

# **The Road to Revolution in Ireland**

**By the Irish Revolutionary Forces (Cork, 1966)**



# **The Road to Revolution in Ireland**

First published in serial form in *An Phoblacht*, organ of the Irish Revolutionary Forces, in 1966.

**“Without a Revolutionary Theory there cannot be a Revolutionary Movement”**

**Lenin**

There are many in Ireland who flippantly disregard the great need for a theoretical knowledge of revolution, by saying that it is ACTION and not THEORY that is required. This sort of error is one which cannot avoid producing dire consequences.

A thorough understanding of revolutionary theory is indispensable to the successful pursuance of revolutionary action. A revolutionary activist can no more cope with the many and diverse problems of revolution without revolutionary theory, than can an electrical engineer master his problems without a knowledge of electricity. The question is as simple and straightforward as that.

## **REVOLUTION:**

In terms of present conditions in Ireland: Revolution stands for the total overthrow of that social, political and economic system which functions in the country as a whole; and its replacement with an entirely new order of things, more compatible to the needs of the people, more beneficial to their progress and general welfare, and designed to ensure the unqualified Independence of our Nation State.

From this it is obvious that the Irish Revolution must be a two-phased effort. The first, must be aimed primarily at the overthrow of the Partitionist regime, and the seizure of State power by the revolutionary movement. The second, must represent a co-ordinated national effort during which the national community, under the leadership of the revolutionary movement, will undertake the reconstruction of the nation on completely new lines.

The most important thing to understand, and understand fully, is that revolution not alone entails that period of national struggle to free the

country, but also encompasses an after period, to implement the social, political and economic changes necessary to give the newly acquired independency a durable substance. Consequently, the revolutionary political organization which mobilizes a popular support for the struggle against the present regimes in Ireland, must, of necessity, retain the directorship of national affairs after that struggle has been won, so as to ensure that what the people fought for shall be realised.

To propose that the matter of national leadership could be arranged in any other fashion is ridiculous. It is stupid, for example, to say that when Ireland is liberated from its colonial yoke, and re-united politically, a parliamentary election should be held to elect a 32 County Parliament. What political interests are going to compete with the party of the Revolution in such an election? Are the old parties to be permitted to continue, even under different names? Obviously, such a set-up, wherein the political opposition to the revolution is allowed to retain its cohesiveness after the revolution has won, cannot be entertained by any reasonable person. Furthermore, it is highly absurd to suggest that new political parties would come into being in the aftermath of victory. Where are they going to come from? What interests are they going to represent? It should be plain enough that all progressive groups in the country are going to identify themselves with the revolution during the colonial struggle, and as a consequence, they are going to become part of the revolutionary political organisation. Anyone, any social or economic interest, which does not establish such an identity must be opposed to the revolution. You cannot have neutrals in a revolutionary struggle; and if it should happen that a segment of the population did adopt a neutral position during the struggle, then, they have automatically forfeited the right to participate as an independent political force in the State founded by the Revolution.

The facts of the matter are: a modern revolutionary movement must have a popular basis if it is to succeed. During the anti-colonial struggle it's

organizational structure must facilitate a mass mobilization of the community within the framework of the movement. The desires of the people will therefore be expressed through the revolutionary movement during the struggle. This is quite logical; and it is equally logical to say that the will of the national community can be as beneficially expressed through the same medium during the period of reconstruction that follows the anti-colonial struggle.

In effect, a revolutionary government under these conditions would be drawn from one political party. The State would function under a system of Socialist Democracy; wherein the various contradictions, or legitimate conflicts of interests of the community, would be represented in the Party, and would be resolved by the democratic machinery of that party. The only interests which would not be represented in, or recognized by the State, would be those antagonistic to the interests of the community. This is the revolutionary way. There is no other.

#### REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAMME:

When a revolutionary movement calls upon the people to rise in active opposition to the status quo, it must base its case on positive proposals of its own, as well as on the negative aspects of the ruling regime. The people must be given a tangible reason why they should overthrow the existing order; in that they must be presented with the prospects of an alternative system emerging from their struggle which will incorporate benefits not forthcoming under the prevailing ruling clique.

Generally, it is the practice of revolutionary movements to issue a social, political and economic programme, so as to enlighten the community on its ultimate aims and ideals. This programme, with its contents exemplifying the ideological motivation of the revolution, represents the CORE of the struggle for freedom. By assessing its contents against corresponding elements of the status quo, it is possible to determine whether or not that CORE is sound or hallow; whether or not the fight, even if successful,

is going to be worth the sacrifice and trouble it will inevitably incur. Does the programme propose modifications to the existing system, or does it involve the creation of a completely new and progressive order? That is the main question. And an analysis of any programme will answer this question, and by so doing, will make clear at once if its contents are in fact revolutionary or not.

A truly revolutionary programme for Ireland must, of necessity, be diametrically opposed to the existing order of things, this is only logical; and since Ireland now functions according to the dictates of capitalism, then, it is but common sense to suggest that an Irish revolutionary movement must found its programme on the principles of Revolutionary Socialism. There exists no other known alternative.

However, the realization of a revolutionary programme requires planning, to take into account the resources of the revolution and of the opposition to it, to select the means by which the revolution advances, and to dictate the employment of revolutionary forces and resources. Such diversified planning falls under the general heading of policy.

#### REVOLUTIONARY POLICY:

A revolutionary policy represents an assessment of any given situation, and the strategic and tactical plans adopted for the employment of revolutionary forces and resources in that situation. From this it can be seen that a fundamental difference exists between the basis of a revolutionary programme, and the various policies conceived to realise it. And it is precisely this difference, by no means obscure or undefinable, that causes much confusion in the appreciations of many Irish Revolutionaries.

A programme expresses the principles on which the revolution is founded. To modify such a programme, or to pursue a course of action antagonistic

to its fulfilment, represents a positive violation of PRINCIPLE. On the other hand, policies are dictated by prevailing conditions; of necessity, they must change as conditions alter, or when new opportunities emerge. The only principle governing policy, is the principle of compatibility with the ultimate realization of the revolutionary programme it is designed to serve.

This somewhat brief outline should at least serve to illustrate a great weakness among contemporary Irish Revolutionaries; that is, the tendency to confuse policies for a programme, and therefore to confuse principles with strategic and tactical expediencies. An Irish revolutionary programme must be based on the destruction of the neo-colonial system, and the construction of a new socialist order. The employment of force to achieve this end is purely a matter of policy; and for that matter, so is the participation, or nonparticipation in the arena of parliamentary politics. However, experience, coupled with a pragmatic assessment of current conditions in Ireland, points to the use of force as the only realistic policy. And in this sense only is force complementary to our principles. On the other hand, should the unprecedented occur, wherein our objectives could be gained without the use of force, and where the use of force could indeed complicate, rather than complement, the realization of a programme, then, under those particular circumstances a policy of physical force would in fact be in direct violation of our principles, since it would be antagonistic to the realization of our programme.

Having established the role of policy in the overall framework of revolution, it is necessary to proceed and sub-divide policy itself.

It has already been said that revolution in Ireland involves the two phased process of destruction and reconstruction; with both dovetailed together to complement the ultimate realization of a revolutionary programme. Now,

since the revolution must be divided into two distinct, though complementary, phases, the over-riding trend in policy must be likewise influenced for maximum efficiency and results. Consequently, to expedite explanations, the dominating policy during the initial period can be classed as Power Policies; and those of the second period, Reconstruction Policies.

#### POWER POLICY:

It is pointless to talk on what should be done to save the country, unless you are in the position to implement your proposals. Therefore, having formulated its programme, an Irish revolutionary movement must assess the situation, formulate plans for the mobilization of support, and then commit its forces against the status quo in a struggle for state power.

Power is the key to revolutionary success; unless a movement succeeds in its struggle for state power its hopes, its aims, its aspirations for a better and more equitable life for the nation's people amounts to nothing more than wishful thinking. It is for this reason that the quest for power looms so large in revolutionary appreciations during the initial stage of the revolution. However, it is of equal importance that a revolutionary leadership retain this quest for power in its proper perspective. State power is itself but a means in the service of the revolution, and is not an end in itself. For this reason, although all means can in theory be justifiably employed by the revolution in its struggle for power, in practice, limits are imposed by the necessity to strenuously guard at all times against any venture or commitment that would tend to compromise the status or functioning of the body which is to symbolize state power once victory has been achieved.

It is natural then that although Power Policies must be dictated by the need of doing what is necessary and what is possible to realize power,

at the same time, they must also be governed by the paramount demand of avoiding any compromising action, even though such action may hold the possibility of a quicker victory on the surface. In other words, when Power Policy is being formulated at any given point, it's makers cannot isolate the range of their evaluations to within the scope and demands of the particular revolutionary phase they are engaged in. They must at all times look beyond that juncture where State power is naturally required by the forces of the revolution, and take into consideration the possibility of any long sought participation in a course of action they contemplate initiating, may have, or could possibly have, on the ultimate revolutionary reconstruction of the nation.

A factor which should, perhaps, be re-emphasized, is that bearing on the employment of physical force. Force is an element which can be used in a variety of ways other than in it's obvious form of military action. However, we are not concerned here with any particular policy governing it's employment; more specifically, we are interested in basic attitudes towards it's employment.

Of necessity, a revolutionary movement, must, from the outset, regulate it's policies on the premise that force will have to be used in the struggle for power. Both precedent and ordinary common sense points to the realism of this stand. On the other hand, while a revolutionary movement must organize and prepare for the employment of physical force, should it so happen that an unique opportunity presents itself to facilitate the ascendancy of revolutionary forces without it's use, naturally the leadership will not turn it down. On such an eventuality policies can easily be realigned to avail of the opportunity.

The important thing to bear in mind, is that although it is relatively simple for a revolutionary movement, that has from the beginning determined it's progress on policies which rely on the employment of force, to re-adjust



rapidly to exploit any opportunity to acquire power by peaceful means.  
It is practically impossible for a movement whose progress means to  
change it's course with equal success and speed, when it has been  
demonstrated that force offers the only solution. The truth of this  
statement is substantiated over and over in the pages of history; it  
is an uncontestable fact.

Consequently, the mood of a revolutionary movement must always be: We  
are going to prepare for, and use, force, to acquire our objectives,  
However, should the enemy be so kind as to vacate the field and allow  
the revolution to march forward without hinderance, then, we will  
naturally avail of the situation.

#### RECONSTRUCTION POLICY:

Basically, these policies are those formulated for the regulation of the  
revolution's advance once state power is in the hands of the revolutionaries

Policies governing the country's reconstruction, along lines compatible  
to the principles of Socialism, are of tremendous importance. Indeed,  
there are many cases where the revolutionary forces experienced success  
on the battlefield, only to lose their way when it came to the  
implementation of the social, political and economic changes that  
justified their existence in the first place. So that when revolutionaries  
do acquire power, they must be constantly on the alert against the  
emergence of any attitudes tending to foster the reactionary notion that  
the job is now completed for all practical purposes; or ideas that the  
revolution can afford to give a little here and there without undue  
adverse effects. The job is far from being done, and the revolution  
can no more afford to compromise during the course of national reconstruction,  
than it could during the period of struggle against enemy forces.

In many respects it could be said that the period of national reconstruction is one during which errors of policy more easily occur, than during the period of struggle against the forces of the reactionary regime. In reality it is more correct to say: erroneous policies can remain undetected for a greater time during the reconstruction period than during the period of armed struggle where they develop first, through a relaxation in revolutionary vigilance, arising from the mistaken, though frequent, notion that the revolution is a reality once the struggle for power is won. Secondly, due to the growth of arrogance in leadership circles; which can express itself in the shape of pursuing policies that the people in general are not yet ready to accept, on the premise that the leadership knows what is best for the people. This latter contention may well be true. Nevertheless, the role of revolutionaries is not to undertake the construction of a socialist state as their exclusive responsibility, but, to guide the people in their rebuilding of their own country.

The fundamental difference between a Socialist and a bourgeois revolution, is that while the latter represents a struggle for state power in the interests of a particular minority class, the former represents one for mass emancipation. As a result, although bourgeois revolutionaries rely mainly on popular support for the winning of their revolution, once they have that power in their hands they invariably proceed to arrange things in the interests of their class; disregarding the interests of the masses when such interests conflict with their own. The great bourgeois cry of: LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY, takes into account only the bourgeoisie; it has never yet been known to include the "Lower Orders", as they style the working classes. To the bourgeois revolutionary, the people is a very abstract phrase indeed; but to the Revolutionary Socialist it is an entirely different matter. The Socialist revolutionary is of the people and for the people in the fullest sense of the term: and should he ever forget this, and put himself on the path of a bureaucrat, ordering the

people around, you can be sure that there is one revolution on the road to ruin.

State power, in the hands of a revolutionary leadership, must only be used to forward the revolution, by doing what is necessary in a tempo regulated by what is possible at any given time. A revolutionary leadership cannot, through the employment of the revolutionary movement backed by the might of state power, proceed to construct the new society by decree, completely disregarding the attitudes and voice of the mass of the people, and at the same time expect to realise in the end that concept of society envisioned by the philosophy of Revolutionary Socialism. For success in reconstruction, a strict equilibrium must at all times be maintained between the revolutionary leadership, the revolutionary movement and the mass of the people. In a word, socialist reconstruction represents a co-operative endeavour between the leadership, the movement and the mass of the people; and in this undertaking state power is merely a tool to be used just like any other, and not a whip with which to drive the people towards their salvation.

The socialist reconstruction of a country represents the labours of its people to build a society which is to the advantage of all. However, the structure that ultimately emerges in any given country can only reflect the amount of labour which has been devoted to its building. No people can expect such a blessing as a gift; no revolutionary movement and its leadership can say to the people: give us your support in our struggle for state power, and we will give you a socialist state in which all will enjoy benefits hitherto undreamed of. No!! If such a state is to be created, then the people themselves must build it; the revolutionary leadership and the movement can only instruct, direct and co-ordinate its creation. It is of the utmost importance that revolutionaries grasp this fact from the beginning, and that they keep it in mind when they are formulating policy at any given time. And it is for this reason also that the

danger of isolating considerations for any given policy, to within the limits of immediate demands, has been stressed throughout. It may, for example, appear smart politics to make all sorts of promises when you are appealing for support to wage a struggle for power. But what happens when power is actually yours, and you find yourself in the inevitable position of not being able to pay up? You can, of course, use your newly acquired power to keep the people in line; you can also use state power to coerce the people into the building of that order of things you promised would be realised so readily and so painlessly. But what the end result of this course would be is difficult to say.

It is obvious that at this stage it is impractical to extend our discussion on the basis of proposing specific policies to meet the needs of our own particular situation in Ireland. We must, of necessity, limit the discourse: (1) to illustrating the role of policy in the revolutionary process as a whole, so as to clearly define its proper function; (2) to establishing some basic tenets which govern the formulating of policy; especially some points that may easily be overlooked by students in their study of revolutionary techniques. The great need is to demonstrate over and over, that this business of revolution cannot be reduced to such relatively simple terms, a learning how to use a gun, and then taking off to take a shot at a target e.g., U.D.R. or the likes; Revolution represents political action under the most demanding of conditions; it is a haven neither for fools, rogues or adventurers.

Again, let it be remembered that the profession of a revolutionary is not merely related to the correct leadership of a people in their struggle for freedom, but also to correct leadership during that period when the people must work, and work hard, to give a durable substance to their new-found status.

So far an attempt has been made to identify the significance of a Revolutionary Programme. This was followed by an examination of

Revolutionary Policy; wherein it was demonstrated that policy is essentially an instrument by which a given programme is realised. The next link in the chain is Revolutionary Action, which, in turn, can be viewed as the instrument of policy.

#### REVOLUTIONARY ACTION:

It is not our desire to examine the various categories of revolutionary action, but rather to place such action as a whole in proper perspective to the other elements of revolution which influence and dictate its direction and content.

In essence, Revolutionary Action constitutes any act or combination of acts designed to complement the realisation of a given revolutionary policy. From this it can be seen clearly that action undertaken by an organisation is not revolutionary by virtue of its own content, but through its relationship to policy.

It is necessary to grasp clearly the underlying significance of this inter-relationship between Action, Policy and Programme if one is to appreciate fully what revolution really entails. All too frequently the idea is held in Ireland that military action against the occupational regime is revolutionary policy, on the strength of its manifest aggressiveness towards the enemy. This is a mistaken and highly dangerous notion, because regardless of how warlike an anti-occupational campaign may be, it is not its military content as such which determines its revolutionary status, but the policies it is designed to complement.

A few illustrations may assist in presenting more clearly what we are trying to establish. Take our own situation: It will be conceded that a revolution in Ireland must entail not alone the political reunification

of the nation, but also the social and economic reconstruction of the country as a whole. As a result, to be revolutionary, any organisation which presently professes hostility to the partitionist regimes must: first, present a programme based on these aims; second, formulate policies which correlate the realisation of this programme both to prevailing conditions and the organisations capabilities; and finally, engage in a sequence of activity designed to implement the policies. In such a context any activity engaged in is revolutionary action, regardless of whether or not it is military in form.

On the other hand, as an example of military action which is not necessarily revolutionary, we can take the I.R.A. campaign started in 1956. In this instance there existed no programme that we know of. And for that matter neither did the Republican Movement of the day regulate it's aims according to a series of co-ordinated policies. Consequently, it is difficult to determine what the I.R.A. was actually fighting to establish as an alternative to what it was trying to destroy. It is utterly stupid to claim the I.R.A. was fighting for Irish freedom, and let it go at that. Of itself, the term freedom is far too vague to mean anything; it must be qualified by social, political and economic commitment in order to have a positive form. Lacking such commitment the campaign in the Six Counties was, in every sense, negative; and the military activity which ensued was therefore non-revolutionary.

As a matter of historical accuracy it should, perhaps, be mentioned that the I.R.A. leadership of 1933 issued one of the very few revolutionary programmes that has ever emanated from an Irish revolutionary movement. That the men of that time failed to achieve their goals does not detract from their position; at least they presented a coherent programme, and conceived policies to realise it. Their failure lay, in part at least,

in the realm of their policies.

Another example, which differs in form but whose end result is similar, is to be found among some organisations of the "left". Here we have organisations some of which present programmes that are essentially revolutionary. However, the policies conceived to realise them bear no relationship whatever to revolutionary demands; and, as a consequence, all action these organisations undertake is unavoidably reactionary.

The foregoing examples should at least show that revolutionary action is a constituent part of a trinary formula, whose elements of programme, policy and action must at all times complement each other. When any conflict develops between these elements, then the entity loses its revolutionary standing to a degree determined by the extent of the contradiction.

Irish republicans have a tendency to ignore the theory of revolution, and instead view revolution solely in terms of action against the enemy. Unfortunately, this has the unavoidable result of endowing their activities with a certain negative quality; that is to say, their actions are determined more by what they oppose than by what they propose to create in its place. The result of this negative position is at least partly obscured by the fact that any armed action against the colonial regime is bound to produce some good, in as much that at least it serves as a counter-force to the oppressive force of the enemy.

However, the fact to be grasped, is that we can no longer restrict our interpretation of revolution to mere military action against the British in the North-East, and at the same time expect a wide response from the people. If we are ever to gain a mass basis for our efforts, then, we can only hope to do so when we place such military action in proper perspective. That is, when we can demonstrate to the people that such action is necessary and vital to the implementation of policies which, in turn, relate to a social,

political and economic programme that offers the people at large a positive prospect of a better way of life.

This pertinent fact must surely be apparent to all by now. And the primary lesson to be learned from it, is that the old approach to revolution, wherein Republicans could rally a mass support for their efforts without the necessity of committing themselves to a social and economic programme of revolutionary proportions, no longer applies. The call for action to free the country no longer receives the response of old. The question is now asked, either consciously or subconsciously; "What do you propose to free us from?" And the only way that query can be answered is by the presentation of a programme.

The factors touched on are elementary; and yet, unless they are understood, unless the fundamentals of the simple formula that has been demonstrated is thoroughly grasped, it is difficult to appreciate how the more complex problems created by a revolution in motion could ever be mastered.

Irishmen have never shown a reluctance to fight against their enemies. But with all our fighting over the past 2 centuries, the results to date are meagre by any standards. Surely, therefore this should tend to demonstrate that revolution entails more than a willingness for combat. This does not mean, of course, that physical force is an unimportant factor in revolution. Far from it. However, to have revolutionary potential, to possess the capability to deliver an adequate return for the demands it makes, physical force must be subordinate to the directives of policies, which, in their turn, must be subservient to social, political and economic objects conceived to better the people's welfare.



**Title:** The Road to Revolution in Ireland

**Organisation:** Irish Revolutionary Forces

**Date:** 1966

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

*The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.*