment, schools are used as a means of combatting Marxism, socialism or whatever needs to be opposed. Oppositional groups should not feel that



similar tactics are either honourable or necessary.

Perhaps we have made the mistake of assuming that unity among oppositional groups means swinging them all round so that they believe roughly the same things. It need not mean this at all. What it should mean is finding a way by which each oppositional group can make progress in its own direction while helping other groups to do the same. The principle is not so odd as it sounds.

It is good to know that the people who oppose one of your policies today will be in like a rocket tomorrow when you need their support on another and that all of us have learned to be open minded enough to give and accept that kind of help.



INTERVIEW

I.P.L.O. - 1988

The "Socialist Republican" intends to bring its readers a number of interview with organisations and individuals active within the struggle for National Liberation and Socialism. In this issue we interview a representative of the leadership of the Irish People's Liberation Organisation.

S.R. Little is known about your organisation, other than what we read in the established media. Can you tell us what your organisation stands for and why it was formed?

IPLO In its origins as a distinct organisation the IPLO shared the experience of various people involved in struggle around the world. A number of comrades who have been active in our struggle for many years pinpointed drift and decay in what posed as the Republican Socialist tradition. At the same time recognising some progressive developments within the Republican Movement. Upon considering both factors these comrades concluded that they fell short of what is needed in order to achieve Connolly's Reconquest of Ireland. The IPLO was founded upon this principle and so stands for the emancipation of the Irish Working Class, and the liberation of Ireland from the yoke of Imperialism. We were formed to contribute - in all areas of struggle - to this objective. Because, in our considered analysis, no other single organisation accepts the primacy of the working class as the agency of liberation **AND** the centrality of the National Question we had no option but to re-enter the political arena as a separate force.

S.R. Maybe so, but can you not now be accused of further splitting the Republican and Socialist camps. Or of looking Revolution on your own terms?

IPLO Some have already accused us of this and others may well do. That is their prerogative. We believe they are wrong. In fact the very accusation implies ELITISM and CHAUVANISM both of which run contrary to the interests of the Irish working class and so actually postpone the arrival of the Irish Revolution.

S.R. But could your members not have been accommodated comfortably inside the Republican Movement or the Communist left; why form yet another organisation?

IPLO The first thing I have to say in answer to your question is that few people are ever accommodated "comfortably" in revolutionary politics. Inside Fianna Fail, the SDLP, Labour Party and Fine Gael etc. undoubtedly; but not were they VOLUNTEER to serve their class and country in struggle. As for the rest of your question; there are clearly many committed Socialists in the Republican Movement who are working for similar ends to those we claim and we support them fully. The volunteers of the IRA and the IPLO; indeed all combatants have much in common in terms of their experiences. They are, and should be, natural allies - not competitors - in the war against the British forces. However, this alone is not enough reason to merge at this time in our struggle. We need a deeper unity and this can be forged in the period ahead. The Republican Movement is essentially a radical Nationalist organisation, united across class lines in its support for armed struggle as the means of achieving National Independence. When one examines its history it could hardly be otherwise given what subsequent - including the present - leadership inherited. For us to have entered the Republican Movement at this time would have meant accepting the Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, claim that Socialism is not yet on the agenda in Ireland. This we could not do and we say this with no wish to offend or hinder revolutionary comrades inside that movement. In fact if the Irish working class are ever to be successful our paths and theirs must merge on the road of Scientific Socialism. As for the Communists, we believe they have a great deal to offer the working class in terms of helping to harness revolutionary theory to revolutionary practice. They more than anyone else will understand and accept Marx's claim that "all organisations are only moments in the history of the working class". At present the Communist position on the National Question is incorrect. Hence our need - not desire - to form a separate organisation from those already in existence at this point in our struggle.

S.R. The IPLO have shot members of the RUC and recently killed the extreme loyalist George Seawright; what would you say to the claim that you are simply another armed Republican group?

IPLO I suppose the "proof of every pudding is in the eating" and of course history and our people will be our final judge; not some hack from RTE or the BBC. The media is pro-establishment by its very nature. Our organisation is founded on a scientific political analysis of the nature of the forces now oppressing the Irish people throughout this island. This analysis is based on the teachings of Scientific Socialism interpreted for the Irish conditions by Connolly, Mellows and Costello; amongst others. The two states on this island; the 6 counties and the 26, are the legacy of British imperialism. In the 6 occupied counties the presence of upwards of 25,000 men at arms maintaining a physical bridgehead for imperialism demands a physical dimension to **OUR** response. In the 26 where a conservative and reactionary church combines with corrupt and salaried establishment politicians to sell off **OUR** means of life a different strategy is currently required. In order to achieve victory we must awaken the entire working class to their true role in our struggle. This we will do by agitating and organising on every issue possible. The combination of such strategy and tactics goes far and away beyond the thinking of any group of "Republican Gunmen".

S.R. **If you will use armed force to fight "Imperialism" in the 6 counties why not do so in the 26 counties?**

IPLO As a revolutionary socialist we have no moral hang-ups on the legitimacy of physical force. We do of course accept that in using force as one weapon in the arsenal of the working class we take on a responsibility and accountability. This is more than **any** Labour, F.F. or F.G. TD who while in "Government" (sic) takes upon himself the right to **Control** the armed forces of a capitalist state. These are police and troops whose job it is to uphold the laws and social and economic values which rob our people. However, at this point in our history a great many people in the 26 counties give open support to the institutions of the state; believing them to be sovereign and Irish. This incidentally is a legacy left to us all by the ambiguities of earlier Republican ideology and the absence of a revolutionary working class consciousness. While a majority of workers in the 26 county state support it an armed campaign against it is both politically **and** tactically incorrect. However, the day when the ruling elite feel their privileged position under capitalism threatened they **THEMSELVES** may re-draw existing battlelines. For the present though it is as well to remember Connolly's maxim in these matters: Use argument where argument serves and arms where arms are necessary". There is no prospect of an armed "Campaign" in the 26 counties in the foreseeable future.

S.R. **If you view the 26 county state as a puppet regime what is your position in relation to elections and Representative politics; how does it differ, if all, from your position on the Northern and British elections?**

IPLO There is no parliamentary road to Socialism and here again James Connolly illustrates this fact perfectly when he says, "The election of a socialist is only valid if it returns a disturber of the political peace". The whole concept of "Western Democracy" is itself a sham and represents little more than a 300 year old con-truck. As the French philosopher Rousseau said of the English obsession with **electoral** democracy, "The English are only truly free on the day they vote; immediately afterwards they are again overtaken by slavery". Electoral politics under capitalism is merely a competition to see who gets to administer the trappings of power for a few years. This is as true of Dublin as it is of Belfast or London. We would oppose any participation in any **British** electoral chamber, for obvious reasons, whereas we would view elections inside the 6 and 26 counties as a tactical matter and apply Connolly's position even then.

S.R. **So far you have spoken at length in emphasis of your political philosophy tell us now of your military dimension. How many members do you have; what type of weaponry can you deploy and in what areas are you organised?**

IPLO I am sure the "Intelligence Analyst's" at Dublin Castle and Whitehall have been waiting patiently for such a question. But one cannot and will not answer. As a revolutionary organisation whose views - never mind our practice - border on the "criminal" in the eyes of the authorities we must take every step to preserve our secrecy. Our organisation works on a "need to know" basis enshrined in the constitution by which **EVERY** member is bound. So even if I had the answers you want - which I don't - I could not give them. Your readers; do not need to know the answers. However, I can say that we are certainly in business and that business is social revolution in Ireland.

S.R. **But surely you can say something about the nature of your organisation. Do you plan to attack senior loyalist politicians, British soldiers, bomb England; what are your plans for the future; how will you set about achieving this Social Revolution?**

I.P.L.O. Interview

I.P.L.O. Perhaps you miss the point. To begin with armed struggle is only one weapon in this struggle - albeit a very important one. The I.P.L.O. cannot say "We will attack THIS section of our enemy THIS month and another section NEXT month". We will not do our enemies job for them. We must always retain the element of surprise. The information you want us to give voluntarily would not be in the possession of any one person nor should it ever be. It would only help our enemies not the oppressed and is out of order. As for how we will build a Social Revolution, the I.P.L.O. has no illusion about its present role or its future potential. We see our organisation as one component in the struggle. We REPRESENT not a number of voters but a Revolutionary position mapped out for us by Connolly. We seek the creation of a Revolutionary Vanguard inside a Broad Front and believe this work - which can be done now - offers the best way forward from the morass of mixed consciousness which now dominates our struggle. We will participate fully in building a unified working class led by a revolutionary vanguard.

S.R. **Some people reading this interview may think the I.P.L.O. is so embarrassed about its capacity for armed struggle that they don't want to talk about it or maybe that you are soft on the issue. What have you to say to that?**

I.P.L.O. In every struggle spies and informers are at work; Ireland is no exception. The early 1980's produced a crop of touts known as Supergrasses. Many were paid liars others were not. Any organisation that cannot protect itself can never hope to win recruits and build confidence amongst the working class. Security is all in military matters. The I.P.L.O. has no reason for shame unlike others that could be mentioned. If we are tactical, discreet and secure we shall grow. As for being accused of being "Soft" on the issue of armed struggle this is nonsense. Neither are we mad militarists out for the sole celebration of armed struggle or hell-bent on one more "glorious" failure. Such characteristics belong to adventures and the I.P.L.O. has no room for such people in its ranks. We can and must be judged on our practice in struggle and we will not put the proverbial cart before the horse now.

S.R. **You seem to set high standards for membership of the I.P.L.O. Where do your members come from; what areas and have any of them had past political involvement?**

I.P.L.O. We set the standards we hope to build into our class. For too long our people have been contaminated by the cult of the personality; machismo; greed and the concept that only the strong survive. These values are the values of exploitation and theft. The I.P.L.O. realises that the working class have been socialised - or raised under - these values for several hundred years. Change must begin within each individual and it is the role of the most politically advanced comrades to guide and instruct the others. The standards we set are the stepping stones for Socialism. And as for the origins of our membership it is entirely working class, rural and urban. Some of them came new to us for the first time, others were previously involved with the Republican Movement and the IRSP / INLA prior to its degeneration.

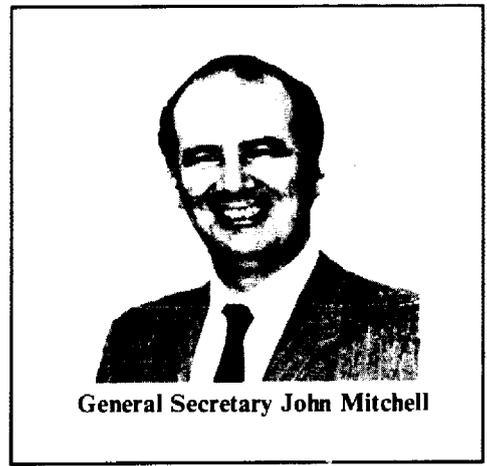
S.R. **What do you think the future holds for an organisation like the I.P.L.O. after 20 years of War in the North?**

I.P.L.O. Your question is really too narrow. We see the future in terms of what it holds for the working class not any one group. Ultimately the choice for Irish workers is VICTORY or DEFEAT - utter defeat. While the battle remains inconclusive or unfinished "STRUGGLE" is inevitable. The people who make up the I.P.L.O. will be engaged in that struggle. Parties and groups come and go, the class struggle has to have a WINNER - and a LOSER! At present we see our class forces scattered and our people unorganised. Socialism has been hijacked by the Dick Springs and Jim Kemmy's of this country and has been blunted. Nationalism as put forward by the Republican Movement presently offers only a change of management. These must be reclaimed and forged into a fighting ideology and practice to guide and lead our struggle. There is work for all of us to do in this; in many ways the REAL "WAR" is yet to begin. And I say that because I believe WAR is the total combination of ALL our struggles - Political, Social, Economic, Cultural and Military.



LABOUR AND THE COMING MAN

Transcript of the Interview with John Mitchell - IDATU General Secretary



General Secretary John Mitchell

S.R. **I.D.A.T.U. was recently expelled from I.C.T.U. because you criticised some of it's leaders. Can you tell us something about this and I.D.A.T.U. generally. Which workers do you represent; how many and what will be the geographical spread?**

J.M. Technically we are not expelled, only suspended. The sequence of events are; I was in the Whiterock Centre in the North, we gave a few hundred quid to a nursery. While there, I did an interview for the Andersonstown News and I criticised the trade union movement and our rivals in the North - as they are as such - U.S.D.A.W., which is a British based union. Some people got very upset at this and I was criticised for using the term "British based". There is maybe something in that. Primarily down here, we represent shopworkers - and U.S.D.A.W. is the British shopworkers union so they would be rivals and I called them "an Uncle Tom reactionary union" and "useless". Strictly speaking, they are of some use, but it is hard to find that use. I also then criticised the leadership of all the unions in the North; the Mafia as I called them. This was then used to say I called them "criminal" but they are only criminal in so far as they are very tightly controlled - especially by the Communist Party. They have an inordinate amount of influence for the amount of members they have. Almost all the craft unions and the big amalgamated transport unions are run by the Communist Party and their fellow-travellers. In the classic Stalinist sense they just want to get power and keep power. They won't rock any boats.

An example would be when an agent of the Histurat-the Zionist Trade Union Federation - gave out invites for a delegation from Ireland to go to Palestine and Congress's General Secretary, Nevin, brought it up saying they would pay the fare. I objected on the grounds that I knew who would like to go to the Western Mediterranean but couldn't even though they were born there. It looked as if it was going to be defeated when Billy Wallace, the President of Congress - which would surprise anyone because he makes no impact. He is a Communist Party hack from one of the Northern unions - he leaned on me saying "Your coming on to dangerous territory as they may stop free trips to Moscow if you do this." So they voted with the establishment and against the Palestinians. Right throughout any issue in the trade union movement, the leadership take "comfortable" positions on basic bread and butter issues.

If you extend that into the "National Question" they have never taken a position against oppression even though their own members are being oppressed. They take a safe labour, anti-sectarian position. That is why I criticised them; for that there was a complaint made. A complaint engineered by the "Mafia". U.S.D.A.W. had no part in the complaint and were surprised to learn of it. Anyway, to make a long story short, it took up three executive meetings of Congress - the ruling body of the Irish Trade Union Movement. Eventually I was suspended because I would not withdraw the remarks; I couldn't withdraw anything that was true. Then they used the low trick of trying to have me sacked by getting the Union to disown me. They would not do that and, in fact, I got very good support from the union. So the union was suspended even though I said the comments were personal and didn't represent union policy. I was done for that and the union was suspended. There was an appeal made to the I.C.T.U. conference; against my advice, but the appeal was made anyway. It was rejected and we are now suspended from Congress.

S.R. **What impact has the decision had on your membership : how do the workers you represent view the experience?**

J.M. The day to day running of the Union is unaffected in fact we are probably better off. We save about £30,000 p.a. between fees which we can use for other maybe more important work. There was always a sizeable minority here opposed to being involved in congress ; perhaps for the wrong reasons. Under the old regime here the union was very weak and a lot of it's members were poached by the I.T.G.W.U. **against** congress rules. Congress never imposed the rules against the big unions and there was a fairly strong anti-congress feeling here. That is not healthy either as I feel it is important to have a national trade union position but the membership here don't notice any great difference (under suspension). The primary function of a union is to give good service to it's members. If it does not do that, it cannot be involved in political or international issues. We lay the emphasis on doing things right. There has been a major "poaching" war with the I.T.G.W.U. in Cork and Limerick - they have taken a few of our members, we have taken a few of theirs, we are about equal. The major plus at the minute

revolves around the "National Plan" which is a bloody disgraceful piece of collaboration and we are getting significantly better pay increases than we would get if we were tied to the "National Plan". So most of our people are happy to be outside Congress at the minute.

S.R. **In terms of this experience, what role do you see Socialists inside the labour movement having in bringing political consciousness - as opposed to trade union consciousness to the workers you represent?**

J.M. Within our own union we have tried to - if I can give a brief history. This was a very conservative union and then there was an influx of people like myself, Brian Higgins, John Daly and a few others and we re-organised the union. Then we became involved in related social issues; like the South African dispute (at Dunnes Stores). We also have a Social Justice Committee in the union to deal with injustice at home and abroad. It covers women's issues such as strip searching, rape, discrimination, discrimination in the North and international relations with other trade unions. There are a lot of people around the country now involved in that. We constantly try to make the point that unions are not just "reactionary" bodies - reactionary in the sense of reacting to situations. That we should not just be involved in disturbance claims and demarcation disputes that they were founded to fight social injustice and improve the lot of the workers. Say, in Derry now, that would include fighting against the RUC harassment of workers and highlighting that. It involved fighting against homelessness and all those sort of issues. Now Congress unfortunately have been invisible over the last few months. Haughey has fooled them. He has tied them into a "National Plan" where they can't even criticise something they are a party to themselves. I think workers need a voice very, very badly and when they look to Congress, it has failed them. Interestingly enough, I got some documentation from America which shows a very similar situation developing in Australia. There is a Social Contract between the Labour Government in power there and the unions. It is probably significant that Haughey and Bob Hawke are the two biggest gangsters in their respective hemispheres. We have a very similar situation of the unions collaboration and I think it is essential for trade unions to stand up and say we do not represent all of society. We do not have a consensus with the farmers and employers. We represent different categories of people.

S.R. **It has been said in the past that the trade union movement which began as a workers organisation inside the state, has now become a State organisation inside the class. How would you respond to that accusation?**

J.M. I would say that is very accurate. I have described them as making a few ritual protests but essentially they lubricated the system. To have someone who will make an ineffective protest on cue is very supportive of the system we live under.

S.R. **What then would you see as the real relationship between the trade union movement and it's workers and the Irish Labour Party to which many unions are affiliated?**

J.M. Well, we are not affiliated and won't be. A trade union has the basic function of looking after bread and butter issues. It is not a political party, nor can it ever become one. Yet I do believe workers should have a political wing but you can't have this in a party that will go into coalition with Fine Gael. You can't have it in many of the small "Mosquito" groups who have all the right policies but cannot understand why they can never attract support for them and you can't have it in a group like the Communist Party who have no loyalty to this country or it's workers. Similarly, you can't have it in the "Sticks" (Workers Party) who are basically an enlargement of that - a conspiracy masquerading as a party. I also believe - and we have been involved in pushing the line - that workers do not have a voice, North or South, and that they need such a voice. It is such an obvious thing, really.

S.R. **You used the term "Mosquito Groups" I As someone whose job it is to organise and bring together common areas of struggle, how do you see these groups, who obviously represent something inside the class, could coming together?**

J.M. By "Mosquito Groups" I was basically dismissing the likes of the S.W.M. and the Irish Workers Group. Not specifically because they are Trotskyite groups but because they are destructive Trotskyite groups. We went through a whole range of options when we campaigned for a political party. We feel there is a need for a new party but cannot simply proclaim this party. There has to be a lot of homework done. The other options suggested were a "Rainbow Coalition". I think that was Matt Merrigan's phrase; he was paraphrasing Jessie Jackson. But that would be a hotch-potch and there would not be enough common ground there. Then you have the Long Kesh group - who published Congress '86 - calling for a Republican Congress. There is one flaw in this and I have told them this directly. If you want to have a Congress

IDATU HELPS BELFAST RAPE CRISIS CENTRE

The Union has given a special telephone answering machine to help cope with the growing number of calls received by the Rape Crisis Centre in Belfast.
This recommendation of the Social Justice Committee was endorsed by the National Executive Committee and the presentation was made in Belfast by the General Secretary on 2 November 1987.



(L to R) Mr. John Mitchell, General Secretary of the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union, and Assistant Divisional Organiser (IDATU) Elaine Harvey, hand over an answering machine to Vivian Harvey of Rape Crisis, at the Union's Office in Belfast.

where you have the Republican and Socialist positions represented, you need an organisation to represent the Socialist position. You cannot go in there as a group of individuals with a big bloc who tend to represent everything. That is the big flaw in that. I think a variation on that is the way forward. There is a period of flux at the moment and a lot of interest. You have our own group looking for a home, the group in Long Kesh. There are quite a few of our members in the North who were in political parties before and are critical of the Provos as are a few of the Provos themselves.

I think there may be a possibility of bringing those groups together. If that can be done in such a way that it does not become a slanging match between them and the remnants of the Provos that could be useful. A lot depends on the Provos making up their mind where they are going. The majority of indications at the moment are they don't know what they are doing but in as much as they do - and this by the way is one of the excuses they made to us for some of their activities; for example their former Vice President, Phil Flynn, supporting our suspension from Congress and making disgraceful attacks on our Union in the North, saying we were engaged in grubby sectarian politics. This was one of his phrases. I think I should point out that in cash terms, I estimate we put in forty times more money into the North than we have got out. We are not in the North for financial gain; a lot of our members are unemployed and at £2.00 p.a. we're not going to make a fortune up there. The Provos are going to have to make their mind up if they are going to tolerate things like that. Phil Flynn was the proponent; the chief architect of the National Plan. He is into "STROKE POLITICS" if you like. Himself and Haughey are buddies he does a little bit of work for Haughey that gives him a bit of an inside. There have been allegations that if you take Flynn, Haughey and the S.D.L.P. and certain Sinn Féin elements that they are all into "STROKERY" its something of a national pastime at the minute. Now if that is the way they are going they will lose some of their best people and any support they got from the likes of me.

S.R. You have stated the reason a new party is needed is because the Socialist position is not represented, can you elaborate?

J.M. It is not represented and there is nobody seriously claiming to represent it. Sinn Féin does not actually claim to be a Socialist party. The Workers Party - so called - is only a Unionist Party. I would not be a part of any organisation that was stressing the National Question to the exclusion of the Social Question and visa-versa. I think the two of them are intrinsically linked. We have this debate inside the Extradition campaign as to how many issues you can raise under the term repression. Extradition is an obvious one, Strip-Searching and Section 31 are others, but when you get into the Health cuts some people balk at that. Then when you say "YES! Health cuts because the multinationals are exporting our profits" or because the government, so called, are putting the repayment of debts the workers never incurred in the first place, as a higher priority than giving people education and hospitals. That is a kind of national question as it is a social one. They are all interlinked and its the same people imposing them North and South.

S.R. What is the present state of your campaign for an All Ireland Socialist Party?

J.M. I gave it six months first, then I gave it a year, then I abandoned it. As have most of my supporters, largely because if all the approval and support we got had



Defiant IDATU members picket Dunnes Stores in Nenagh.

been translated into bodies we would have had a fairly large organisation. But people said its a great idea or I'm busy. I'll wait and see how it goes and we finished up with maybe one or two hundred people.

S.R. Given that this campaign is now ended, what lessons and experience do you bring from it?

J.M. The campaign still continues. That is essentially a pseudonym now for one particular group. I would be inclined now to see the vanguard party as a model. A smaller, more coherent group which would build up gradually rather than go for a bigger mass based organisation because I don't think that can be done.

S.R. How do you see such a vanguard relating to the various political forces in the country?

J.M. I think it will take some of these forces to form the vanguard. I would see a lot of the people currently pushing that line possibly coming together to form the Vanguard Party.

S.R. Have you any suggestions or agenda on how that could be most usefully achieved?

J.M. What I am doing with my own group at the minute is having discussions with those who - in shorthand terms - see a need for a Socialist Republican Party. Although some people try to make the argument that you can't be socialist without being republican. I intend to talk to as many of those people as I can. Perhaps then there could be some sort of mini-conference organised. I think its too early to get into a large public debate on the issue.

S.R. The terms "Socialist" and "Republican" are much used and abused. We see Haughey claim to be a republican,

while the likes of Dick Spring and Jim Kemmy claim to be socialists. What political or ideological co-ordinates would you use to define your Socialist Republicanism?

J.M. I was talking on the phone there with someone who regards himself as a republican. I mean I would not have any empathy or common ground with say the Aointach Eireann people. Interestingly enough after extradition had gone through there was a meeting of sponsors for the campaign. There was a certain group pushing for a form of pan-Republicanism; that included some quite prominent Sinn Féin people. I was totally opposed to that and said I would not be part of such a group. Personally supporting me on this was Kevin Boland. He accepted that we could not have a common position in relation to the health cuts or the economic policies of the government which he supports. It is schizophrenic at this stage to say you can have common ground with the likes of Blaney, Boland or Haughey types. And the so-called republican wing of Flanna Fail; which I always had trouble finding. You can't say I have common ground with them but I don't like the way they bring in health cuts, education cuts and support American imperialism around the world. We are going to have to have a position which says "We are in favour of a British withdrawal. We are not taking any line on how that is achieved; that is by whatever means are available". We don't want the British to withdraw and hand over to a coalition like Haughey, the S.D.L.P. and Unionists. As for Spring and the Labour Party, they are not socialists.



Brian Higgins leads the IDATU delegation at the 'Save Barringtons' march

S.R. **It has been said of Republicanism, by it's critics, that as an ideology and as practiced by the leading group, Sinn Féin, that it offers only a change of management on a British withdrawal. How do you respond to that?**

J.M. I suppose like any cliché I'd be a little bit worried about accepting it as stated. I have already said Sinn Féin don't have a clear position on where they are going.

S.R. **The question is really addressed to Republicanism in general and not Sinn Féin in particular.**

J.M. I was coming to that. I worry that Sinn Féin now maybe place too much emphasis on getting people re-elected. That was very clear the last time in Gerry Adams case. There was an awful lot of resources used to do it. But in areas like the Bogside or West Belfast I do see in many ways how the people have a common identity. I noticed that in places like the Phillipines where they are (S.F.) still a grass roots party. A lot depends on the balance between 'PEOPLE POWER' and the leadership. You can see the parallels in South Africa where you have an African National Congress which does not really "REPRESENT" anything; a lot of loud mouths giving off at a distance. But then there are the kids in Soweto where the uprising was spontaneous and it may have been headed off by this same ANC again. The same is true of many Palestinians, their leadership abroad is quite remote from anything. The people internally were docile but now they have taken them up again. If you can get a situation where the grievance of the people are channelled into an organisation which is going to pursue them irrespective of the "MANAGEMENT". If that is Republicanism then I see some hope for it but if it is a remote leadership at the moment dealing with theoretical issues and being sucked into the system. If that happens then you are heading for a change of management.

S.R. **It is an observable fact that on issues like the Public Debt, Repatriation of profits, Raymond Crotty a non-aligned individual, is, on this issue, to the left of most organisations. Your own union was directly involved in raising the issues around South Africa. So clearly there is agitation and struggle outside the left parties. How do you view that?**

J.M. Well Sinn Féin are virtually non-existent in the South. I think they will admit that themselves. They have already said they need a southern profile and a southern leadership but they can't just do that overnight. They put people up in the election who had no roots in the community and no record of achievement. I'm not saying that they had to embrace clientelism. But essentially there is no party of the left, the Labour Party isn't. There is no left party; the sticks are well down the path and again they are very much more a conspiracy than a party. Sinn Féin have no presence in the Trade Union movement, they don't seem to know what to do about us. Then it is left to the likes of ourselves and the Raymond Crotty's - who is only left on the debt by the way. He was in favour of the Pro-life amendment and against Divorce. Again it goes back to the problem that there is a great vacuum.

S.R. **You have said Sinn Féin don't claim to be Socialist and that there is no Socialist Party ;,that the vanguard must be drawn from various elements. Do you see the Trade Union Movement - as a movement - having a role in this?**

- J.M. No. Not as a movement ; not as currently structured. The TUM is very much a part of the establishment and will continue to be. The one thing the T.U.M. has yet to realise is they are becoming irrelevant. Their power is little enough at the minute and its getting less. Young people are very cynical about Trade Unions. If they examine the lessons of the North where many young people are anti-trade unions; not simply non unionised but anti-trade union because they see them as part of the establishment. I see that in more young people here. More union members are going to have to move into the political area. That will happen gradually; I see no hope for the union leadership we have today. There is a need for a new type of Union Movement. If you take the Nicaraguan situation where there was a trade union section attached to the Sandanistas. Or the experience of the Phillippines where you have a trade union attached to the C.C.P. and the N.P.A. I have been there a few times and seen this for myself.
- S.R. **The Irish Trade Union Movement originated with Connolly who envisaged it as an adjunct to the Labour Party which he saw as the party of the working class. You have described how the Labour Party has abandoned and betrayed that position. How do you personally relate to Connolly's position on the reconquest of Ireland and what relevance do you see it having for Ireland into the 1990's?**
- J.M. It is hauntingly relevant really. It seems so obvious that each class should have its own party, its own industrial organisation; its own defence organisation. In the 1930's the T.U.M. and the Labour Party were the one organisation and they then split in two. We need both a Trade Union Movement that will represent its workers and do deals with the government behind their backs. That is what happened with the National Plan; almost certainly the majority of the workers are against it. The Transport Union, for example, kept changing the closing date for the ballot until they got the right result. So they are not doing their basic representational job correctly. You have the obscenity there of John Carroll, a well known wind-bag - he used to play the clarinet and should have stuck to it. There was a motion at the last Labour Party conference, or the one before last, to withdraw from coalition which the unions were supporting. When it looked as if it might be carried and they might have to do something the union block vote changed and they voted against it. So Labour would have been forced out of coalition only for the Trade Union leadership. Returning again to the main part of your question, Connolly's position is essential. Here we have a well organised union, we have good officials, they work hard. We have a good system and democratic structures but there is only so much you can do through negotiations. You can't deal with taxation through negotiation. You cannot stop the importation of South African goods through negotiations. You can't deal with the debt burden through negotiation. You can't deal with the role of the banks when they get involved in liquidation. Take McBirney's (Dublin) where seven people had about 300 years service between them; each had between thirty to forty years there. They were given statutory entitlement plus £100. Under the law at the minute the banks get their money, the liquidators get their money and the workers get theirs last. That is a political question. It is very easy to convince people, if you get a chance, that we need a political line. That is not going to be done by a party like Fianna Fail which is made up of auctioneers and land speculators. Or Fine Gael.
- S.R. **You made a couple of references "to using what ever means are necessary" in struggles and that you cannot confront certain issues through negotiations. I presume you are referring to direct action by the workers on their own behalf. How do you see that evolving; what sort of leadership should be given and what restrictions would you place on it?**
- J.M. Not really. I think it was Connolly or Larkin who said, "The weapons are whatever is at hand". I have a saying of my own whenever I do classes on what industrial relations are about they revolve around three questions. What do you want? How far will you go to get it? and; If you go that far what weapons do you use? You can apply those to nearly any situation. In the union we found that traditional strikes didn't work. We put on pickets and people walked past them. We went on from there to sit-ins which were reasonably successful but you had all these managers and security people wondering around polluting the place. So we used to throw out and lock them out. So now if we have a dispute we try to take over the place and lock everyone out. I think it is a fundamental aspect of solidarity; whether its South Africa or the 6 counties or anywhere. Its up to the people on the ground, in struggle, themselves to liberate themselves and nobody externally has the right to tell them what weapons to use. And if we break the law sure they are not our laws anyway.
- S.R. **Would it be correct then to summarize your position as supporting Connolly who advocated the "Use of argument where argument serves and arms where arms are necessary"?**
- J.M. Yes indeed. But I would not favour the use of any force in fact unless it has a political direction to it as a thought out position.
- S.R. **It is clear from some of the coverage you received that you are not the establishments favourite person. How well would your views be received outside your union; do you feel you get a good reception or are you currently working against the tide?**
- J.M. The problem we have is the media is controlled by the establishment and your not going to get objective coverage. Though I have had a reasonably good press. My colleagues and I have one thing going for us; we are good at our job; we can't be criticised. We do the basics better than the right wing. I think the left wing have always to be better than the right wing - at least twice as good! Also we deliver on our policies any time we take a position. I don't think we have any broken promises; that would be our reputation. And in terms of meeting

people personally at meetings our standing is pretty high and we have an influence. Take our policy on South Africa or on anything we pursue them fully.

S.R. **In terms of your unions influence do you see that extending in any way to sister unions in England; are they willing to take up the issues you raise here?**

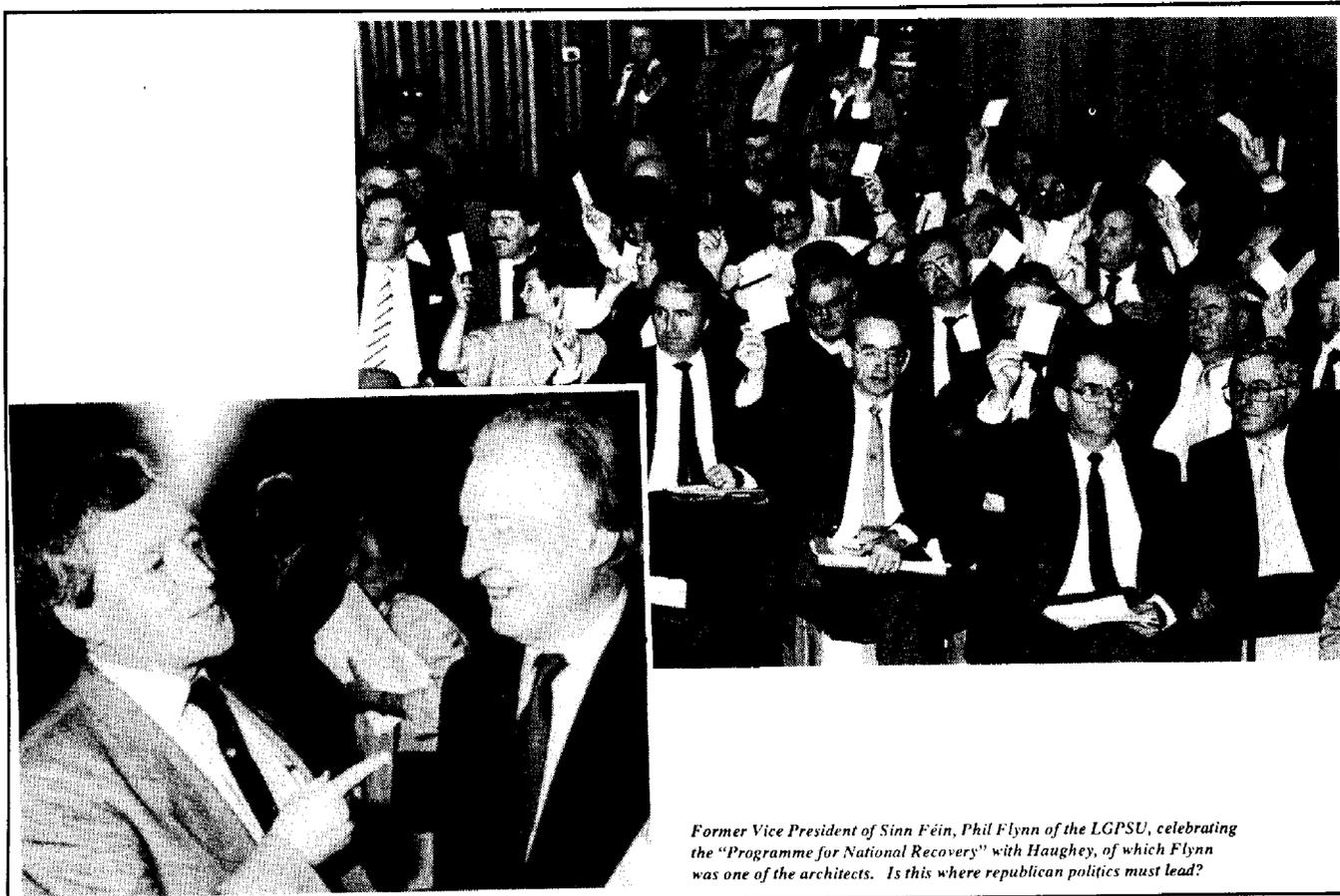
J.M. I spoke last year at an A.S.T.M.S. Conference, it was a fringe meeting organised by the Association Staffs for a United Ireland. Ken Livingstone and myself were booked but he could not make it. The amazing thing was the number of people who came up later and said "I didn't know it was like that", it was encouraging. I have certain reservations about trying to influence the British. I think we should have fraternal links with them but I feel they will always put their national interest before ours. There will be situations when its useful to have an English voice; say after Stalker and the Birmingham Six, where you had Livingstone, Chris Mullen M.P. and Gareth Pierce. Even they have tenuous links with the working class; it is really more the labour party, few trade unions have taken up the public positions in favour of Ireland recently. Its a little bit childish to expect too much from them, they have not done too much on their own.

S.R. **The Anglo-Irish Agreement between the London governments is designed to repair and restore capitalist rule on this island. In the light of the Stalker, Birmingham Six and Extradition affairs what role do you see trade union activists in opposing oppression?**

J.M. One of the problems is the dichotomy between the national and social questions. If you talk about the Anglo-Irish deal or the Single European Act in abstract terms people get bored and disinterested. One thing that has provoked a reaction has been the searches under "Operation Mallard". All sorts of people were affected and now the North, Extradition or Repression don't seem all that far away. The working class in the 26 counties are more concerned at the moment in hospital closures and the cuts in health spending. The case of the Birmingham Six has raised public opinion but the workers are not going to confront such issues unless they have the correct organisation. There was a march here against Extradition and the climate post Stalker et al is good. But if you take away the already politically committed it will be interesting to see how it develops as a campaign. There is a major effort needed to bring people out on these issues.

S.R. **To conclude, John I would ask you where you think we go from here in search of the much needed vanguard to lead Irish workers? What would be your position on the creation of a Broad Front to unify such forces?**

J.M. I don't see it being done immediately; there is an obvious need for exploration. If we do it prematurely, like the campaign for an All-Ireland Socialist Party, you could go off half-cocked. I think the various groupings, who are easily enough identified would, I hope, come together, four or five of them, to work out a programme. As for a Broad Front, I have no hang-ups about it. I would like to see a coherent homogeneous group that are convinced a British withdrawal without a social revolution is not worthwhile. I'd like to see that established before dealing with a Broad Front.



Former Vice President of Sinn Féin, Phil Flynn of the LGPSU, celebrating the "Programme for National Recovery" with Haughey, of which Flynn was one of the architects. Is this where republican politics must lead?

LOUGHALL to GIBRALTAR: The Role of the Media

The Lie Machine

**WHAT THE
PAPERS SAID!**

The year of 1987 was the year of "Selective Perceptions", with people viewing events from their own partisan positions. There to record these events were the usual array of press and T.V. crews once again claiming "impartiality" and "objectivity". Yet truth is distorted each time a newspaper is printed or a broadcast transmitted. It is widely recognised that "objectivity" and "neutrality" are socially constructed concepts which choose, in advance, to ignore certain facts. Can you imagine how the Irish Independent; Press or Times would have reported the slaughtering of the Innocents, the Spanish Inquisition, or the Famine let alone Loughall or Gibraltar or Enniskillen. Clearly the actions of Herod, the Catholic Church, Britain, the S.A.S. and the I.R.A. were not unilateral acts of mindless violence but were "momentary" actions in the history of a wider conflict.

Today the established media exists to take sides in all conflicts. However subtly, they shape the views of their readers through editorials or a particular bias. This much was evident from the media reports on Loughall, Enniskillen and the struggle generally. To many people in Ireland and beyond the Volunteers at Loughall were Freedom Fighters; to others and the media they were "Terrorists". Not even in death can the media treat the "Victims" of war as equals. The same people, in church and state, who wept copious tears for the "Innocents" of Enniskillen praised the murders at Loughall an act of hypocrisy ignored by the media.

For this reason the working class must analyse the true role of the media under capitalism. What are the real functions of the

media; whose class interests does it ultimately serve; what is its relationship to the state; how is it organised and who are recruited to its ranks?

Violence and death touch us all on this small island and when the writer John Donne remarked, "Any mans death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind", he captured the essence of the human suffering surrounding death. However, if we look for an expression of the human sorrow, pain and death caused by the cruelty of exploitation under imperialism we have only the Socialists or those who support liberation theology to light our path.

One basic trick of capitalism is to offer - via the media - an alleged "Freedom of Choice" to make decisions, hold opinions and form ideas; independently of anyone else. So long as it stops short of challenging the state. This myth, developed and refined over the years, lies at the heart of parliamentary democracy; a system which offers only a choice between shades of the same colour. For this historical con-job to work the notion that ideas and opinions of the media are NEUTRAL is essential; this is why we hear so much talk about the so called "FREE PRESS". In reality they are only free to criticise the excesses of life under capitalism. Even then they can only portray these excesses as "exceptions" requiring moderation or reform.

To better understand the relationship between the media and the ruling class it is necessary to cut through the illusions to the facts. All sections of the media act as rival producers in the "SERVICE" sector selling advertising, certain values and information as commodities in return for a profit. Hand-in-hand with this competition for profit the media perpetuates and subtly glorifies the system and culture which applauds the individual

**THESE
PAPERS**

JOE ASHTON
February 25, 1986
DAILY STAR,
Monday

**INSULT
IRISH
PEOPLE
STANDARD
SUNDAY EXPRESS**

STAR

By John J. Jones
Editor of
THE SUNDAY EXPRESS
THE SUNDAY EXPRESS
LONDON

DON'T BUY THEM

theft of wealth from the labour of workers. Against this background we can see why and how Socialist activists are marginalised and abused in the media.

News gathering, news management and presentation are all directly influenced by the particular "line" of the paper or T.V. company and moulded by the subjective prejudices of individual reporters; often chosen for their conservatism. The myth of "professional detachment" is exposed when we examine how the day to day struggles of workers and their communities are reported. The consequences of the issues for the working class are never properly addressed and in many cases so trivialised. On occasions issues like Sellafield, the National Debt or Independence are treated

as subversive! The media under capitalism in Ireland works to uphold the Status Quo and seeks only to trim its roughest edges. In this way they create the illusion of accountability while holding out a false prospect of change; in short they put a gloss on what is really crisis management. The media acts to deflect and defuse struggle by pretending to report the facts.

The absence of a developed class consciousness - as a result of a divided nation and fragmented class - to challenge the media leaves the bosses in control. They are then free to give "impressions" or offer "conclusions" which reinforce OUR oppression. When Marx stated that: "The ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class" he hit the nail on the head. Against this background the watchword for the workers should be "WHOSE NEWS?" Whether the issues are Enniskillen, Loughall or the Palestinians we must reject all selective views of our life. We must identify all who oppress us and oppose them. In this struggle to build consciousness amongst the working class we too must capture the hearts and minds of all our people if we are to turn back the tide of apathy and reaction and lead our people to victory in a Socialist Republic.



Civil Rights 1988

Sunday February 7th saw a meeting in Coalisland to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the civil rights campaign. The conference, chaired by Bernadette McAliskey and addressed by Michael Farrell, attempted to bring together the various strands of political opinion which made up the original movement for civil rights and proposed to evaluate the lessons learned in the intervening years.

Most speakers accepted and went so far as to emphasise the need to "broaden the base of the struggle" as Gerry Adams put it. In the course of the debate the inevitable but crucial question of the direction of the struggle was also raised. Throughout though it was generally agreed not to exclude any section of society who wished to support the demands and aims of the anti-imperialist movement. This consensus evident from the outset of the meeting and articulated by non-aligned as much as by the politically organised. However, this begs the question why has it taken so long for this consensus to arrive and how can this intention to unite be most effectively harnessed so as to move the struggle forward from the doldrums in which we now exist?

Ireland's continued economic and political ills are due to the continued presence of Britain in our affairs. After years of direct intervention, by way of military and political rule Britain appears able, at every turn to outflank and negate the gains made by mass mobilisations, starting with the Civil Rights Campaign, The Anti-Internment Resistance, the Political Status campaign culminating in the H-BLOCK Hunger Strikes. It must be said that while they could not have been as successful without the

co-operation and collaboration of the reformist and right wing elements in constitutional nationalism and the Catholic Church, our failures reflect our own weaknesses which must now be seriously addressed.



While the various internal and external British forces were always there at some level it has only been since the hunger strike that they feel they can "take the kid gloves off". The fact that a shaky economic and political climate existed in the 26 counties at a time when ordinary people were openly supporting republican candidates in the north prompted John Hume and his international backers to try and save the day for British Imperialism in Ireland. Today, after Stalker, the Birmingham Six and Gibraltar even the pseudo republicans like Charlie Haughey rush to bend the knee before the dictators of London.

Today extradition, tomorrow articles 2 and 3. Meanwhile our people live against an increasing climate of recession and oppression, despite our "lessons" little has changed in the lot of the plain people of Ireland.

This coupled with the disorganised and depressed state of the working class has led to a united front amongst the rich and their political allies. Correspondingly the people who have historically opposed Britain and its native collaborators have found that this coalition has forced them back into the ghettos; or more accurately into a political cul de sac. It remains now to be seen what strategy and tactics the '68 Committees can offer in what is now a golden opportunity to examine and rework the leadership and direction of our struggles.

As Michael Farrell stated "*The danger is if serious political resistance in the north can be confined to the republican ghetto. That is how the establishment succeeded in the past. It was when resistance spread beyond that ghetto that the British become seriously worried about their position. It is important that we get back that position spreading beyond the ghetto and we should utilise this occasion to build that sort of unity and united action which was the real strength of the civil rights movement.*"

In the South the relevancy of the "National Liberation Struggle" has become more obscure to the lives and struggles of ordinary working people. While many instinctively support "Brits Out" the active participation of that class as a whole in its own liberation is limited if not denied because of the lack of clarity by the present leadership regarding the objectives and outcome of the struggle.

Continued...over

continued

The emerging '68 Committees around the country must take this fact on board if they are to contribute anything towards the building of a future mass movement.

While it is correct to examine the last twenty years with a critical eye, so as to avoid past mistakes in future struggles it is also important to use the opportunities presented by the planned "Calendar of Events" to relearn and develop successful forms of struggle. The slogan "Commemorate to Educate" has its value but to stop there would be an abandonment of our duty as there is much more than the education of this generation at stake now. It is essential now to harness the groundswell of support expressed at Coalisland. The need to unite through dialogue analysis and struggle is evident. If the '68 Committees provide the necessary forums for this they are to be welcomed, yet the main task facing us all is to give clear and decisive leadership and mobilise the workers in their own interest. This must be the outcome or we will see our struggle drag on without any serious prospect for victory and the only victory worth having is aptly summed up by James Connolly.

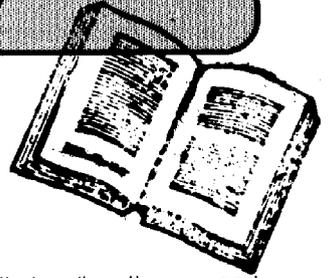
"The Irish question is a special question. The whole age long fight of the Irish people resolves itself in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production in Ireland".

Socialist Republican readily welcome the initiative of '68 Committees and pledge our support to its campaigns. Anyone seeking information or wishing to form or sponsor local committees should write to

**Fergus O'Hare,
Box. No. 68 122
Andytown Road,
Belfast BT12.**

Stella Fean.

BOOK REVIEW



Inside an English Jail -

Published by
Borderline Publications 1987

In 1870 Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa wrote to Jenny Marx, daughter of Karl, describing the barbarous conditions he was being subjected to while imprisoned in England. Having described the callousness and tyranny of the regime, Rossa concluded,

"If this letter reaches my fellow countrymen I have the right to demand that they raise their voices to insist that justice be done for their suffering brothers. Let these words whip up the blood that is moving sluggishly in their veins!"

117 years later Raymond McLaughlin's "Inside an English Jail" echoes the call of O'Donovan Rossa and reminds us that little or nothing has changed about the way Britain treats Irish prisoners in English jails, perhaps it would have been timely to reproduce Rossa's letter in full at the beginning of this little book. It may then have pricked the consciences or indeed exposed the hypocrisy of the present day revisionists who would willingly send Irish men and women into the hands of Britain's jailers.

Consider the comparisons; Like Raymond, Rossa was regularly strip-searched and mercilessly beaten when he refused to cooperate. He too was left without clothes in unheated cells. Ross's comrade, John Lynch, who suffered from a heart complaint died in Albany Prison in 1977. Since 1974 he had complained of severe stomach pains and was given nothing but aspirin. In 1977 he was diagnosed as having cancer of the stomach. Had this been detected earlier he would almost certainly be still alive.

Ray McLaughlin was sentenced to twelve years imprisonment in 1974. This followed an attempt by himself and his comrade, James McDade, to sabotage the Coventry Central Telephone Exchange. Tragically the operation went wrong and McDade was killed instantly. Ray was picked up nearby in a confused and disoriented state.

One week later, while being held on remand in Windson Green Prison, Ray witnessed the torture of the six innocent men who had been charged with the Birmingham Pub bombings. Along with other Irish men in Windson Green at that time, he too was a victim of the beatings and psychological tortures.

This was to be his initiation into a system of brutality that has been streamlined and perfected since Rossa's time. Inside an English Jail gives a first hand account of many of these injustices, from the petty to

the murderous. It describes the use and abuse of heavy psychological drugs on militant prisoners. It explains how walls are painted in such a fashion as to subdue and depress prisoners held in isolation units for long periods. It graphically illustrates how the "Ghost Train" operates, through Ray's own experience of being moved from prison to prison more than twenty five times in the nine and a half years he was inside.

However, the book does not dwell on the injustices of the regime alone. It is, more than anything, a story of struggle. Not just one man's struggle but the collective struggle of the Irish political prisoners. Despite little or no communication between jails, it tells how the prisoners often linked up their struggles in solidarity. It also shows the determination of the Irish POW in disciplining mind and body.

The book also tells the story of a developing political consciousness. The story of a boy who was forced to leave school at fifteen to find work far from his native Donegal, like his father before him. That boy quickly became a man and dedicated himself to the fight against British imperialism. In jail he educated himself, learning three languages and being introduced to the works of great socialist writers. At one point he tells how he was introduced to Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest State of Capitalism, by Hugh Doherty, brother of Sinn Féin's National Organiser Pat, and one of the Balcombe Street Four, and the effect that this book had on him. Meeting with and talking to Libyan, Spanish, Black African and Palestinian revolutionaries, in the confines of prison, taught Raymond that the real struggle for freedom is the fight against capitalism in all its forms whether imperialist, colonialist or native.

Tragically Raymond's life was cut short in its prime. Just two years after his release from jail he died accidentally while on holiday in Shannon. It had been the first holiday he ever had with his family, as he had been forced to go on the run for the previous nine months. This book was published later with the help of some friends. It deserves to be read for the same reasons that O'Donovan Rossa's letter was widely read. I am sure that Ray McLaughlin, were he alive today, would restate what Rossa said to Jenny Marx in 1870:

"I am not complaining of the penalties which my master inflict on me, it is my job to suffer, but I insist that I have the right to inform the world of the treatment to which I am subjected".

E. McC

The Winds of Change?

The last seventeen years have seen many changes in the original policy of Republicanism. Federalism has gone and the mish-mash of the Eire Nua policy, long regarded as a political afterthought, has been virtually amended out of existence. Changes have also occurred in the recognition of courts and the area of electoral politics. Yet where exactly does Republicanism stand today; what social forces direct it and what are its prospects for the future?



Encouraged by the recent changes, a series of debates are now being conducted inside and around Republicanism. The recognition that Nationalism, even in its most highly organised and

efficient military expression, poses no lasting threat to Capitalism in Ireland and is therefore incapable of liberating the working class, is increasingly understood by the most advanced class conscious sections of Republicanism. This revolutionary component now argues that sharing the "low-ground" of Nationalism with the S.D.L.P., F.F. and their ilk only serves to blunt and obscure the contradictions between a disorganised but revolutionary labouring class and a highly organised, reactionary Capitalist class. It is an analysis that is explicitly critical of the present leadership.

Some of the questions now under consideration include: Is Republicanism organising to defeat Capitalism and build Socialism in Ireland? How do Republican structures and strategy serve and lead the struggle - if indeed they do - for the self-emancipation of the working class? What precisely - and in practice - is the relationship of the armed struggle to the working class? What type of party organisation does Republicanism offer and how does it mobilise among the workers? These debates conducted by various elements, are not, as some party loyalists may claim - anti-Republican. These questions are not mere academic abstracts but seek to determine whether an ideology based around Radical Nationalism is now, or ever can be, capable of leading the Socialist Revolution in Ireland. As such, they centre around the need for a wholly consistent scientific ideology; the methods of organisation and struggle to be employed; opportunities for full critical debate on all theory and practice; and ultimately the precise aims and objectives of all forces engaged in the struggle against Imperialism in Ireland. The key question now facing Republicanism - though it has not been posed openly - is whether it is organising for REFORM or REVOLUTION. Clearly this is not even a question of personal or collective choice and can only be safely answered inside an honest and concrete analysis of the concrete situation now existing.

Connolly long ago advocated Ireland's liberation in terms of unfettered control by the Irish working class

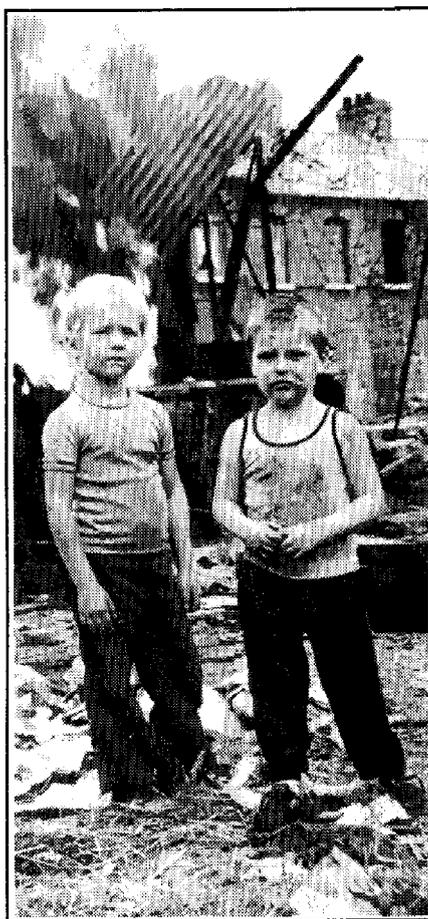


over the means of production, distribution and exchange. A position which has been avoided or betrayed in struggle since Connolly's time. The present failure to meet the conclusions stemming from this history poses a dichotomy between "Tactical Manouvere" and an honest expression of what is actually planned for the future. Any misconception that Socialism can be built around a conspiracy to manipulate social forces must be removed. The task

of revolutionary activists is to develop revolutionary politics within the widest possible mass of workers. The current tendency towards electoral "Clientelism" through the councils in return for votes encourages PASSIVITY on the part of the working class and sub-consciously reinforces the opinion that aspects of the system can be made to work if properly directed. It is only by LEADING and DIRECTING workers in struggle to identify the total contradiction between labour and capital and by exposing the limitations of all bourgeois institutions that the revolutionary party can ever hope to win, hold and build the forces necessary for Social Revolution.

While recruitment to Republicanism fails to be along class lines the development of an amorphous, populist party is inevitable. Such a process ignores the development of a higher level of class consciousness, however diffuse it is at present, within Republicanism and across the class generally. It flatly contradicts revolutionary theory and inevitably poses questions on the ultimate composition, direction and historical role of The

Republicanism. As a product of its ranks I can no longer tolerate that simplistic rhetoric which says : "Republicanism is Revolutionary because it opposes British Imperialism". Native Irish capitalism also opposes British and World Imperialism that does not make it "REVOLUTIONARY". The need for political clarity of the class forces involved cannot any longer be ignored. It is one's position in the conflict between labour and Capital that ultimately defines whether one is revolutionary or not. Ambiguity impresses no-one and achieves less. The revolutionary potential of Republicanism in its historical sense is in its ability to complete the National Revolution on terms most favourable to the working class in their continuing struggle for Socialism. Whether the results and conclusions of these various debates achieve the public airing they demand or are destined to remain marginal depends on the ability of the rigid hierarchial structures of Republicanism to lay themselves bare to the revolutionary criticism necessary to correct our errors in struggle. The elevation of Armed Struggle to the status of "Sacred Cow" and the reluctance of many to discuss its role within that TOTALITY of struggle that is Social Revolution remains an obstacle to the development of revolutionary theory and practice



inside Republicanism. The OVER emphasis and reliance on armed struggle as the primary component is, in this period, flawed as it leads to the working class being organised as an ancillary support group and not as an agency for its own liberation. No-one who understands the nature of state power under capitalism believes the exploiters will give up their spoils without a struggle. Under Capitalism the philosophy of PACIFISM is never a realistic option, it is tantamount to suicide. Yet many traditionalists see

debate on the issue as the "Thin edge of the wedge" leading to a denial of the right of oppressed people to bear arms against their oppressor.

Universal laws of motion dictate that "CHANGE" is inevitable, the direction in which it goes however is a matter of conscious will on the part of those involved. Criticism for its own sake is a futile and ultimately negative exercise yet criticism of Republicanism designed to discover whether it is in FACT - not someone's imagination - capable of achieving its stated historical objectives is completely valid. Their dominance of social forces ie. CLASSES, governing all struggle does not mean a sudden or even gradual abandonment of the "National Question" as the objective conditions for socialism cannot mature under colonial occupation. It does however demand the strategy and programme which will in Connolly's words, "*Muster all the forces of the labour for a revolutionary reconstruction of society and the incidental destruction of the British in Ireland*". Republicans - and I include myself within this tradition - must face the fact that currently we are not implementing Connolly's theory and practice. Those who REJECT constructive criticism deny debate; in

such circumstances REACTION flourishes.

The Communist left, which itself emerged from the National struggle after 1916, regards Republicanism as a bourgeois ideology which poses class alliances for the realisation of a Republic which stops well short of a workers state. Through radical in part, the Communist believe, Republicanism side-steps the centrality of the working class. Republicanism can be objectively seen to be enlisting the working class, via the electorate, as "Electoral Troops" and not as an agency for self-emancipation. Our critics point to an armed struggle which, while undoubtedly waged with popular support, is fought over the heads of the workers and often as an alternative to organising them as a class of labour in direct conflict with capitalism. How many revolutionary republicans can honestly refute such a criticism? Undoubtedly the theory and practice of the communist movement is found lacking in various areas. Their theoretical elitism and frequent opportunism around the National Question has seen them marginalised by their preference to colonise relatively "Safe" issues in the Trade Union, Anti-Nuclear and Womens Movements. However, the old Republican response of treating other political forces as irrelevant while appealing over their heads to some abstract mythical deity in the shape of "The Republic" is no longer - if it ever was - credible!

The current "**Wind of Change**" may be nothing more than the cyclic stirrings of dissent that follow every long-standing formation. In which case they will have no more relevance than a Parliamentary election anywhere. On the other hand they could mark the coming of age of an increasingly politicised and revolutionary conscious trend. If it is the latter then complacency and faith in its evolution has no place in its development. Only open, and as far as possible comradely polemic, leading to a synthesised revolutionary Leninist Party can safeguard the future of the struggle for National Liberation and Socialism.

APARTHEID - The Case of Sanctions

Brian Turner

For decades, the right wing Government of South Africa has attracted the contempt and hostility of the world for its racist policies against the majority of its black people. So let us look at apartheid in its social, economic, and political terms, and analyse the various forces for change in South Africa.

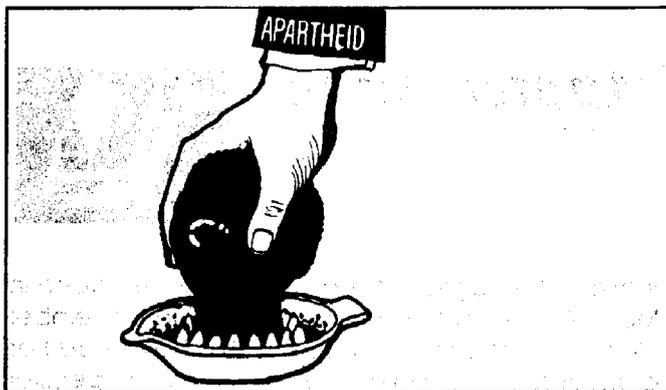


South Africa is unique in the world today for it is the only country where racism is the official doctrine of the State. It's constitution and laws condemn the black person to a life of deprivation and humiliation, while it upholds the superiority of the white man, who in turn enjoys one of the highest living standards of any country, only made possible by the sweat and labour of the black person. That this regime has survived for so long has direct political consequences for the plain people of Ireland, who, in our common history know only too well the legacy of poverty, hunger, torture and death under Capitalism.

The recent banning orders designed to strangle all democratic opposition to Apartheid are in direct response to the recent electoral successes of the ultra right. Despite the restrictions on international news teams operating in South Africa the world now knows the TRUTH. Increasingly ordinary people are showing their revulsion as they did in Dublin during the I.A.A.M. Rally last month. This solidarity must now be translated into concrete forms of agitation in support of the campaign for sanctions.

Such a fascist regime is not only unjust and immoral, but presents a real threat to the future liberation of all oppressed peoples in the world today. Throughout the world, Capitalism has divided workers along the lines of race, sex, colour and religion. Each time their desire is to fragment the workers so that their exploitation is made easier.

The South African Government's policy was summarised by Dr. Verwood, the Prime Minister in 1963, as follows: "We want to keep South Africa white". Keeping it white can only mean one thing, namely white domination, not leadership, not guidance but



SOLIDARITY

control, supremacy. If we are agreed that it is the desire of the people that the white man should be able to continue to protect himself by retaining white domination by means of separate development. This separate development can be seen to split and divide workers in their unions.

The South African Congress of Trade Unions (S.A.C.T.U.), the non-racial trade union, has seen its power whittled away over the years. The Industrial Conciliation Act 1956 prevented the white workers from forming a common front with the African's by splitting the trade union on racial lines. After 1956, no mixed unions up to that date were split in to white and non-white. Of recent years, the South African Government seems to be bent on destroying S.A.C.T.U. Its offices are frequently raided by police, its pamphlets seized and members harassed by bans and restrictions. This persecution is a tactic to destroy the function of the union, without declaring it an unlawful organisation. Nevertheless, the S.A.C.T.U. has survived and keeps alive. Its main aim is to secure better conditions for its members and work towards a non-racial society free from the evils of apartheid. In support of their struggles inside South Africa, S.A.C.T.U. have repeatedly called for international sanctions. A call which all freedom loving people must support and campaign for.

So why do the Capitalist countries continue to oppose economic sanctions. Countries which continue to trade with South Africa are in effect bolstering up the Regime. While we cannot expect that the imposition of sanctions would end apartheid, we can be sure that it would 'Bren-ch the Laager'. It has been shown that the South African economy is not self-sufficient and depends on trade with the outside world to support it. Those countries who condemn apartheid but oppose the imposition of economic sanctions, have a duty to spell out any better plan they have for aiding the non-whites in their struggle for justice and peace.

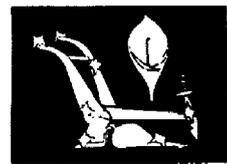
The civilised world can no longer afford to offer material support to the South African Government though the trade and investment which help sustain an economy that robs the vast majority of its people of the means of life. Hence the demand for the imposition of economic and political sanctions **NOW** against South Africa. This demand has come from both the non-whites and the African National Congress who have always regarded the external boycott of South Africa as an invaluable aid to their struggle against apartheid inside the country. They have not only welcomed demonstrations of solidarity from outside, they have openly called for sanctions, believing that outside pressure for a boycott and sanctions will ultimately weaken and undermine the economic power - with all its accompanying social privileges - upon which apartheid is based. The boycott of South Africa's fruit from Dunnes Stores by Irish workers backed by their union (I.D.A.T.U.) showed a brave stand against apartheid. Such actions strengthen the confidence of the black workers in South Africa, who realise the regime is forever incapable of reform yet openly declare to the world that South Africa belongs equally to all who live in it, black and white. No South African Government can justly claim legitimate authority unless it is based on the **will of all its people**. While it is not, it must be opposed tooth and nail.

UNITE THE MANY TO DEFEND THE FEW!!

SANCTIONS NOW - SANCTIONS NOW

Black Irish

Gerard Steenson - An Appreciation



It was a bright sunny afternoon in September when I first met Gerard Steenson, it was to be the beginning of a close political collaboration and an even closer friendship. To try to sum-up anyone's life in an appreciation can never be an easy task. Yet so much of the man Gerard was - and remains to his friends - was unknown and unseen.

The man the media tried to portray as a psychopathic killer was an intense and private individual. Always ready with a joke or a prank, in public he was the centre of attraction in any social gathering. Yet away from the crowds Gerard would read Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Shelley and had a strong interest in philosophy and psychology. Amongst my own cherished possessions is a notebook which he kept in jail. In this he lists his favourite pieces of classical music and quotations from Shakespeare, Kafka and John Donne. Taken alongside his public face these interests reveal a sharp and probing intellect who was capable of great sensitivity and strength.

Gerard or "Steensy" as he was called by his friends was a mass of high energy and was able to assess individuals and situations quickly and thoroughly. His ability to motivate and inspire comrades, evident from an early age, placed him amongst the most able of his generation. At the age of 15 years old and having lied about his age he joined the IRA in the lower Falls becoming its Operations Officer within the year. Now that he is dead more may be spoken or written of his bravery and courage in the field. Suffice to say here that the name of Gerard Steenson struck fear in the hearts of our oppressors.

In just 22 short months between April 1980 and February 1982 Gerard reorganised and led the now corrupt and defunct Belfast INLA in its most active period ever. For the first time the INLA activity against the crown forces resulted in a successful and sustained campaign. True, Gerard did not suffer the foals or "phoney" easily yet he always retained the respect of his comrades in the field and his courage and bravery are beyond dispute, even amongst his enemies. Those who took his life have no place in the history of our struggle for liberation.

To try and put Gerard's life ; his early childhood or teenage years into perspective is to confront struggle head on. He saw his father and older brother beaten and interned in 1971 and his mother Eileen suffered severe injuries in a no-warning bomb attack in 1975. Ten of his 30 short years were spent in jail, a factor that was to lead to the eventual break-up of the only two long-term relationships he had. Yet Steensy remained unbroken.

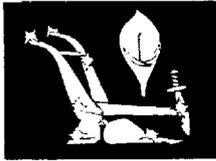
While in the cages of Long Kesh Gerard escaped in May 1976 but was soon recaptured. In December 1985 he went on hunger strike with others as part of a successful campaign against the paid perjurer system. Gerard held the unenviable record of being the longest man held on supergrass evidence and no less than 5 different informers were brought against him. He was no stranger to hardship or suffering in or out of prison. Always on the move he would cover the country in search of information and resources. His organisational skills impressed us all. A master of the art in negotiation he involved all activists in the formation of, what was for a time, a highly organised and militarily efficient fighting force. Always seen as a man of action he confounded his critics by delivering precise political polemic and analysis when called upon to do so. There were few areas of activity he could not turn his hands to.

As a close friend and comrade attempting to give an impression of a man I knew well and whose memory I cherish, I am also aware of what Gerard himself would say or want said of him. Like us all he had faults and weaknesses ; times when even his closest friends found him difficult to deal with. Yet for all that he was human, caring and forgiving with those people he knew to be honest, sincere and genuine. He could never bear to see his family or loved ones upset on his account and tried always to shield them from danger.

Through the years that Gerard and I shared together as friends, comrades and brothers I have seen him engage in every area of struggle. He had nothing left to prove to anyone yet he set himself increasingly high standards. His wish to see the corrupt and degenerate IRSP/INLA disbanded may have cost him his life. That our class should be robbed of such a man by such craven cowards is sickening in the extreme. Not one of them could ever stand in his shadow. Yet this is no place for bitterness and now one year after his murder, along with our mutual good friend Tom McCarthy, Gerard is still strong in my life.

He will always be remembered for the man he was, while those of us who knew him well may sit and wonder of the man he might yet have become had he not been so brutally cut down. A dedicated soldier and socialist republican activist your memory lights our path.

May Grey



John Sheehy : An Appreciation

At first sight Limerick must have seemed a strange place to a young man who grew up in England.

Knowing himself to be Irish John Sheehy lived for the day he would return home like so many before and since John's family were forced to emigrate to England in search of work, a fact never lost on him and one which helped shape his socialist principles.

John's father or "ould Johnnie" as we came to know him was always active in the labour and Irish movements in England and John often said how he grew up with these two ideals at his father's knee. Once home young John was determined never to leave Ireland again. While in England John studied Connolly, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Seamus Costello who he quoted to us regularly. The energy John applied in campaigning in the Troops Out Movement during the Hunger Strikes in 1981 never failed him here. He was an immediate asset to his comrades.

Soon after returning he was actively involved in the "Free Nicky Kelly" campaign and in his local IRSP Cummann. No task was too small and no job too big as he was soon to prove on joining the INLA. John saw his politics in terms of people and **their** liberty and was always unhappy with the weak stand of Sinn Féin on the issue of Socialism although he came to make many good friends there ; including many in the IRA.

The one thing that made John stand out was his seriousness and dedication to all things political and for him the armed struggle was a direct extension of the political. John was active in numerous operations around the country. During these times he impressed his fellow volunteers with his security; he was obsessed with secrecy and the safety of his comrades. John was a thinking man and always had suggestions and advice. Such was the respect his comrades had for him they were always willing to listen. More than once he volunteered for things he thought might be a bit "risky" for a family man. It was things like this and John's policy of never asking someone to do something he would not do himself that won him the admiration of all who knew him.

He also came in for abuse from the Gardai, who perhaps thinking John was weak or an outsider made many attempts to break him. John was arrested regularly in Limerick, Dublin and Cork. But John knew the score he would never even talk to them, soon even the Gardai were wasting their time. Before long other people in the organisation became aware of John's commitment and skills. Soon his responsibilities increased both in the political and operational fields. At no time was John ever found lacking.

Despite the pressure of work John always had time to relax with his friends. He enjoyed a night out and was popular at local parties where he made the crack. Everyone who knew John liked him and believe me that is some doing in a tough area like O'Malleys Park. The respect local people had for John was there for all to see; the day we buried him hundreds of people lined the streets as a lone piper leads his remains for burial. His comrades provided a full guard of honour and proper tribute was paid to a fallen comrade when a volley of shots were fired over his coffin.

No words can explain the sense of loss and personal grief a man feels when he has lost someone so close. Even now I find it hard to say all that I feel for my friend and comrade John. I know he loved his father and mother Myra. He was always fond of his old dogs too and I have many happy memories of the time I spent with them all. John's death leaves a gap in our lives but his example must spur us on to the Socialist Republic that was his dream. Believe me when I say, to your memory John, that we will finish the job.

Your comrade - Liam Goodwin

A LIBERATION THEOLOGY

by Joseph McVeigh

Following is the introductory talk given by Fr. McVeigh at the Community for Justice seminar in Derry.

Liberation Theology is the general title given to the grassroots movement which puts justice at the centre of Christian life. There is no one Liberation Theology. There are many theologies of liberation - Black, South African, Latin American, Chicano, Asian - and each one is unique. But they all share the same method: they begin with reflection by a people on their own experience of oppression and struggle in the light of the Gospel.

From this reflection comes a new understanding of the Church as outlined in the documents of Vatican II as well as a new understanding of the faith which puts working for justice before ritual. This new awareness on the part of the poor has frightened the day-lights out of the Establishment both Church and State, just as the first Christians did. There have been all kinds of warnings, accusations and attempts to discredit Liberation Theology, but proponents of the movement are not discouraged.

In Ireland there is a need for an alternative theology, an Irish or Celtic Theology of Liberation, which is concerned with justice for the poor, which is concerned with the plight of the people who are singled out for harassment and humiliating treatment, which is concerned with the causes of the violence in our country and not just the symptoms. We must begin to question the attitude of the bishops, priests and religious about the injustice of the British occupation and the continuing oppression of the people of Ireland, north and south, by foreign and native exploiters.

I attended a week-long meeting of priests to talk about the role of the priest today. Although these priests live and work along both sides of the Border, there was no talk about justice or the poor or the plight of the people in our country. However, one priest wanted the assembly to issue a public statement condemning the IRA. It convinced me, if I needed convincing, that the oppressed and the prisoners can look elsewhere for support in their struggle for justice; these priests do not see this issue as important or necessary.

My experience as a priest during the past 15

years has shown me that the priests in Ireland - who may begin their ministry as idealists - usually end up working for the system and falling in behind the bishops in their mission to promote the interest of the middle class.

The most obvious oppression is the increasing poverty of the people and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. But there has been no real attempt by the bishops and clergy to confront the basic injustice of the system which causes this gap. On the contrary, the utterances of some bishops would lead us to the conclusion that they are quite happy with the status quo.

The Church has always accepted the legitimacy of the two states set up by the British in 1920. They have refused to condemn as immoral the British involvement in Irish affairs and they have refused to become involved in the people's struggle for justice, indulging instead in ritual and one-sided condemnations of violence.

The people are oppressed not just by a foreign and capitalist system of government but also by an authoritarian Church. Indoctrinated as they have been with a "theology of obedience", which puts them in their place and hardly recognises their rights and their dignity, they find it difficult to go against the power of the Church. The Church is often seen as the Church of the "Elite", the respectable, the middle class. The people often find it difficult or impossible to get the bishops to listen to their concerns.

In this regard the clergy, while engaged in all kinds of "Church activity", have neglected the most important aspect of their ministry - to be "preachers of the good news to the poor". They preach, rather, a perverted version of the Gospel which supports the status quo and allows the rich and powerful to continue exploiting the people without a word of censure.

The situation calls for new theology and a new vision of Church which would see as its chief task to work for justice. That new theology and new vision will only come from the people who are suffering the brunt of the oppression

for it is through the poor that God brings about change and justice.

There are signs in Ireland today that a new political consciousness is beginning to develop, however, slowly. This in turn is creating a new theological awareness among a people who have traditional veneration of Christ crucified and of the crucifix. Irish Catholics identify with this persecution.

Every one-sided condemnation of violence by a bishop or a priest erodes the myth of the Church as protector and defender of the oppressed. With that erosion comes a growing awareness that the Gospel is a gospel of liberation which gives hope and strength to face even the greatest Imperial Beast. And out of that awareness a new church will grow - a Church of the Poor.



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