

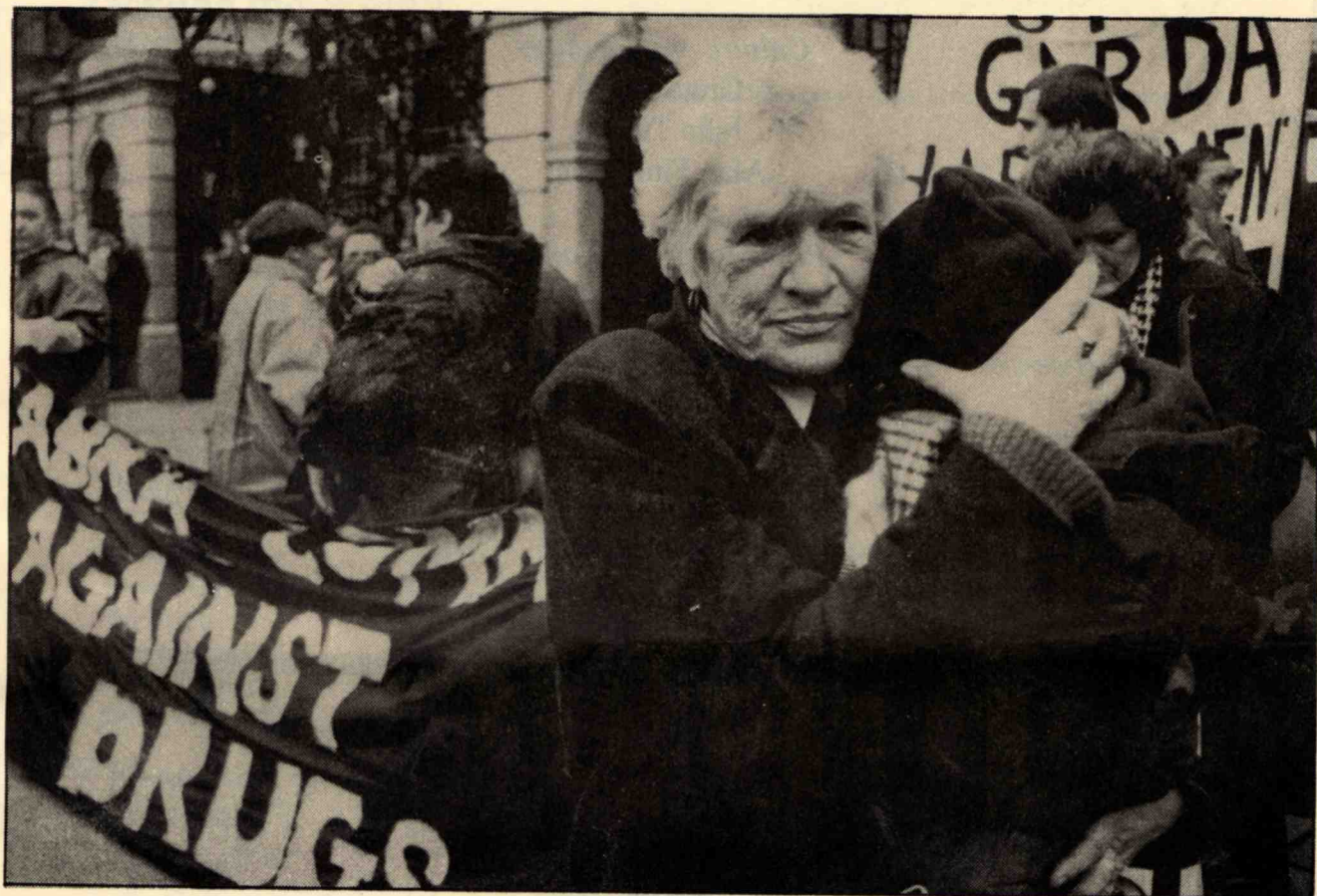
# Times Change

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## Tackling the drugs crisis

- Renewing the Left • EMU • ETA and the IRA •
- New Labour, new government • Democracy and revolution •
- Inventing Ireland •

# The Irish Review

Spring 1997

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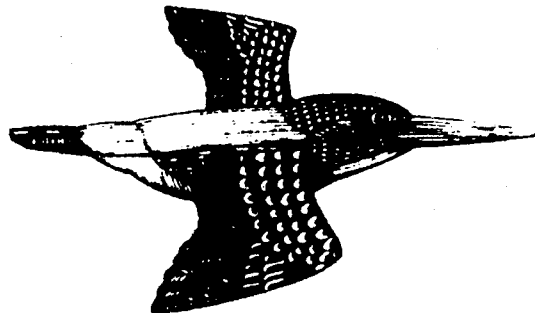
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# Times Change



## Tackling the drugs crisis

► Reopening the debate on the IRA and the OIRA  
► New Labour, more government? Unemployment and socialists  
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## Times Change

Quarterly Political  
and Cultural Review

69 Middle Abbey Street  
Dublin 1

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# Renewing the government

The Government of Renewal came into being in December 1994 following the collapse of the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition that had governed for two years. The immediate cause of the collapse was the delay in extraditing the paedophile priest, Brendan Smyth, coupled with Fianna Fáil's insistence on the appointment of Harry Whelehan as President of the High Court. But trust between the two parties had already broken down.

This was the second time in two years that Fianna Fáil had lost the trust of a coalition partner. This is not surprising given that Fianna Fáil detested having to depend on a partner to form a government. The Soldiers of Destiny have always regarded themselves as the natural party of government and derided the concept of coalition. This attitude prevailed even when Fianna Fáil coalesced with, first, the PDs and, then, Labour.

The Fianna Fáil/PD coalition was traumatic for both parties. All six PD deputies had been members of Fianna Fáil who left in 1985 to form the new party. They were widely regarded within Fianna Fáil as renegades. It was bad enough to have to abandon a 'core principle' in order to remain in government but joining with the despised PDs was an even more bitter pill to swallow. Albert Reynolds spoke dismissively of 'a temporary little arrangement'. However, worse was to follow and the conflict of evidence between Reynolds and Des O'Malley at the Beef Tribunal was the final nail in the coffin of a government beset by begrudgery and bitterness. As one Fianna Fáil TD has admitted, there were 'too many scores to settle'.

The general election of 1992 resulted in a further decline in the Fianna Fáil vote and the party again found itself in search of a partner in order to form a government. The Labour Party which had won a record 33 seats in the election shocked many of its voters when it did a deal with the party it had fiercely criticised from the Opposition benches.

The Beef Tribunal was to be a factor in the collapse of the second Fianna Fáil-led coalition. Labour ministers were not consulted prior to the publication of the tribunal report and resented the spin that Fianna Fáil put on it. This caused a serious rift between the two government parties. The

government's eventual collapse led to further trauma within Fianna Fáil and the party crossed to the opposition benches in a state of deep shock. Recovery was painfully slow.

Fianna Fáil is now proposing to form another coalition government with the PDs, not by choice but out of necessity as the party has no realistic prospect of winning an overall majority in the next Dáil. There is, however, every prospect that the proposed coalition will prove to be another mismatch as the two parties differ greatly on policy issues. The Fianna Fáil chief whip, Dermot Ahern, has already drawn attention to

differences on Northern Ireland and privatisation. Mr Ahern insisted that Fianna Fáil's 'view on the North would be in the ascendancy in a coalition arrangement with the PDs'. This presumes that the PDs will be willing to change their policy and endorse pan-nationalism. Mr Ahern was equally dismissive of the PDs' 'strident views' on privatisation and insisted that they would have an 'insignificant' or 'very little say' in government with Fianna Fáil. Nobody should take Fianna Fáil for granted in a

post-election situation according to Mr Ahern; his party will only consider coalition with the party it believes will implement its policies.

Will the PDs accept the subservient role laid down for them by Mr Ahern? For despite the attempts by the other Mr Ahern to paper over the cracks, all the PDs are being offered is a walk-on role in a Fianna Fáil government. If, however, the PDs were to assert themselves and win a real say in government, would Fianna Fáil be happy to re-introduce water charges as advocated by Mary Harney? Would Fianna Fáil cut taxes as required by the PDs and, if so, what public spending cuts would it make? Would Fianna Fáil sell off profitable state companies like ACC, ICC, TSB and Aer Rianta? And would Fianna Fáil have the nerve to ask workers to be poor but happy?

A Fianna Fáil/PD coalition would be inherently unstable. Strong differences have emerged over the desirability of a further referendum on abortion, squabbling over the spoils of office has already begun, and the PDs attempted to upstage Fianna Fáil with the promise of £23 millions to group water schemes. In fact, all that unites the two parties is a desire for power at any price - hardly the basis of good government.

● *All the PDs are being offered is a walk-on role in a Fianna Fáil government* ●



Maryn Turner/Irish Times

The contrast with the outgoing government could not be greater. The three-party coalition of Fine Gael, Labour, and Democratic Left took office in difficult circumstances unprecedented in Irish political history yet quickly got down to business. **Prudence and decisiveness have been the hallmarks of the government's management of the economy.** Economic growth at six per cent in 1996 was well above the EU average while inflation at 1.6 per cent was at the lower end of the EU scale. Mortgage rates are at their lowest for 30 years, resulting in substantial savings for householders. The new national agreement, Partnership 2000, provides a framework for further steady economic growth.

Almost 100,000 new jobs were created in the government's first two years in office. New employment initiatives coupled with training programmes for the unemployed have begun to take effect; unemployment is now at its lowest level since July 1991. And attention is at last being paid to long term unemployment.

Likewise, tax reform is finally under way. The social welfare area is being transformed resulting in a greater emphasis on equality and a decisive shift in favour of a more work-friendly system. The government has also adopted a national anti-poverty strategy to address all aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

A tough anti-crime package was introduced to deal with a new generation of ruthless criminals. Measures to tackle the

drugs menace are being implemented and government agencies are acting in partnership with communities in the front line.

The government's record is not flawless. Serious mistakes were made but they do not constitute a convincing case for Fianna Fáil's return to office.

One lie needs to be nailed as the election draws near. Elements of Fianna Fáil together with Sinn Féin continue to accuse the government of being responsible for the 'breakdown' of the IRA cease-fire. This is nonsense. The IRA alone is responsible for ending its 'complete cessation' - not the Brits, not the unionists, not 'those bastards

in power in Dublin' (as leading republican Brian Keenan describes the Irish government). The 'Irish Peace Initiative' was blown to smithereens by its creators at Canary Wharf and it is now up to democratic parties, both nationalist and unionist, to fashion a genuine peace process. Neither violence nor pan-nationalism have anything to contribute to such a process. The best contribution that the Republic can make is to continue the government's even-handed approach.

**The government is working well; the Republic is in good hands.** The forthcoming general election will decide whether this remains the case or whether a shaky coalition, leaning to the far right and hopelessly divided on basic issues, will be entrusted with the governance of the state ■

*‘The government is working well; the Republic is in good hands’*



# EMU: in or out?

In a referendum on 18th June 1992, the Irish electorate endorsed the Maastricht Treaty by a margin of 69 per cent to 31 per cent. This treaty commits Ireland to participation in European monetary union (EMU), with other qualifying member states, on January 1st 1999, subject to a number of macro-economic criteria. If EMU goes ahead as planned, the pound and all the other national currencies of the participating member states will, after a lead in period of three years, be abolished and replaced by a single currency, the Euro. Monetary policy will be set collectively by the European System of Central Banks (ESCB), comprising the national central banks and a new European Central Bank (ECB) based in Frankfurt. Interest rates will be the same throughout the monetary union.

Meeting the qualifying criteria for EMU will require low inflation, a budget deficit at or near three per cent of GDP, a debt to GDP ratio at or approaching 60 per cent of GDP, a stable exchange rate within the normal fluctuation margins of the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System (EMS) and low long term interest rates. Since Ireland is likely to meet these entry criteria with relative ease and since, unlike the United Kingdom and Denmark, we did not negotiate an opt-out clause, we will, in theory, be obliged

## Ireland faces problems in or out of EMU; CONOR MURPHY considers the options

to participate in EMU from the outset. It could, perhaps, be argued, therefore, that a discussion on the merits or otherwise of monetary union for Ireland is a rather

*‘The main benefit of EMU for Ireland, however, arises from the likelihood of lower interest rates, as Ireland effectively piggybacks on the low inflation pedigree of the German economy’*

academic exercise. In reality, however, the criteria are written in such a vague manner that the Irish Government could find a way to opt-out or delay entry if it so wished. In addition, one should fully

discount the, albeit unlikely, possibility that some other member states, wishing to rule out any prospect of early disruption to the system, may seek to block Irish membership of EMU at the outset if, as expected, the UK opts out initially.

During the lead up to the referendum, the debate on the merits, or otherwise, of Irish participation in EMU union was swamped by arguments about whether or not the prospect of £8 billion pounds in EU aid between 1994 and 1999 was dependent on the passing of the Treaty. Since then, the debate has remained rather muted until the last year or so when the realisation, both that Ireland was likely to qualify and that the UK was likely to opt-out, at least initially, began to take hold.

As a small open economy, highly dependent on international trade, Ireland stands to benefit disproportionately from the lower transaction costs associated with EMU. Irish firms and consumers will no longer have to pay to banks the charges relating to making or receiving payments in foreign currency, nor face the currency risk associated with trading with other European states who participate in EMU. These first round benefits will stimulate greater trade between EMU member states leading to further second round benefits for consumers due to greater competition



among firms. The greater transparency afforded by a single currency should put downward pressure on prices because transnational firms will find it more difficult to engage in price discrimination across European borders under the cover of the confusion caused by different national currencies.

The main benefit of EMU for Ireland, however, arises from the likelihood of lower interest rates, as Ireland effectively piggybacks on the low inflation pedigree of the German economy. Germany has consistently lower long term interest rates than Ireland because it has a fifty year history of low inflation, compared to our relatively short period of about ten years. Irish interest rates still carry a risk premium due to the poor inflation performance of Ireland during the 1970s and early 1980s. Even in the last year, however, as the markets have become more confident that EMU would go ahead and that Ireland would join in the first wave, the risk premium on interest rates has declined significantly.

It is probably reasonable to assume that the UK will opt-out of EMU, at least initially. Even if an incoming Labour government turned out to be more disposed towards the idea than the current Tory administration, there is unlikely to be enough time to enact the enabling legislation on central bank independence etc. The likelihood of a UK opt-out will exacerbate the main downside of EMU, namely the loss of the exchange rate as an instrument of economic policy. In the event of a sharp fall in the value of sterling, for example, Ireland, as a participant in EMU, would not have the option of devaluation to protect employment in firms which are dependent on the British market. While Irish dependence on the UK market has declined significantly in recent years, to the extent that less than 25 per cent of exports are sold there, compared to over 50 per cent in the mid-1970s, those industries that remain dependent on that market tend to be labour intensive with quite low margins. Critics of the EMU option for Ireland, in the event of the UK opting out, point to the currency crisis of 1992/3, when the pound rose from about 95 pence to 110 pence against sterling within a matter of months, following the exit of sterling from the ERM. The subsequent efforts to defend the pound saw short term interest rates rise to over 100 per cent. The devaluation option, when it was eventually exercised, gave



instant relief and, it is argued, saved thousands of jobs.

One vital difference between the 1992/3 currency crisis and a theoretical sterling crash with Ireland in EMU, however, is the behavior of interest rates. The sharp fall in sterling in late 1992/3 was a rather extreme example of the problems caused by a fluctuating sterling/pound exchange rate during 1980s, when the pound was a member of the ERM while, except for a brief period in the early 1990s, sterling remained outside. To cope with this problem, most Irish firms with a UK exposure of any significance purchased financial instruments which allowed them to effectively hedge their exchange rate risk. What firms could not protect themselves against was the horrendous increase in interest rates. It was the prospect of a further rise in interest rates at the beginning of 1993 which eventually broke the resolve of the Irish authorities to defend the value of the pound in the ERM. In EMU, however, while firms who were dependent on the UK market would, undoubtedly, suffer, if sterling fell sharply, they would not face the prospect of penal rates of interest.

The current strength of sterling and the consequent rise in the value of the pound in its slip stream could be seen as like a mirror image of the 1992/3 currency crisis. It serves to emphasise the real nature of the dilemma faced by Ireland on exchange rate policy. Exporters to the UK are benefiting now from windfall profits due to the fall in the value of the pound against sterling but exporters to continental European countries are under some pressure. Significantly, exports to

EU states other than the UK account for almost 50 per cent of the total compared to less than 25 per cent for the UK. In an EMU scenario they would be protected from such exchange rate losses as they are now suffering and those exporting to the UK would see even greater increases in their margins.

It would probably be somewhat foolhardy, however, to plan on the basis of the current situation being typical. A more likely scenario for the trend in exchange rates over the next decades is that sterling will continue on its gradual long run decline against most other currencies and, if it remains outside EMU, the pound, due to Ireland's superior economic prospects. In addition, there are likely to be occasional periods of extreme sterling weakness and less frequent periods of sterling strength. Inside EMU, as argued above, Irish firms selling into the UK would suffer during periods of sterling weakness but it would not be plain sailing outside EMU either. Given the geographic spread of our trade some sections of Irish industry would suffer whether sterling was going through a weak or a strong phase against the Euro. Firms dependent on mainland Europe would suffer during periods of sterling strength while firms selling into the UK will suffer when sterling is weak.

In a weak sterling scenario, which is probably the most likely, the Irish government might decide to protect vulnerable industries by following sterling down, but that strategy would carry in its wake a rise in inflation which would undermine the value of real incomes and generate a risk premium on interest rates in the long run which would undermine growth. To seek to hold up the value of the pound could quickly lead to a 1992/3 scenario with crippling rates of interest which would bankrupt many industries.

In the end, there are no easy options for Ireland when it comes to exchange rate policy. The nature of our trading links means that we face problems in or out of EMU. Outside EMU, while avoiding the worst effects of periodic sterling weakness Ireland would miss out on the ongoing benefits of EMU. In addition, it is likely that the gradual erosion of Irish trade dependence on the UK would slow dramatically or even go into reverse. On balance, it is probably in Ireland's best interest to take the EMU option with or without the UK ■

# Tackling the drugs crisis

**T**he problem of drug misuse is one of both demand and supply. Efforts to cut the supply of drugs that are not backed up by measures to address the reasons why people become addicted to drugs in the first place, will, I believe, prove to be ultimately futile. Governments must pay equal attention to both aspects of the problem.

Strong, uncompromising government action to put the drug barons out of business must be supported. Complimentary efforts are also required to tackle the social and economic conditions which undoubtedly are factors in the high levels of drug addiction to be found in disadvantaged areas in general and particularly in the inner cities of our European capitals. The historic correlation between social disadvantage and drug misuse is well documented. Whatever about certain observed and reported new market trends in the United States, the reality in Ireland still is a problem that is predominantly associated with economic and social deprivation, an urban phenomenon and geographically highly concentrated. The overlap between the heroin problem and that of long-term unemployment is clear and established.

In Ireland, the last year has seen the clear-cut formulation and development of a Programme of Demand Reduction and also, in relation to that programme, the adoption of an integrated approach. This approach is both commonsensical and in line with best international practice. Much of what has been done here in the last year in particular, conforms well with, for example, that of the United Nations Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP) Format and Guidelines for the Preparation of National Drug Control Master Plans although we do not have a formal, written master plan as such.

A co-ordinated, integrated approach in tackling all aspects of the problem can

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## PAT RABBITTE describes government measures to combat drug addiction

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make an impact and can give hope to the communities ravaged by drug addiction.

In Dublin - as indeed is the case elsewhere in the EU - community groups and individuals have emerged as a real force in the war against the drugs

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*• The underlying deprivation which causes people living in these areas to turn to drugs as a release from the pressures and stresses which they are experiencing must also be tackled •*

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scourge. After the first big outbreak of heroin abuse a decade ago they, and a handful of local politicians, were left to their own devices and fend for themselves by the national political establishment and system. Their efforts and dedication are now being recognised and supported by the government, the statutory agencies and local administration, in a concerted war on drugs. The government's response to the first report of the Ministerial Task Force on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs represents a permanent change in the attitude of the state system to the problem of heroin trafficking and the

plague it visits on the communities it hits.

New legislation has been introduced, and existing laws have been strengthened, to put the squeeze on the drug barons and their pushers. The current laws on bail and sentencing are being changed. A Criminal Assets Bureau has been established to seize the ill-gotten gains of the crimelords. Legislation to prevent money laundering and to stop the pushers from operating from local authority houses or flats has been introduced. The Gardai - through operation *Dóchas* (meaning 'hope') - have moved to stop what had previously amounted to almost unrestricted drug pushing in our local authority estates and flat complexes. The above measures represent just a small sample of the initiatives which have been introduced.

As I have already mentioned, the drugs problem in Ireland, and particularly in Dublin, is at its most acute in the local authority housing estates and flat complexes. These estates and complexes contain the worst levels of unemployment, poor living conditions, low educational attainment, lack of recreational and other facilities, in the country - conditions which create an ideal breeding ground for many of our social ills, including drug misuse.

Cutting the supply of drugs to these areas will not in itself solve the problem. The underlying deprivation which causes people living in these areas to turn to drugs as a release from the pressures and stresses which they are experiencing must also be tackled. The task force quickly concluded that special measures were required to tackle the drugs problem in the socially and economically deprived areas of Dublin and North Cork City.

Arising from our recommendations, it was decided to establish local drugs task forces in these areas, to provide a locally-based response to the drugs problem, involving an amalgamation of statutory,



voluntary and community sectors, supported by flexible, responsive structures at central level. To achieve this, we have put the following structures in place.

A cabinet committee, chaired by the Taoiseach and comprising relevant ministers, has been appointed to give overall political leadership and direction in the fight against drugs and also to resolve any organisational or policy difficulties between the various departments and statutory agencies that might inhibit an effective response to the problem. We have also set up the National Drugs Strategy Team. This team comprises key personnel from the relevant government departments and statutory agencies such as the Departments of the Taoiseach, Health, Education and Justice, as well as the Gardai and Health Board. In addition, persons with a background in voluntary and community work in tackling the drugs problem have been invited to join the team to lend their perspective and experience to its work.

The team is one of the first to be established under the Strategic Management Initiative, which recognised that certain issues have a cross-departmental dimension and, therefore, must be tackled in new and innovative ways. Under this initiative, members of the team will continue to remain staff of their parent departments - thereby continuing to formulate and influence departmental policy.

However, their primary objective will be to ensure that the government's overall drugs strategy is being implemented effectively - this objective to override all departmental considerations and the 'turf wars' between departments, which have been a traditional feature of the civil service the world over. To assist them in this regard, members of the team will have direct access to both the political and administrative heads of their departments on issues relating to their brief. The team has been charged specifically with overseeing and assisting the work of the new local drugs task forces, which I have already mentioned.

These task forces are being established in areas which have been designated, by

objective criteria, as being among the most socially and economically disadvantaged in the country. They embody the concept that communities can and must be directly involved in the efforts of the statutory agencies to fight the drugs scourge in their areas.

The task forces represent a new partnership between the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. Relevant statutory agencies, such as the gardai, the health board and the local authority will, through the task force, sit at the same table as community representatives and local voluntary agencies, to devise strategies to combat the drugs problem at a local level, based on the specific needs of the area. The government has set aside funding of £10 millions over the next year to support the implementation of development plans, which will be drawn up by these task forces.

These plans are expected to provide an integrated, coherent response to deal with the local drugs situation. They will be developed on a co-operative basis between the relevant agencies and communities and are expected to contain a comprehensive package of measures in the areas of treatment, rehabilitation and educational/prevention, which will build on existing programmes and services.

I regard the wider approach of the government to economic policy - and in particular, to long-term unemployment - as another pillar to the integrated approach. Getting a job and finding it rational to take a job is the key to everything. Both requirements are necessary. Once in gainful employment a person's life chances will improve dramatically other things being equal. Getting a job and back into gainful employment sets in train a set of mutually reinforcing positive processes in the same way that slipping into long-term unemployment leads into a downward spiral. Therefore there is a need to intensively pursue the project of getting the long-term unemployed job ready, but also actively into the labour market and furthermore, in the blackspots, actively represented by the employment and manpower services in that marketplace.

The co-ordination of social protection, low-income support and affirmative action programmes, combined with tax and PRSI reform that concentrate on lower earners, basic TFA, the standard rate and the standard rate band, is the comprehensive formula for creating an employment friendly economy and crucially, pursuing the goal of long-term, sustainable full employment in an internationally competitive national economy within the framework of Economic and Monetary Union.

The government is in no doubt that this comprehensive approach will yield results. Equally important as providing funding to tackle the drugs problem is the fact that we are creating a new dynamic between the statutory agencies and local communities in responding to the drugs menace. Although both sectors are obviously on the same side in the war against drugs, it may not always have appeared that way.

In conclusion, I wish to turn briefly to some issues for the future. I have talked of some of the trends evident in the United States, in particular the efforts of traffickers and pushers to grow the market and the appeal of heroin as just another recreational drug.

We cannot let that happen and we must be able to identify how the traffickers are responding to the intensification of anti-trafficking measures and international co-operation between governments.

Secondly, here in Ireland, I think that we do need to undertake some epidemiological research to better understand the problems of abuse and addiction and the consequences. This was referred to in the first report of the task force.

I think also that we need to look at some innovations in other countries: for example, the use of drug courts in the US is worth examining. The task force itself has further work to do, not the least important being the examination of the situation in the prisons in Ireland ■

*This is an edited version of an address by Pat Rabbitte to the Dublin Branch of the Irish Council of the European Movement, January 1997*

# New Labour, new vision

**P**rediction is a fool's game. But we can hazard some guesses about the next Parliament. Labour would be transformed. With a 4.3 per cent swing (a one-seat majority) 88 new Labour MPs would adorn the green benches.

Averaging 43 years of age, they would be middle class, often professional politicians who have spent years running councils. There would be many more women. They would be mostly loyal, says the Public Policy Unit.

But what will Labour do? The 'Iron Chancellor', Gordon Brown, will maintain Tory public spending limits for two years. Labour will redistribute resources within current budgets. For instance, the subsidy to private schools will fund smaller state class sizes. Labour won't change the standard or top tax rates - 23 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. But indirect, corporate taxation and allowances could change. Perhaps as much as £30 billion could be raised in this way.

Labour will largely rely on a one-off windfall tax of between £5-10 billion on the excess profits of privatised utilities to pump-prime a work programme for 250,000 young people, Labour's only new spending commitment. Each unemployed person costs about £9,000 per year in benefits and lost tax. More in increased crime and alienation.

With this tight fiscal regime plus hopes of a 10 per cent tax rate for the low-paid, much rides on other revenue-raising measures. These include the windfall tax, the phased release of council house receipts, closing tax loopholes as well as corporate and indirect taxes, cutting waste and the benefits bill.

Brown recently made 'the philosophical case for equality of opportunity' in today's radically changed circumstances. The priorities are tackling unemployment, building the work ethic and comprehensive lifelong educational opportunity. And 'the days of men-only

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## GARY KENT looks forward to New Labour in government

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economic policies are over.' The Minimum Wage is particularly important to women and its rate will be a critical decision in Government. Socialism's trinity is equality, freedom and solidarity. Many in the Labour movement share

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*‘Labour's tax policies might be a realistic way of winning votes: especially the crucial 'swing voters' ●*

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this vision but want Brown's fiscal timidity reversed. Increasing the top tax to 50 per cent for those on £100,000 would raise £1 billion and affect few people. It would symbolise redistributive egalitarianism.

Opinion polls indicate that people are prepared to pay higher taxes. Experience indicates that many forget this when voting. Labour's tax policies might be a realistic way of winning votes: especially the crucial 'swing voters'.

If 'tax and spend' images have been slayed, so have 'beer and sandwiches at No 10'. The Tory public sector pay freeze will stay. So will most Tory union laws. The unions won't exercise the influence they once had with Labour. They may initiate more independent political campaigning and withdraw funding from Labour.

But powerful pressures could well-up

for Labour exceeding what Hugo Young calls its 'realistic but puny' programme. *Observer* columnist, Andrew Adonis points out that the Liberal Administration elected in 1906 on a mild programme, went down in history as a great reforming Government. Lloyd George fathered the welfare state, curbed the Lords and freed the unions. His Liberals also split.

I don't suggest a hidden Labour agenda - new danger - or Labour dumping Blair. Labour has changed. The Blairistas have studied the last Labour Government when the party executive acted like a virtual opposition. A new Labour report proposes far-reaching changes in party-cabinet relations.

The party executive would meet less often but there would be weekly meetings between Government and party leaders. Labour conference would remain supreme but policy would be filtered through a two-year rolling policy programme before reaching conference. A leadership dominated Joint Policy Committee would determine which policies conference reviews.

It's a question of trust. According to one anonymous Labour MP, it's an 'attempt to house-train the party and the conference' and will dismantle 'the whole basis of organised criticism of Labour in Government.' The watchwords, perhaps warm words, of the report are Partnership, Mutual Trust and Co-operation.

What will they mean in practice? It is difficult to envisage busy government ministers having the ability to square party interests. Consultation might turn into 'hear what you say' and ignoring it.

It won't, however, be easy for Labour activists to exert influence. In the 1970s, union and party activists could severely embarrass the leadership and exert a negative influence, at best. The leadership held the trump cards.

The union block vote has now been

curbed. Key decisions are taken by all members (more democratic in theory than in practice). A rank and file revolt amongst the party's 400,000 members would take some organising. But there could be splits from the top, with heretical councillors and MPs either being expelled or exiting for redder pastures.

Labour MEP, Ken Coates' excoriating critique of Blairism (*The Blair Revelation*) advocates a challenge to Blair 'to resolve the question of whether the Labour Party should be transformed into an alternative capitalist party.' If this fails 'a new Party or new Association of Socialist Groups or a new Labour Representation Committee might come to be feasible.' Party officials may relish confrontation and hope that it goes off half-cock.

Labour's Left is divided and demoralised but may come into its own in a new Parliament - exerting influence by itself or in alliance with the Liberals, Plaid Cymru and/or the Scottish Nationalists.

Within the party, new forces are coalescing. Labour Reform brings together the soft left and soft right in a union of the heirs of Crosland and (Aneurin) Bevan. They reject 'Politics As Marketing - that the only basis for Labour is control by professional politicians with members marginalised.' They are small but may become a lightning conductor for dissent and reclaiming the party from the 'ultra-modernisers.'

Other potential flashpoints include John Prescott. Blair must decide his deputy's role in office. According to Colin Brown's sympathetic biography (*Fighting Talk*) of Prescott: 'the outcome of these negotiations with his difficult, belligerent, big-hearted deputy could determine the success or failure of a Blair Government.' Abandoning Labour-union links could be the 'sticking point' for Prescott.

There is bound to be a cabinet tussle for control of policy, especially economic policy. Then there's the unexpected. For instance, crisis over Gibraltar; mass exodus from Hong Kong when the Chinese take over; Drumcree 3 and the Provos; a big industrial strike.

And what impact will 200 digital



*Tony Blair - the next British Prime Minister?*

channels have on cultural and political life? The shared reference points that bind us together will be cast aside.

Blair may be a strong leader, in contrast to Major. Blair's modernising project has easily sliced through Labour although his party base is quite narrow.

Few know exactly what Labour will do. We know that the priorities are education, health, crime, a new constitutional settlement and low inflation. But what will each year's few hundred hours of valuable parliamentary time be devoted to and when?

The Blairistas are playing their cards close to their chest. No spending commitments can be made. Policies are short on detail.

The pace of change in the Labour Party - Blair's march to the 'radical centre' - has

alarmed many traditional members and supporters.

Much radicalism simply bypasses the Labour Party or, like Swampy, tunnels under it. Much progressive opinion loathes what it sees as Labour's social authoritarianism law and order. Some admire the forthright straight-talking on civil liberties and tax from the Liberal Democrats. It is ironic that former Labour right-wingers like Shirley Williams and Bill Rodgers mount assaults on Labour - from the left.

But oppositionist sulking on the sidelines is no substitute for 'constructive engagement' (which should be a two-way street) to maximise Labour's once-in-a-generation chance to change UK politics as decisively as 1906 and 1945 ■

# ETA and the IRA

The Northern Ireland conflict has frequently been compared with many other troublesome areas throughout the world such as the Middle East or South Africa. Republicans frequently insist on drawing parallels with the peace processes developed in those zones in an attempt to deepen the internationalisation of the Irish question. However, very little attention is drawn by republicans to another long running sore in Western Europe - that in the Basque region in Spain.

The newly-appointed RUC Chief Constable, Ronnie Flanagan, has recently tried to link the republican and Basque terrorist campaigns. He has anticipated that the IRA campaign is not going to be characterised by the weekly or daily attacks as was the case in the past. On the contrary Flanagan has foreseen a campaign of sporadic large-scale attacks similar to that waged by the Basque separatist group ETA. Furthermore he has declared that the IRA is setting up a special cell in order to gather information and kill prominent figures and politicians following the example of the Basque terrorists. Recent terrorist attacks and those frustrated by the security forces seem to have proved Flanagan wrong. Moreover he has also misrepresented the nature of ETA's violence.

During its long campaign ETA has killed judges, army generals, and prominent politicians, including the president of the Spanish Government in 1973. The campaign has included selective attacks on VIPs and 'spectaculars' like the assassination attempt on the current Prime Minister, J.M. Aznar, when he was leader of the opposition. This kind of violence is intended to maximise the political impact of the terrorist campaign. However, ETA violence has had many more targets than the political elite. There have been many atrocities which caused hundreds of civilian casualties like the 18 people

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## ROGELIO ALONSO and HENRY PATTERSON ask whether comparisons between ETA and the IRA are valid

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killed when a bomb went off in a packed Barcelona supermarket on a Saturday afternoon in 1987. Dozens of soldiers or policemen have been shot dead by solitary gunmen. The casualties also include many ordinary Basque

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*• Opposition to violence is carried out by huge pacifist demonstrations which would be envied by the modest gatherings that called for a new cease-fire after Canary Wharf •*

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businessmen who had refused to pay the so called 'revolutionary tax' (extortion money demanded by ETA) and civilians murdered while working for the defence ministry.

Moreover, in the last three years there has been a new type of violence, that of groups of young hooligans called Y Groups. Their behaviour resembles that of the YDH (Young Derry Hooligans) at the beginning of the Northern Ireland Troubles. On a weekly basis they terrorise villages and towns: hijacking buses, setting telephone boxes on fire, smashing shop windows, intimidating and threatening locals. This vandalism is

the latest and most successful tactic introduced by ETA. It is an attempt to win the battle of the streets in order to make its campaign ever present. Last year a mob tried to lynch the mayor of Hernani, a small village in the Basque region. People who speak against ETA are threatened, beaten or even set on fire. The IRA has indulged in similar violence but because of the large degree of residential segregation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland the disruption caused is largely confined to Catholic areas while elsewhere it is business as usual.

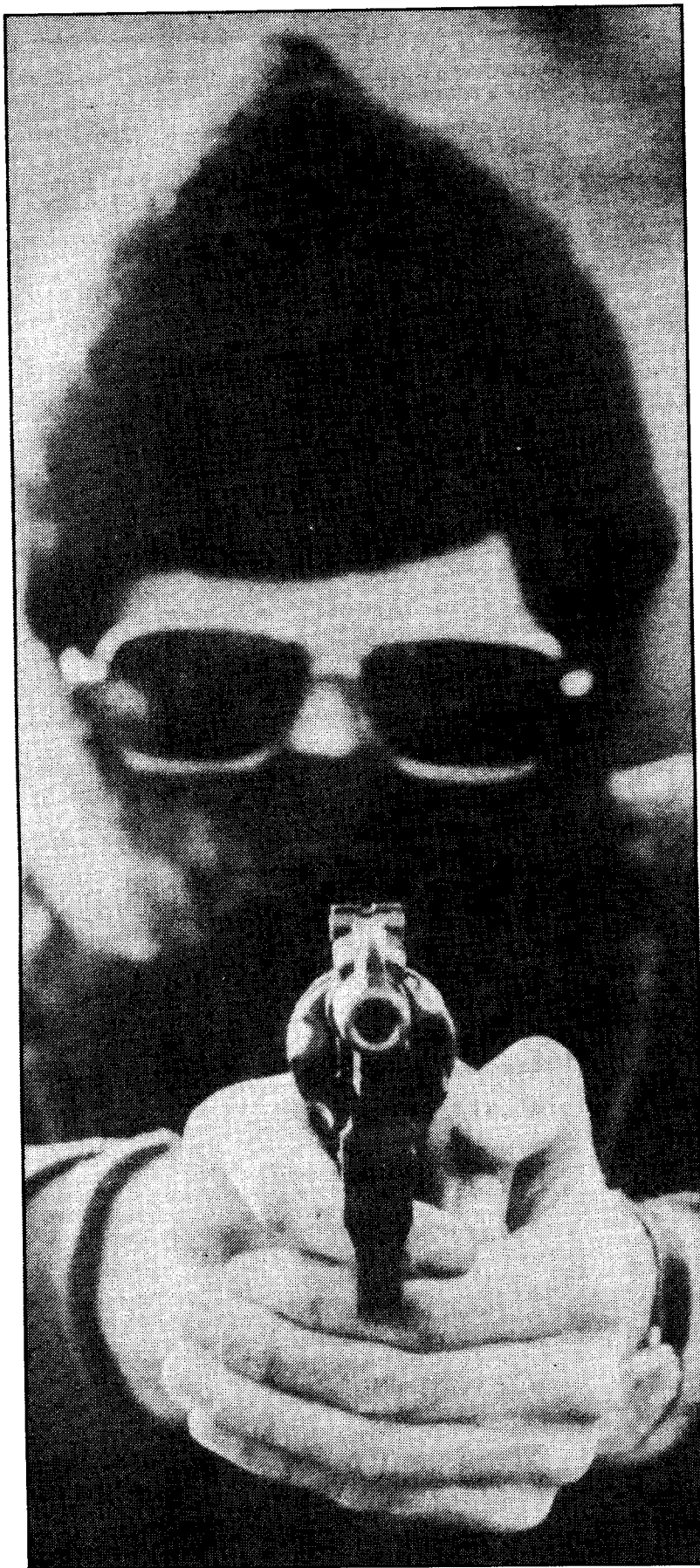
This tactic is complemented by another one which provides ETA with economic funding: kidnapping. At the time of writing two people are being kept captive by ETA, one of them for almost a year. It is an effective way to remind people that the terror is constant, and to intimidate ordinary Basques: anyone could be the next.

All these tactics are intended to achieve the civil war situation many terrorist groups aim at. Although ETA has managed to divide Basque society, people there have also united against violence and fascism. In 1995 J.M. Aldaya, a local businessman, was kidnapped by ETA. During his one year ordeal thousands of Basque people demonstrated in the streets demanding his release. Every single week they demonstrated in silence wearing a blue ribbon. They were confronted by groups supporting ETA who challenged the pacifists with slogans like: 'ETA kill them' or 'The murderers wear the blue ribbon'. In situations reminiscent of the marching season in Northern Ireland, the Basque police have stood between the two sections of their own people trying to prevent one of them from being attacked by the other. Those Basques who wear the blue ribbon are constantly attacked in the streets and many are afraid to speak out and confront those who terrorise

them. Yet there is still a strong movement for peace in the Basque Country something which unfortunately is not the case in Northern Ireland.

The above aspects of ETA's campaign should be borne in mind if any parallel with Northern Ireland is to be drawn. Despite the daily provocation which ordinary Basques are subject to, the Basque Country has not known an outbreak of reactive violence similar to the one of the loyalist paramilitaries. Opposition to violence is carried out by huge pacifist demonstrations which would be envied by the modest gatherings that called for a new cease-fire after Canary Wharf. Last February one million people demonstrated in Madrid after the killing by ETA of a prominent academic and former president of the Constitutional Tribunal.

It is the pervasive sectarianism of Northern Ireland which has undermined past peace movements and which also invalidates Mr Flanagan's prognosis of an ETA-style selective campaign by the IRA. It may well suit the calculation of republican leaders to try and restrain the more fundamentalist and bellicose of their followers from an all-out return to violence in Northern Ireland. That way it will be easier to maintain Sinn Fein's growing political challenge to the SDLP. Past experience shows that intensifications of



IRA violence which lead to 'innocent' (i.e. Catholic) deaths hurt Sinn Fein's electoral performance.

republican strategy which was characteristic of the analysis given by his predecessor Sir Hugh Annesley ■

But one major problem with the selective strategy as applied to Northern Ireland is the presence of severe communal sectarian divisions at the core of the conflict. The divisions between Basques lack the depth and passion of the Catholic/Protestant divide. Put crudely, when ETA alleged activists were killed by their political opponents in the GAL affair this was done by individuals linked to the central state structures whereas in Northern Ireland republicans are much more likely to die at the hands of loyalist paramilitaries than the forces of the state. There is a high probability that IRA 'spectaculars' like the killing of a senior unionist politician, RUC man or member of the judiciary would produce a rapid and fierce response from the loyalist paramilitaries. The recent booby trap bombs which exploded under the cars of two republicans and a Catholic family pose serious questions about the status of the loyalist ceasefire.

While there are many valid comparisons to be made between terrorism in Northern Ireland and the Basque Country, the Chief Constable's analysis is fundamentally misconceived. By leaving out the inevitability of a strong loyalist paramilitary response it puts the sort of optimistic gloss on

# What's in store for the left?

There is much to agree with in Johan Lonnroth's contribution to *Times Change*: his identification of alienation as a vital and contemporary issue, his description of globalisation and his critique of the developments of Marxist thought, especially post Marx. But there are also some issues and assumptions which need challenging if we are to attempt to restore socialism, not only as an ideology with credibility but as a political programme capable of implementation.

At the outset, we should recognise the importance of context. Lonnroth writes from a Swedish perspective. There the social democratic values, while perhaps eroded in recent times, have not been subject to the sustained battering characteristic of Britain in the immediate past (as shown by Sassoon in a recent book). Hence his assertion that 'the neo-liberal delirium of the 1980s is over' cannot pass without comment. Drawing on the English experience, any relief from the delirium is largely because the lunatics have taken over the asylum. Any political party likely to form a government in Britain accepts much of the change and damage that Thatcher has caused. Some of this is unavoidable: it is very difficult to rebuild a manufacturing base that has been so decimated in the favouring of capital and finance over investment and production. Some of this acquiescence, however, is a too-ready acceptance of the change of the political map to the right. And that is before we move to discuss taxation, distribution or public services.

It is in that context that another assertion needs to be examined: the left is against capitalism, as Lonnroth states, but is it not against the market? 'Market' has become a catch-all term (a sign of the change to the right in political discourse) and definitions vary. For Will Hutton, the aim of markets is to clear, ie to reach a state of equilibrium in which buyers and

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**In this response to Johan Lonnroth's article in the last issue of *Times Change*, MALCOLM BARRY identifies some assumptions that need to be challenged if socialism is to be restored as a political programme capable of implementation**

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sellers are satisfied. This equates to the regulated market on which, perhaps, the whole metaphor is based: an agricultural model in which there are set times of

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*It is essential for those espousing a politics of socialism and democracy to be clear about with whose interests they intend to ally: it is impossible to be a democrat and looking after the interests of a Rupert Murdoch* ●

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transactions and set spaces. There is an etiquette of transactions regulated by whoever - a feudal system, a monarchy, a state in some other form, a local power. For Friedman and his like, the market represents human life (with the underlying Hobbesian view of human nature represented by the marketeers -

the function of us all is to trade and life is thus nasty, brutish and short for the overwhelming majority).

The issue now must surely be that both models of the market are obsolete: there is no equilibrium possible (and thus the market clearing) even within regulation since, once achieved, the world would stop. That, surely, is the message of globalisation. We cannot accept the pessimistic view of humanity in a century which has seen the Holocaust and contemporary comparators but which has also seen these negative events brought to an end (admittedly far too late). While one must agree with Lonnroth that we cannot aspire to control politically billions of decisions to transact in the market, we must aspire to democratic control of the framework in which this operates, if socialism is to be an ideology of freedom for all (and not just the participants in the market). To wring our hands about the impossibility of control of the global market is to accept that it is part of Nature, a succession of Acts of God and thus uncontrollable (and probably ineffable): surely a counsel of despair.

The most important lesson for us at the turn of the century is, as an editorial in the last issue of *Times Change* stated, that 'democracy is essential to a viable socialism'. But, once again, problems of definition emerge: my notion of democracy is light years away from the practices of the last 17 years in Britain where the elective dictatorship has been alive and prospering, yet Britain will still be described as a democracy. Getting the definition of democracy right, in both theoretical and political terms, is important both for us and for those with whom we need to join (admittedly some thinking has already been done on this (eg by Chantal Mouffe and others).

Perhaps we might think the unthinkable and begin to assert democracy not only as a political system



but as a set of moral principles and thus return the concept to its original conceptual base, as has been suggested by Kelly. We might go further and consider that socialism itself should be defined in part as a morality: Marx, after all, could lay claim to being one of the last humanists, at least in some of his writing, while a recent publication by Lea and Pelling demonstrate the role that Engels played in the emergence of Marxist thought, underscored by a morality, or at least by a set of moral principles.

Common to current analyses of 'what's left' and what it will be in the future is a concern to build alliances, whether based on specific campaigns or on particular coalitions of issues (ecological, gender, ethnic). Lonroth subscribes to this, too, and calls for us 'to be present in the everyday life of the unemployed, the immigrants and the entrepreneurs'. How this juggling is to be achieved is never explained since, in a frustration with apparent political impotence, it is sometimes forgotten that different groups will have different interests. What is good enough for the British Labour Party, in terms of its appearing to be all things to all people, cannot be sustained for long. It is essential for those espousing a politics of socialism and democracy to be clear about with whose interests they intend to ally: it is impossible to be a democrat and looking after the interests of a Rupert Murdoch. On the question of alliances, Eric Hobsbawm has recently shown the danger of a gooey identification with single interest campaigns.

With one sentiment of Lonroth, it is impossible to disagree: 'dreams of a Leninist type' (which lead to a Stalinist nightmare) 'are gone for ever' (thankfully). But equally dreams of a social-democratic consensus appear also to have gone, perhaps for the same length of time. There are a number of reasons for this (and Lonroth identifies some of these in his article). Another was that that consensus was not in the interests of those Lonroth describes as 'power elites'; also there was unquestionably an arrogance on the part of the left that I have identified elsewhere (and been proven to have a point with the diagnosis, to judge by some reactions to the temerity of this suggestion).

Given these factors, it is not surprising that Milliband wrote prophetically in the terms he did (cited in the last issue) -



'socialists will be...a pressure group to the left...(It) is social democracy which will constitute the alternative - such as it is - to conservative governments'. That was in 1989 and, nearly eight years later in Britain, the 'such as it is' looks all too accurate: a retreat from re-distributionism, an acceptance of disastrous policies in education and training and a timidity about any policy debate characterises the main party of what used to be the Left.

The expectations aroused by the years of Tory governments and successive oppression, both economic and political, and the New Labour determination to maintain financial orthodoxy could lead to one possible scenario (if the Tories can hold together over Europe, rather than splitting as has been forecast). This would see a short-lived Labour government blown away by industrial strife dwarfing 1979 ('the winter of discontent' which effectively destroyed the last non-Tory government in Britain). This could be followed by an emphatic return of a further right Tory government for the indefinite future. The implications for both islands in such an outcome are grim indeed. It is for this reason, if for no other, that, however reluctantly, a Labour victory must be profoundly hoped for.

This does not mean that there are not some reasons to be more positive. The

debate is at least a sign that the Left is not dead, although too much re-arranging of the furniture perhaps suggests the metaphor of the Titanic. The role that Milliband saw for the Left, while not storming the Winter Palace, would at least ensure that the issues of equity and democracy were prosecuted and some gains, hopefully, could be made. This strategy seems to accept the politics and practices advocated by Lonroth.

But, more fundamental than the accommodation with the market that he suggests, the re-assertion of some fundamental positions about these very questions of equity, distribution, democracy and community, underpinned by a notion of morality diametrically opposed to that of Hobbes, will be needed. The use of terms such as 'alienation', 'class', and even 'labour theory' as well as 'democracy', 'liberty', and 'co-operation' should inform the renewal called for by *Times Change* and other organisations and publications. I am not sure that it is 'only within the Marxist tradition ... really bold and brave thinking that is needed.' (Helena Sheehan, cited in the last issue) but I am sure that to jettison Marx completely would be a fatal mistake.

In other words, not only do we have to understand the world in order to change it but we also have to understand and synthesise the traditions of the Left in order to take these forward in a world at once very different from that confronted by the 19th century socialists and communists but also, in the oppression, inequity and anti-human behaviour of the 'power elites', very much the same ■

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# Modern myths and the need for democratic socialism

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 was hailed by right wing politicians and economists as proof that both marxism and socialism were based on flawed beliefs. Here was proof, they argued, that the state could not control the economy, because market forces would be so stifled by the State that economic collapse would follow. It became the new dogma that the economy could only function if there was a free market in which individuals could pursue their own interests.

In a recent *New Statesman* interview, Anthony Giddens, the new director of the London School of Economics, expressed his growing concern about these new 'dangerous flindamentalisms in which answers are set down as absolutes', These new fundamentalisms, he argues, involve a re-casting of the past, the reinvention of a tradition that is then used to prevent argument and dissent. 'You can define flindamentalism,' he adds, 'as a refusal of dialogue.' When both the electorate and the opposition parties accept these dogma as truths, the result is political and intellectual stagnation.

George Soros, the man who made billions of pounds by speculating on Wall Street, and who became the guru of the free market, has recently attacked this core right-wing belief that the free market is always an economic good. In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1997, he wrote that he had now come to the belief that a market place which is controlled solely by uninhibited self-interest is the greatest danger to capitalism. He writes: 'unless the market place is tempered by the recognition of a common interest that ought to take precedence over particular interests, our present system, which however imperfect qualifies as an open society, is liable to breakdown.' Laissez-faire capitalism, says Soros, has

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## The left should stop being mesmerised by the myths dominating politics today writes FRED LOWE

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effectively banished income or wealth redistribution. If wealth is allowed to accumulate in the hands of a few people, and if there is no mechanism for redistribution, the inequalities can become intolerable. The result is rebellion against and destruction of the free-market itself

Right-wing economists, who would regard Soros's conversion to market control as heresy, have always, however, deliberately ignored facts which contradicted their new flindamentalism. The state has always controlled monopolies, for example, because they destroy competition, but they are created by market forces which they threaten to destroy. They also ignored the fact that the British government has finally decided to curb the growth of out of town superstores, because they were destroying the smaller mainstreet shops. The super stores are the product of market forces, but their excessive power in the market place had to be controlled because their growth was destroying a resource needed by the community, namely the less economically viable small shop.

The fundamentalism that the free-market is always good is in fact a modern myth, and many such modern myths are dominating modern politics. These myths are so generally accepted that they have become dogma, stifling political thought and theory. It is worth examining some of them.

The most common modern myth is that the nationalised industries were a failure. This fundamentalism states that private enterprise alone can run a

company. This myth came about because certain loss making nationalised industries, such as British Steel, British Coal, ship building, and above all British Railways, were seen as proof of the failure of state ownership because they lost money. These industries however, were in all in decline across the world, and, as in the case of British Railways, were actually saved from collapse by nationalisation. To preserve the myth, however, any contrary evidence had to be ignored. Many state industries, such as water, gas, telecom and electricity, were highly efficient and highly profitable. However, the new fundamentalism that state control is always bad, led to the sale of these profitable industries, even though that led in many cases to higher bills and less efficiency for the consumer. Complaints about privatised gas multiplied exponentially. It was only when the Conservative party tried to sell off the Royal Mail, that the public outcry ensured that an efficient and cost effective service remained within state ownership. The public, in short, knew when it was being served well by an industry.

The myth that privatisation always leads to greater efficiency was largely fostered by increased profits, not better service and efficiency. Increased profits were usually achieved by what was euphemistically called 'downsizing', or ruthless staff cuts motivated only by immediate profit increase. However, a recent study in the United States has shown that firms which did not downsize, but which instead increased production and profitability, were in the long-run more successful. British Gas and Yorkshire water proved that profitability and efficiency are not the same thing.

Unfortunately, however, the British Labour party has adopted the new myth. It has ditched Clause 4, which asserted a

belief in nationalisation of the means of production, and then gave assurances that nothing would be renationalised. Even essential service industries, such as water, electricity and gas are to remain privatised under New Labour.

An allied myth is that high taxation destroys the economy. This new fundamentalism states that money should be left in people's pockets, and not taken by the government. People will then invest in the economy, creating not only jobs but that other modern myth, the trickle-down effect, where eventually the poor at the bottom of the pile benefit from wealth at the top. Pursuing this new fundamentalism, the Conservative party in Britain cut the highest tax rates to forty-five pence in the pound, and created the lowest income tax rate in Europe. However, Britain has seen no investment on any significant scale. Its industries have largely been destroyed by under-investment, and the country's wealth and productivity have been so affected that Britain has dramatically dropped in its ranking as a world industrial power. Despite being 'built on coal and surrounded by oil', Britain has found it can no longer build ships or cars without the help and investment of European or Far Eastern countries. Moreover, countries with much higher tax rates, such as Sweden and Germany, and indeed Ireland, are now more efficient than Britain.

Nonetheless the British Labour party has adopted the new fundamentalism. It has given a pledge not to increase direct taxation for five years. It has unwisely accepted yet another right-wing modern myth.

Yet another modern myth is that union power is responsible for the decline in Britain's standing in the world. The Conservatives produced more laws to curb the ability of the unions to take effective industrial action. Management, the new fundamentalists argue, must have the power to manage. For this reason, Britain obtained its famous opt out from the social chapter, which attempted to set minimum standards of wages and conditions for workers. The minimum wage would interfere with the market place and destroy jobs and ruin the economy, it was argued. They totally ignored the fact that the United States, the most successful economy in the world, has a minimum wage and has created more jobs under the Clinton administration than Britain has been able

to do.

In fact, it was the high rate of unemployment as much as the new legislation which curbed the action of the unions. As job insecurity increased, union power declined and union membership along with it. Moreover, the multinationals, if confronted by a strong work-force, simply moved their business to another nation. The only way to curb the enormous power of the multinationals was to have an international agreement on minimum standards. To quote George Soros again: 'Co-operation is as much a part of the system as competition and co-operation to improve the living conditions of everyone should take precedence over their right of particular interests to pursue whatever policy increases their profitability.'

Laissez-faire capitalism driven solely by self-interest, Soros believes, will ultimately destroy capitalism. He points out that, history has shown that financial markets do break down causing economic depression and social unrest. When financial markets break down, totalitarian regimes and extreme right or extreme left wing ideologies take over.

The implications of this argument for modern left-wing parties is clear. Socialism is about co-operation, and placing the common good above particular interests. Socialism is about the re-distribution of wealth through taxation and subsidies, which can efficiently prevent the extreme inequalities that result from unfettered market forces.

Democratic socialism should be about attacking fundamentalisms. It must remain an intellectual force to promote change. It must remain an intellectual force to ensure that institutions and systems adapt to changes taking place in society. The Norwegian political scientist, Stein Rokkan, has argued that institutions and party systems remain frozen in the form which they assumed with the coming of universal suffrage. Democratic societies, once they achieve the vote for the population as a whole, become extremely conservative and resist change either of the institutions within the society or the constitution under which they rule. For example, in Britain, reforming zeal came to an end when universal suffrage was achieved in 1918. After that date, Conservative governments have dominated, and constitutional change has ground to a

halt. Even the House of Lords and the monarchy has remained intact. The only real break in this pattern of Conservative rule occurred after the upheaval of World War Two, where the need to place the common good above the market place and its institutions came to the fore once more and the reforming Labour party was elected. The socialist ideal created the welfare state. However, once society had stabilised again, the tendency to maintain the status quo dominated once more.

The 'freezing hypothesis' also states that the constitutions and institutions remain frozen and only change reluctantly when they are forced to adjust to changes that have already taken place. In Ireland, for example, the need for changing the constitution is often raised but no party has dared to tackle the matter. Most changes that have been made came about because governments have been forced to recognise that the constitution no longer reflected how society was behaving.

The development of international consensus on human rights has been a key factor in aiding change, and the ideals of democratic socialism have been a driving force behind this consensus. Nations, stagnating with their constitutions, and laws, have been forced to change because of such international agreements. The change in the law on homosexuality, and the proposed new mental health legislation are examples where international standards for human rights have forced Ireland to change its laws to conform with them. Nations which do not give their citizens these basic human rights, as in the case of South Africa under apartheid, can find themselves boycotted in the international market place. Similarly, multi-nationals which exploit work forces have come under international pressure to stop such exploitation.

It must remain a central ideal of socialist parties to prevent gross inequalities in the global market place. It is for this reason that Britain's opt-out from the Social Chapter, based on the modern myth that high wages destroy jobs, is likely to prove meaningless. Should Britain's wages drop dramatically below other European nations, it will be seen as exploitation and will meet with national and international resistance. If this is interference in the free market, then long may it remain an objective of democratic socialism ■

# Spectres of French Communism

In August 1991, in the wake of the failure of the putsch by Soviet Communist leaders, the French historian Francois Furet proclaimed the end of the 'endless burial' of Communism. This burial had begun with the unmasking of Stalin by Krushchev in his 'secret speech' to the CPSU's Twentieth Congress in February 1956. In 1995, Furet's work on the Communist idea, *Le Passe d'une illusion*, sought, as its title suggests, to be the triumphant end-point to his own intellectual crusade against Marxist historiography in particular, and Communism in general, since he left the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1956. However, in France today, Communism, a term which that country invented, retains a presence, albeit ghostly, which challenges such comfortable historical closure.

In the French intellectual domain, the anti-anti-Communist backlash began with the publication, in late 1993, of Jacques Derrida's *Spectres de Marx*. This prestigious intervention was followed by a flurry of publications critically re-appraising Marx and Communism, as well as by the publication of work by Marx and Althusser. The interest in Marx, and the breakdown in old sectarian divisions, was illustrated by the success of the Congress Marx International, held at the University of Nanterre, old hotbed of revolutionary intellectual agitation, in Autumn 1995. The strike wave at the end of that year brought a resurgence of the symbols of the workers' movement - with the red flag waved and *L'Internationale* sung - which moved the daily newspaper *Info-Matin* to vote Karl Marx man of the year.

Communism in France may live beyond the grave, but it is modified by the unavoidable truth of the death of real existing socialism in the East. In *Spectres de Marx*, Derrida seeks to assert the continuing pertinence and necessity of the 'spirit' of Marxism. Its spectre so

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## GAVIN BOWD considers the state of the French Communist Party

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terrifies the new world order because 'it is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself as that which could come or come back.'<sup>1</sup> The spectre acts with deconstructive effect, sapping the comfortable illusion of controlling the

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*It can be argued that the PCF's implacable opposition to the ravages caused by the drive for monetary union has helped it to put an end to electoral decline*

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present that is expressed in such phrases as 'the death of Communism' or 'the end of history'. The spirit of Marxism, with its critique of existing iniquities and its promise of a better future is, for Derrida, a form of the 'messianic'. But the 'messianic' is a utopian impulse that he distinguishes from the dogmatic determinism of 'messianism' found in Communism's teleological vision of history.

Derrida's re-writing of Marx finds an echo in the work of the Trotskyist philosopher, Daniel Bensaid, who declares, in *La Discordance des temps*: 'against the illusions of mechanical and inevitable progress, history has shown that it is not a one-way street.'<sup>2</sup> In an enthusiastic review of *Spectres de Marx*,

Bensaid praises Derrida for noticing 'one of the essential theoretical upheavals dared by Marx. A deconstruction of dominant historical and physical temporality. A radical rejection of all-powerful History'<sup>3</sup> In the Marxian view of things, Bensaid argues, time is full of gaps, out of joint, 'open to the event'. 'Revolution,' Bensaid writes, 'is the event par excellence. What could be more present, more charged with returnings and arrivals, than this sudden irruption in the disjunctures of time?'<sup>4</sup>

The new indeterminacy finds expression in the work of the PCF philosopher, Lucien Seve. Seve theorises the *depassement*, or supersession of capitalism, rather than its brutal abolition. For him, capitalism is creating before our very eyes the 'objective conditions for *depassement* of class society.'<sup>5</sup> The information revolution and massive gains in productivity offer the possibility, hindered by capitalist relations, of greater free time, and initiative and cooperation by workers. This cybernetic Communism would be created through a new type of politics, which values 'progressive *depassement* over sudden abolition, transformative construction over rigid condemnation, collective initiative over self-proclaimed vanguards.'<sup>6</sup>

Rethinking history as open-ended and unpredictable, and turning chaos to their advantage, such Communist intellectuals seek to reject both the triumphalist Marxism-Leninism now in ruins and the discourse of the 'end of history'. But the cautious optimism of the 'messianic' cannot hide the loss of beliefs—in a science of history, in the proletariat and Party—which underpinned the extraordinary success of the Communist idea in the twentieth century. Both Bensaid and Seve are 'spectral' proponents of an 'undead' idea, combining a desire for revolution which is necessarily virtual, and a passion for

the concrete, expressed, for example, in Seve's positive view of trends in the mode of production.

On the political level, French Communism has persisted, but its substance is questionable. Certainly, Robert Hue, who succeeded Georges Marchais as

PCF leader at its 28th Congress in 1994, embodied the promise of change. Hue, a trained nurse of working-class background, superseded the distinction between 'worker' and 'intellectual' which has long plagued the internal life of the PCF. He belongs to the generation of Party militants who joined after 1968. As a result, he was not trained in Moscow to be part of the international Communist movement. Instead, as a mayor, Hue is more in touch with popular feeling and the crisis facing the grass-roots.

Since his election, Hue pursued with some success what has become known as *la mutation*. Hue made symbolic breaks with his predecessor: regretting the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and criticising Marchais's notorious declaration, in 1979, about the 'globally positive' balance-sheet of real existing socialism. There has been an unprecedented pluralism in public debate, with the Party extending a hand of reconciliation to intellectuals, such as Edgar Morin and Roger Garaudy, whom it had expelled. (Although, in the case of Garaudy, the Muslim convert's negationist theses about Israel caused the hand to be quickly withdrawn.) Hue's strategy of a 'unitary pact for progress' led to public dialogue with Trotskyists and Greens, as well as the Socialists and their euro-sceptic breakaway, the *Mouvement des Citoyens*.

There have, however, been limits to *la mutation*. The PCF remains reticent about its past ties with the Soviet Union. On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the crushing of the Hungarian uprising, there was discreet denunciation of the Soviet intervention the PCF once had fulsomely



Robert Hue

praised, but this was drowned out (understandably) by commemoration of the 10,000 International Brigade volunteers, mainly PCF members, who went from France to fight for the Spanish republic. Similarly, the PCF has met with deafening silence revelations about the financial aid it received from the USSR up until the Gorbachov years. This reticence about the past worries fellow-travelling intellectuals such as the poet Bernard Noel. He says: 'Even if Hue is too young to have been involved in the Cold War period, he should speak out on the lies and persecutions of the Stalinist years. Such a gesture would help heal old wounds. Silence is as harmful as that of Mitterrand on the episodes of Vichy and the Algerian War.'

Robert Hue, with his bonhomie and apparently genuine desire for change, has become a popular figure, and dramatically improved the image of the PCF. This has yet, however, to translate into voting intentions, which remain just below 10 per cent. The Communists and the Socialists, both tarnished by past compromises, be it association with the East or experience in government, are finding it difficult to reproduce their electorate among young workers and the unemployed, who look more to the populist solutions offered by the *Front National*.

The 29th Congress of the PCF, in December 1996, displayed the extent, limits and dangers of *la mutation*. The venue was a symbolic break with the past: at the new Arche de la Defense, one of the grands projets of the Mitterrand years, rather than in the former Red Belt around Paris. Red flags, and even the

colour red, were absent until the end of the Congress. The changes in internal democracy were, however, limited. With democratic centralism having been formally buried in 1994, opposing opinions were integrated into the Congress document, but only as italics in

the margin of a single resolution. There was no official 'report', but Hue opened proceedings with a three-hour speech.

Nevertheless, the Congress resolution displayed the emptying of the Communist idea of much of its substance. The primacy of the working class was rejected in favour of an alliance of all salaried workers. 'Statism' was denounced, along with the notion of general collectivisation, and replaced by proposals for a 'new type' of mixed economy.

Where was the Communism in that? The hammer-and-sickle emblem was abandoned. This could be interpreted as a necessary symbolic break with the Soviet legacy. Nonetheless, this was accompanied by a total lack of commemoration of the Bicentenary of the Conspiracy of Equals led by Gracchus Babeuf, previously considered to be a founder of French Communism.

The 29th Congress revealed considerable divisions within the PCF, mainly over relations with the Socialists, and how to avoid repeating the 'mistakes' of the *Union de la Gauche* and the coalition government of 1981-4. On the one hand, conservatives combined a worrying nostalgia for the East with obstinate hostility to the Socialists and opposition to Maastricht, sometimes even *Europe tout court*. On the other hand, *les refondateurs* argued for the creation of a 'radical pole', similar to Spain's *Izquierda Unida*, gathering around a 'refounded' PCF groups such as Greens, Trotskyists and euro-sceptical Socialists. They felt vindicated by the recent by-election success in a suburb of Marseilles, in which the Communist candidate,

supported by such an alliance, trounced his carpet-bagging Socialist rival, and sent the *Front National* into retreat.

Robert Hue successfully negotiated a middle way between these two currents: activism at the grass roots, linked with political agreement at the top; hostility to the Europe of Maastricht, but dialogue with the Socialists, still the main component of the Left. The Congress resolution was approved substantially intact, with a huge majority. But the Congress revealed the existence of vocal and influential minorities.

The leadership of the PCF was renewed, with the departure of veteran figures such as Georges Marchais, Roland Leroy (former director of *l'Humanite*) and Henri Krasucki (former general secretary of the CGT union). At the same time, there were departures which bode ill for Robert Hue's strategy. Louis Viannet, new general secretary of the CGT, left the politburo, thus historically separating political and trade-union responsibilities. This was not unforeseen: it had been discussed for a long time as a way of improving the flagging fortunes of the CGT. But this departure weakens Hue's argument that the distinctive role of the PCF is as a 'transmission belt' linking grass-roots activism and governmental responsibility.

Another blow was the largely unexpected decision by Philippe Herzog to leave the PCF altogether. Herzog, an economist who has contributed greatly to the development of the PCF's programme, and who led the PCF list at the European elections in 1989, left through disappointment with Hue's mutation. Herzog had joined the PCF in 1967, hoping to marry the origins of his parents—the father an engineer, the mother a millworker—in a Communism that would be prepared to manage the economy and the state. Disillusion set in in 1984, when the PCF chose to enter into opposition to the Socialists. It had, according to Herzog, chosen to remain a 'counter-society', uninterested in management, cultivating distrust of the Socialists, hatred of employers, and hostility to European institutions. His experience in the leadership had confirmed to him the persistence of a workerist culture that excluded the intellectuals from real power. Herzog's departure not only deprives the PCF of one of its most original thinkers: it raises doubts, especially in the minds of the Socialist leadership, about the PCF's fitness for government.

It can be argued that the PCF's implacable opposition to the ravages caused by the drive for monetary union

has helped it to put an end to electoral decline. It has retained the support of a number of working-class voters who feel threatened by the nature of European unification. But, in the run-up to the legislative elections of 1998, and as the single currency grips the political class with millennial zeal, French Communism is not immune to tensions. The attitude to the Maastricht project will largely determine the relations between the Socialists, who still support it in principle, and the rest of the French Left. Any compromise by the PCF leadership may trigger serious internal strife. Already a pale version of its former self, the French Communism that survived the wreckage of 1989-91 may be lucky to reach the year 2000 in one piece ■

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#### Contributors to this issue

##### Pat Rabbitte

is Minister for Commerce, Science and Technology and Democratic Left TD for Dublin South West

##### Conor Murphy

is a financial consultant

##### Rogelio Alonso

is a freelance journalist

##### Henry Patterson

is Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster

##### Malcolm Barry

is reviews editor of *Education Today and Tomorrow*

##### Fred Lowe

lives and works in Dublin

##### Gary Kent

is a parliamentary researcher

##### Gavin Bowd

is author of *The Endless Burial: Communism and the French Intellectuals since 1956*, forthcoming from Verso

##### Chris Walker

was born in Madras. He lives in the backwoods of the Clare/Galway border and paints in Hiberno-Sanskrit

##### David Wheatley

is a poet and editor of *Metre* magazine

##### Marc Mulholland

is currently completing a PhD on 'The evolution of Ulster Unionism: causes, course, and consequences 1960-9' at the Queen's University of Belfast

##### Paul Bew

is Professor of Irish Politics at Queen's University, Belfast, and Parnell Fellow at Magdalene College, Cambridge, 1996-7

##### Robin Wilson

is director of Democratic Dialogue



# Michael Collins in Europe

How will audiences in mainland Europe react to the film *Michael Collins*? They will, in general, not be familiar with the period covered and the characters portrayed. Despite Neil Jordan's remarks in the *Belfast Telegraph* saying that this is a film which 'was made about then and not now' the current political situation in Ireland will undoubtedly condition the way in which the story is interpreted abroad.

International media coverage of the Irish conflict is very limited, and is generally confined to events like the riots after the release of Lee Clegg, Drumcree or IRA 'spectaculars'. The reading of the Northern Ireland peace process is in consequence quite simplistic. Issues like the decommissioning of weapons are far too complicated and boring, not to mention the endless quarrels in the talks about talks. It is also arguable that people are not familiar with partition and the independence of the Republic. In this context, and as a result of some remarks made by Jordan at the Venice Festival, his work is bound to become something more than a Hollywood historical drama about the years 1916-22.

In an interview published in the Spanish newspaper *El País* last year Neil Jordan affirmed that 'Fifty years after his [Michael Collins'] death everything could be different. There would be no conflicts between Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland and the bombs would have never gone off in London. (...) Gerry Adams would be today's Collins, a positive and heroic figure who tries to stop the armed movement and transform it into political strategies.' Moreover, in a US interview the Irish director was quoted as calling his film 'an argument for the British to talk to Gerry Adams'.

Gerry Adams is very often viewed abroad as the former revolutionary turned pacifist struggling to get the intransigent British to the negotiation table. He is portrayed as the dove who

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## How will European audiences view Michael Collins asks ROGELIO ALONSO

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endeavours to bring the hardliners in from the cold while keeping the balance with 'the unionist section of our people' as he has put it. This is extremely convenient in a country like Spain with its own terrorist problem. Spanish media

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*• Gerry Adams is very often viewed abroad as the former revolutionary turned pacifist struggling to get the intransigent British to the negotiation table •*

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and politicians desperately need to show the Basque separatists somebody with Adams' charisma and his alleged intentions of giving up armed struggle.

Seen in the context of the media portrayal of Adams, Jordan's comments undermine his own view that the film is nothing else but an historical drama which 'was made about then, not now'. In true Hollywood style, Jordan sums up decades of Irish history in two hours. At the beginning of the film he explains that what follows is a 'story', whereas interviews with him reveal that he understands the film as a history book - in his own words, 'the truths we must tell'. (It is interesting to note that in languages like Spanish or French *historia* and *histoire*, respectively, mean both

history and story.)

It is also relevant to assess the accuracy of Jordan's remarks. It is useful to bear in mind that European audiences will see the film through their own eyes and prejudices which surround a colonial conflict. Given that the film does not throw much light about many relevant issues - constitutional nationalism and unionism for instance -, it will be easy for continental audiences to jump to wrong conclusions and draw inaccurate parallels between Collins and Adams.

Collins became the most influential politician of nationalist Ireland in his time, and he managed to do so in the very few years he was involved in politics. Despite Adams' high profile nowadays he has never achieved similar prominence in three decades of involvement in the political arena.

Due to the simplifications and selective use of history in the film it is quite likely Michael Collins will be seen as a romantic hero who fought and defeated the most powerful empire in the world, as well as somebody who finally accepted that violence no longer served his purpose and that the time for peace and political negotiation had come.

Is it the same in the case of Gerry Adams? In a recent interview I put it to the Sinn Féin president whether armed struggle should nowadays be still a part of the republican struggle, to which he answered: 'I think there always will be armed struggle in the type of conditions which exist in Ireland ... It is just a matter of fact that when you get occupation by a foreign government in a country you get armed struggle.' When pressed if he thought that the position is now such that republicans should definitely embrace another kind of struggle, Adams replied: 'I think that the people who are committed to the IRA struggle will continue. (...) As far as those who are committed to armed struggle there can be no doubt that their position has been



*Liam Neeson in a scene from Neil Jordan's Michael Collins*

strengthened by the events of the last number of years'. (Adams' words coincide with what Austen Morgan regards as the central message of *Michael Collins*: that political violence was necessary in 1916-23.)

When asked why the IRA was still engaged in a military campaign in spite of the acceptance by every other political party on this island that there cannot be a united Ireland without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, Adams replied: 'Because we have to take the British out of the equation'. In the course of the interview, a very simple question was put to him more than six times: Is the military campaign carried out by the IRA a liability or counter-productive for Sinn Fein's peace strategy? There was no straight answer to the question.

Consequently, it is difficult to extrapolate from Adams' statements the 'positive and heroic figure', or the 'pure and heroic spirit which in that period went together with the intimate nature of

violence' that Jordan was referring to.

It can be argued that Adams' is engaging in rhetoric and that he has certainly learnt from Collins' realism as some of his comments would suggest: 'Perhaps we need to find some sort of a

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*‘Collins had the courage not to flinch in the face of a split in the republican movement’*

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transitional arrangement which satisfies each, which means each giving up something as part of a transitional measure', or 'People will have to realise that dialogue is a two way process and that making peace is a two way process.

(...) In the course of that there will have to be a lot of give and take', or when he talks of 'some accommodation if it is required so that we get an end to the conflict and so in the course of that we get as far along to our republican objectives as possible'. These are the kind of comments which will anger those responsible for last year's graffiti on the Andersonstown Road: 'Adams remember Michael Collins'.

Collins reluctantly accepted the self-determination of the unionist population in the North and had the courage not to flinch in the face of a split in the republican movement. Adams still insists that the conflict will only be over when 'we have the right of the Irish people to self-determination restored' and refuses to accept a 'partitionist settlement'. This is the illusion which killed Michael Collins and thousands of Irishmen. The problem is whether Jordan's film will help the world to understand it ■

# An Anglo-Irish sensibility

Not since AE has the minority community in Ireland produced a writer of such versatility and European knowledge as Hubert Butler (1900-91) whose fourth collection of essays *The Land of Nod* has been published by Lilliput Press.\* He is one of that rare sub caste of Anglo-Ireland that produced academics, scholars and free thinkers.

This volume of thirty-two essays, reviews and an address are reprinted from publications like the *Irish Times*, the *Church of Ireland Gazette* and the *Journal of the Butler Society*. The Butlers were a widespread clan; I live only three miles from the one time seat of the local branch, the Butlers of Bunnahow House, on the Gort-Ennis road. Butler deals less with the enthusiasms and foibles of the minor gentry in this volume and more of the religious massacres in Croatia. Since the word 'horse' is rare in his writing, Butler would have had little in common with the Kirkwoods of 'Woodbrook', the classic of demesne life by David Thomson. To the Kirkwoods, horse worship was rather more important than any other sort. Other subcastes of Anglo-Ireland were the Irish Raj, the colonial box-wallah or tea planters and the army types who retired to the West.

In Clare the Anglo-Irish were 'ethnically cleansed' in the first decade of the Free State, when over sixty landed families left. Nowadays there are residents of the Pale who would be regarded as British tourists in Clare, such is the unfamiliarity with the minority in these parts. I was taken for a Swede recently by a passing health visitor and am always regarded as British.

Not only are locals ignorant of the minority. Eric Newby, the noted travel writer, describes in *Round Ireland in Low Gear* how he and Wanda, his wife, cycling through mid-Clare 'settled .... into a lane which led past an expensive looking illuminated blur to the left which was presumably Ballyline House, in

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**CHRIS WALKER** applauds the achievements of a versatile writer who gained recognition late in life

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which I imagined Anglo Irish ladies with high voices and men wearing waistcoats and watchchains downing Beefeater's gin and Glenlivet'. Newby, in 1985, was about fifty years too late, as Ballyline, a

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*As a Protestant who probably knew more than anyone about pre-war Yugoslavia, he must have infuriated the Catholic hierarchy as he uncovered the Catholic massacres of the Orthodox inhabitants of Croatia*

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Butler house of course, was demolished in the 1930s and only the 'return' is inhabited nowadays. This information can be found in Hugh Weir's *Houses of Clare* and could be repeated for scores of other houses - Durra, Ballykeel, Paradise, Roxton, Applevale, Dromore, Maryfort, Rockvale, Cullaun and so on.

I am one generation removed from Meath acres; my grandfather sold Clunymore, near Athboy, to the Land Commission in 1938. However, I

recognise the eccentric relatives described in a previous volume. The 'cousinage' was more important than the baronetage among the Cromwellians and I remember visiting elderly cousins in the Dublin suburbs who knitted to fund a humane slaughterhouse for horses. School holidays from Headfort were spent in a totally West British household near 'Kingstown', where even the cat was called Winston. However, a minority is only as healthy as its families are viable and in this century eccentricity has become insanity, mendacity and disinheritance. From what I have seen, divorce and separation are the norm among the Anglo-Irish.

The first part of this book is devoted to essays on Ireland. Of most interest to me is 'The Minority Voice' This is taken from a Kilkenny county council election address. It touches on the declining influence of protestants in the life of the Republic, whether in the county libraries or in local government. Published originally in 1955, Butler thought that the minority was the main focus of independent thought at the time, as I am sure it was, and could still give a lead in public affairs. At least they had elections to county councils in those days! Reading books set in the 'fascist era', I have learnt of the opposition to libraries by the Roman clergy and how the printed word was regarded as the work of the devil. It is fitting that my nearest public library should be in a Church of Ireland.

Racialism, nationalism and patriotism and their various permutations are a common theme in Butler's writing. As an armchair nationalist, he is noticeably cool about Belfast and the Northern unionists. His essay, 'Am I an Irish Republican' muses on the effect Europe will have on Ireland and the fact that though Ireland is his motherland, Irish is not his mother

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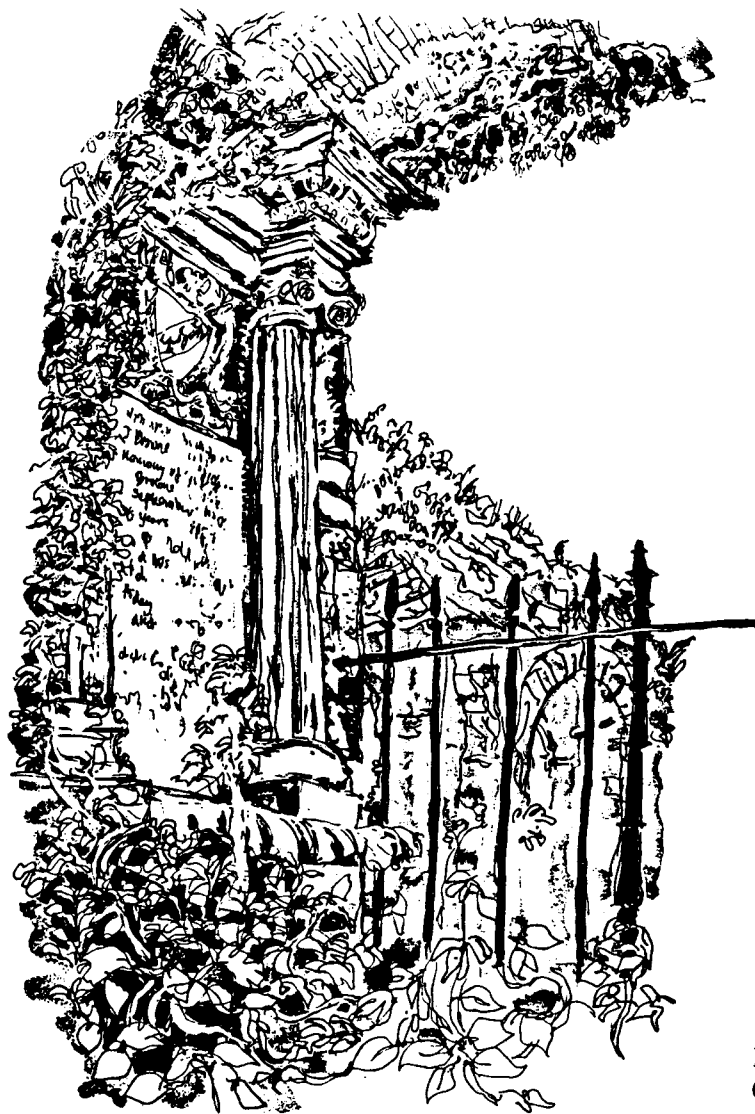
\*Hubert Butler *The Land of Nod* with an introduction by Neal Ascherson; Lilliput Press; £15.95

tongue. I myself have hardly heard a word of mother tongue Irish in half a life in the west of Ireland. I cannot agree with his statement that all national revivals have been sad disappointments. The revival of Finnish culture and language has been a quiet success; indeed, they have managed to keep totalitarianism at bay for over fifty years. Butler also took up the Schumachian ideal of small communities long before it became fashionable.

The second part of this volume is about Europe. 'Fichte and rise of racialism in Germany' was written in 1936, when, as now, Germany was regarded by many as the 'mystic heart' of Europe. Certainly Germans are now the engine of the organic movement of alternatives, from Sneem to the Seira Da Estrela. The other essays are about Dalmatia, Archbishop Stepinac, Himmler's masseur, and various journeys and conferences he attended for good causes during the Cold War.

Part three deals with literature and religion, with, as expected, pieces on Russian writers such as Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Leonid Leonov. A parallel is drawn between Edworthstown House and Yasnaya Polyana in 'Irish Literature', an address to the Union of Writers in Moscow in 1956. The usual names were mentioned, and he notes that Anglo-Irish literature was unpopular and weak due to forty years of aggressive campaigning for Irish and against English. He could not have foreseen the academics, summer schools and culture groupies that would raise Anglo-Irish studies to cult status as the Celtic twaddle receded into a golden haze.

For those interested in the by-ways of literature, there are pieces on E.M.



The Browne Memorial,  
Tulla, Co. Clare  
Chris Walker

The Browne Memorial, Tulla, Co. Clare

Forster, William Gerhadi and C.P. Snow. He deals with Shaw (a second cousin of one of my grandmothers, I believe) and his predictions about protestant Ireland in 'Topical thoughts on Shaw'. He notes Shaw's schemes for reformed spelling as well as the dottier enthusiasms of other writers. To some, the last two essays, on puns in the New Testament, might verge on the dotty, but the comparisons with Irish tribal names is interesting and Butler's Celtic scholarship is yet another facet of a unique Irish writer.

In the last few decades the civilising activities and sensibilities of the minority have been taken up and taken over by wealthy Europeans and less wealthy Britons who have been settling along the west coast. I'm sure more mansions are occupied by these than by true bred Anglo-Irish of which only about a thousand may remain in the Republic

now. Not a few mansions have hippies at the bottom of the walled garden - I have been in that situation twice. The minority also nurtured alternative and organic lifestyles long before it became fashionable and the Dutch cheese-makers and German builders came on the scene. That they kept out of Irish politics now seems to their credit. The late Patricia Graecen told me that the murder of Boyle Somerville discouraged her contemporaries from public life. The protestant 'home and garden' mores could be a valuable antidote to the increasing anarchy of urban life in Ireland.

Butler's writing appeals to the nostalgia for Anglo-Ireland as well as the current interest in the Balkans. As a Protestant who probably knew more than anyone about pre-war Yugoslavia, he must have infuriated the Catholic hierarchy as he uncovered the Catholic massacres of the Orthodox inhabitants of Croatia. His essay on the Fethard-on-Sea boycott in a previous volume

would only be of sociological interest now, as the last time a viable rural protestant community existed outside of West Cork and the border counties was in the 1950s. (Since first writing this I have visited the North Tipperary village of Cloughjordan on a Sunday morning and was pleasantly surprised to see a busy Church of Ireland, though the Ulster neatness of the houses and some names on shopfronts should have told me that this was a protestant enclave. Boycotts also seem to be enjoying a comeback.)

Hubert Butler's success in book form at a late age gives hope to other minority writers of mature years. For me, only the Bengali anglophile, Nirad Chaudhuri, compares in the description of divided loyalties as the end of the Empire affected the Bhadra Lok' or gentry ■

## Book Reviews

# The nation once again

Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* begins with the rather odd suggestion that 'if Ireland had never existed, the English would have invented it'. A Voltairean retort to this might be that before *Inventing Ireland* existed we knew that someone - God, Declan Kiberd, the International Association for the Study of Irish Literature - was bound to come along and invent it sooner or later. As the most ambitious study to date of the rise of national consciousness in the nineteenth century and after, *Inventing Ireland* at its most basic is the textbook which Irish postcolonial studies have been waiting for. Perhaps best known before now as the author of the single most readable book on Synge, Kiberd has produced a tome that by wrist-cramping standards alone makes no secret of its author's large-scale ambitions. Kiberd sets himself the task of succeeding where everyone else has failed: to coax the flux and disparateness of Irish experience into a single, all-encompassing narrative. As such *Inventing Ireland* can be seen as carrying on the project of *The Field Day Anthology*, to which Declan Kiberd was a contributing editor. Epic ambitions are not without their hazards, however. As the very mixed responses to *The Field Day Anthology* showed, the editors were more than a little naive in assuming that everyone would find their chosen brand of Irish identity as inclusive and universal as they. Nothing could have been further from the case. The virtual omission of women from the anthology was singled out for condemnation, but need not have rankled so much were it not for the

Declan Kiberd *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* Vintage; £8.99

implicitly totalising claims that had been made for the project. The editors' flustered response to their critics only seemed to compound the offence. Why



Oliver Goldsmith doesn't get a look in

should the answer to the omission be a fourth volume, as if to confirm that special interest groups, however recalcitrant, could all be subordinated at last to the totalizing narrative of Irish (nationalist) identity? Why should this one narrative, that of the nation, always have the last word?

It is against this backdrop that one turns to Kiberd's book. Inevitably, it is a difficult volume to classify. It is not a work of history, for instance, and has attracted hostile comments from various

quarters for the insouciance with which it bandies about emotive claims ('one of the first policies formulated by the Norman occupiers was to erase Gaelic culture') without any footnotes to back them up. Nor is it a work of 'theory' in any thorough-going sense. Kiberd is no Homi Bhabha, and his use of theory does not extend very far beyond passing

references to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, both of them almost forty years old. The irony of holding up Fanon as a model for liberatory nationalism without once mentioning the events currently unfolding in Algeria is wholly lost on Kiberd: here as elsewhere his method is to extract what he finds useful, while passing over more troublesome discrepancies. But as Kiberd explains: 'I have refrained from attempts to "recolonize" Irish studies in the name of any fashionable literary theory, preferring to allow my chosen texts to define their own terms of discussion'. The innocent-sounding desire to let texts speak for themselves should not detract attention from the highly selective canon-making which Kiberd engages in as he decides who

gets to invent Ireland and who doesn't. Among the first casualties are anyone born before the nineteenth century: Goldsmith, Swift, Berkeley, Burke and Sheridan are 'impeccable representatives of the Irish Protestant middle class' and, for Kiberd's purposes, very little else. The nineteenth-century novel too is scarcely mentioned, while a figure as significant as James-Clarence Mangan does not make it to the index.

Kiberd's real interest lies in the Revival and its aftermath, and the heart of this

book is its chapters on Wilde, Shaw, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett. He loves a good binary opposition, and writes incisively about androgyny in Synge (the feminized man and the masculined woman) and religious ambiguity in Shaw (Joan of Arc as a Protestant heroine, 'Protholics and Cathestants'). It is all compulsive reading, but doubts persist. Kiberd's understanding of modernism, for instance, is strangely limited and unsatisfactory. Since the central thesis of *Inventing Ireland* is the contribution of literature to the rise of the modern Ireland, Kiberd reads Irish modernist writing as a uniformly progressive force, embodying the spirit of the nation struggling to be born. Some aspects of Irish nationalism may indeed be backward-looking or authoritarian, but the civilising influence of literature can be relied on to take them in hand. Thus he fails to deal with the issue of Yeats's right-wing flirtations in the 1930s because *Inventing Ireland* has assigned Yeats the role of Irish patriot and hero, and to attack his political wisdom could be construed as an attack on the foundation of the Irish state itself. In the case of a more elusive writer like Beckett, Kiberd's attempts to sign him up for the nationalist canon which Beckett so vigorously abjured in life lead to serious misrepresentation. How exactly does Waiting for Godot symbolize the 'amnesia which afflicts an uprooted people'? How could the Gaelic tradition seem 'posited on a void' to Beckett, unless Kiberd is simply reminding us that Beckett knew not a word of Irish? And if so, how can the disembodied voice in the dark of Beckett's Company be 'utterly bardic in tone', and comparable to the Gaelic *fili* composing in darkened rooms? Whatever happened to texts 'defining their own terms of discussion'?

For a critic so concerned to investigate religious and racial labels, Kiberd sometimes slips into disappointingly careless thinking on these subjects. One example: 'like others of her kind', we are told, Elizabeth Bowen 'lived at a certain remove from her own emotions'. Remarks like this show Kiberd making common cause with that least likely of proto-postcolonialists, Matthew Arnold, transforming sectarian (and, no less frequently, racial) categories into essentialist absolutes that have no place in a serious work of scholarship like *Inventing Ireland*. Kiberd is no Catholic

atavist, as even Eoghan Harris was forced to admit in a *Sunday Times* column, but it is disquieting how often his attempts at inclusiveness and pluralism proceed from the assumed centrality of his own position. Numerous other examples could be adduced, but I

● *The irony of holding up Fanon as a model for liberatory nationalism without once mentioning the events currently unfolding in Algeria is wholly lost on Kiberd* ●

will confine myself to one more. In the last chapter Kiberd mentions the upsurge of interest among Northern loyalists in the Irish language and the Cuchulainn myth (Andy Tyrie had a portrait of Cuchulainn in his office, and plotted—if *Fortnight* magazine is to be believed—to kidnap Oliver Sheppard's statue of him in the GPO) as encouraging responses to the 'current dilemma of unionism'. By presenting these as imaginative departures from unionist norms, as indeed they are, Kiberd begs the question

of how far the Gaelic tradition still belongs to the nationalist south, the purity of whose Celtic heritage by contrast he does not feel obliged to comment on. Would an upsurge in Irish-speaking in the south constitute a response to the current dilemma of Republicanism? If not, why not? Who exactly are the Gaelic Irish today, anyway (who are 'the Irish' *tout court*)? Our failure to resurrect the Irish language in the twentieth century is a constant theme of this book, but rather than place the blame for this and other woes of the modern Irish state where it belongs—with the failures of the nationalist tradition which Kiberd espouses—he fixes instead on such incongruous targets as revisionist historians, Joe Lee (whose damning account of Irish self-(mis)rule after independence Kiberd calls a 'jeremiad') and young Dublin writers like Dermot Bolger who have 'declared themselves positively uninterested in having a united Ireland'. It is a symptomatically misjudged response to a question which Kiberd's defensiveness of his 'invented Ireland' never really allows him to frame.

There is no denying that Kiberd is a critic to be reckoned with, or that this is an impressive and on occasion brilliant book. *Inventing Ireland* is a challenge which demands to be met, and I am full of admiration for the verve and panache of Kiberd's arguments; I only wish I could agree with more of his conclusions.

David Wheatley

## Democracy and revolution

*Tom Garvin 1922: the Birth of Irish Democracy Gill and Macmillan £35 hb £14. 99 pb*

*Conor Kostick Revolution in Ireland: Popular Militancy 1917 to 1923 Pluto Press £40.00 hb £12. 99 pb*

**T**om Garvin's *1922: the Birth of Irish Democracy*, concerns the 'long 1922'; from the truce of 11 July 1921 to the arms dump order which ended the civil war on 24 May 1923. Garvin seeks to prove the centrality of this short period in the establishment of a secure national democracy in Ireland. Irish democracy

emerged as part of a general wave of democratisation following World War One. Only Ireland, Costa Rica and Finland, however, maintained democracy unaided and uninterrupted from that day to this. He argues also that Irish variant was *sui generis* in other ways. 'O'Connellism', as he christens it, was 'a blend of catholicism, democracy, nationalism and liberalism'. It was built on the civic sensibility of a small peasant proprietorship imbued with the Roman Catholic ethos. The end result, thus, was a democracy of a particular kind: conservative, puritanical, cynical, romantic and rather intolerant of deviance.

If this applied to the Irish masses, it applied even more so to the nationalist elite who made the revolution. For years they had lambasted the sham democracy



of the British administration and the corruption of the Irish Parliamentary Party. In common with many contemporary political thinkers, Irish revolutionaries saw electoral democracy as an optional extra to be subordinated to the greater cause, whether imperialism, nationalism or socialism. The localism and unaccountability of the IRA 'public band' further militated against representative democracy. Revolutionary disdain for the Irish 'slave mind', in thrall to British blandishments and easily coerced by British threats, meant that many were loath to accept Irish democracy. That they did was a rather close run thing and, believes Garvin, it was at base what the civil war was all about.

Ironically, it was only those on the Free State side who had waged war most ruthlessly, even murderously, who embraced the democratic idea wholeheartedly. William Cosgrave, Kevin O'Higgins, Richard Mulcahy and Ernest Blythe would not allow old loyalties to stand in the way of suppressing a republican military coup. Their heroic work to restructure government, the police, the army and the judiciary gives them, in Garvin's opinion, an honoured place in the pantheon of Irish democracy.

Garvin argues for a history in which, if not great men, elites have a determining effect on history. The civil war was a particular example of this. It took place virtually over the heads of the Irish people. The split in the nationalist elite was partly over class but more down to mutual envy and distrust. It was also a split between those who were good at, and preferred, 'running things' and those whose skill lay in military actions and agitation. At an ideological level, Garvin perceives a dichotomy between 'republican moralists' and 'nationalist pragmatists'. The latter were more realistic about what could be achieved in 1921 and more determined to establish the new state on a sound footing in which liberal democracy and an efficient capitalist economy would flourish. 'Republican moralism' eschewed compromise on the millennium, denied majoritarian democracy and espoused a collectivist social ethos.

This emphasis on a clash of outlook is not altogether convincing. Rhetoric on both sides was moulded to the requirements of their case. Those defending the Treaty were bound to be 'pragmatic' and 'democratic', those

against it were required to invoke 'national honour' and appeal to the socially disaffected. Did not the Treaty magnify marginal differences? Were not stalwarts on both sides able to use, as Garvin points out, the rhetoric of their opponents as occasion demanded? A common stock of ideas was drawn upon by those for and against the Treaty to justify responses to the inevitable indignity of compromise. Perhaps the root cause of the split should indeed be explained in personal, class and geographical terms.

Garvin obviously sympathises with the case put for the treaty. It granted unprecedented freedom and the scope for much more. The very fact of a treaty, rather than an Act, implied that both contracting parties, Britain and Ireland, were on an equal footing. He is less understanding of the republican case. While the Free State perspective is quoted in detail, the republican response is dismissed as 'tedious jargon' (p 178). However, there was clearly substance to the republican argument that Ireland was being coerced by Britain. One detects the advantages of hindsight in his rejection of the republican argument that dominion status, de facto independence for large Canada far away, would be de facto home rule for small and overshadowed Ireland. Though Garvin asserts that Britain's restrictions on Ireland's independence were never seriously meant and intended only for home consumption, it is more likely that Britain, in common with the republicans, simply did not believe that so much room existed in the Treaty for Ireland to progress towards independence. The British negotiators would hardly have contemplated with equanimity the prospect of Irish neutrality while Britain was fighting for its life less than twenty years later.

Garvin's book, though rather repetitive, is a trenchantly argued and original work. Its comparative analysis is especially impressive and the arguments generally persuasive and always provocative. It also has the advantage of introducing interesting new source material.

As might be expected from a less established scholar, Conor Kostick's *Revolution in Ireland* is less original or stimulating. Between 1917 and 1923 a movement of politicisation swept through the Irish working class and peasantry, parallel with the general upsurge of nationalism throughout the country but separate from it. Kostick argues that an

opportunity existed for socialists not only to win the leadership of the Irish working class but to take the head of the national independence struggle and, by raising the demand for a workers' republic, gain the allegiance of protestant workers in the north. The book is shot through with counterfactual speculation and tut-tutting admonitions for revolutionary opportunities not seized. These are irritating distractions and rarely convincing; particularly the awkward fudge on whether the Treaty should have been accepted or not, deserving the same impatient demand for clarification put to Irish Labour in 1922 (page 173).

Kostick's approach is similar to numerous tendentious pamphleteers from would be Bolshevist parties. This book, however, is much better researched than the norm and thus serves as a useful survey of an under-appreciated phenomenon in Irish political history. As a comprehensive and clearly told narrative it will be useful to many. Perhaps reflecting chastened times for the left, it is mercifully free of sloganeering and jargon.

There is much useful material, particularly on the impact of syndicalist and especially political strike movements on small communities. Illustrated is the curious combination of pious catholicism, militant nationalism, internationalist socialism and localised economic struggles which characterised the labour movement. Regrettably, Kostick's determination to prove a revolutionary upsurge means that he fails sufficiently to investigate the demarcations and contrasts within the movement. Urban workers and landless labourers are lumped together, as are syndicalist strikes and politically motivated civil resistance. The profound barriers to socialist revolution in Ireland at this time, most especially the conservatism of small farmer society in alliance with the powerful Catholic Church, are grossly underestimated.

Kostick assumes, citing only Rosa Luxemburg as evidence, that direct action class struggle produces a unifying socialist class consciousness. For this reason he argues that protestant workers in the North could have been incorporated into an all-Ireland independence struggle. Only the timidity of the Labour leaders and the lack of a revolutionary vanguard presented such a happy outcome. (In common with all socialists of this stripe, Kostick never

wonders why the same process might not work the other way - that catholic workers be inspired by class struggle to support a unified socialist British Isles.) Kostick is blind to the reality of striking engineering workers in Belfast locating their industrial militancy securely in a unionist context, just as Irish Labour members were not prepared to push class struggle so far as to prejudice the higher goal of national (i.e. catholic) unity in the struggle for self-determination. He insists on treating both unionism and (less so) nationalism as epiphenomenal.

Kostick rehabilitates the political motivations of those at the bottom of the heap in Irish society, and accords them a crucial role in defeating the British strategy of bare repression. As such he serves as a useful corrective to Garvin's jaundiced view of avaricious or fanatical grass roots activists upsetting ordered government. However, Kostick bizarrely dismisses of the importance of the 1918 general election, possibly the single greatest and practically irreversible legitimiser of Sinn Féin as the leader of the national independence struggle. His obsession with the efficacy of direct action leads him to aver that a storming of Mountjoy prison in April 1920 would have precipitated an Irish 'February revolution'. In this light, Garvin's defence of electoral democracy against the centrifugal forces of revolution takes on new relevance.

From the evidence of these two books, it is the revisionists of nationalist mythology who retain the advantage on those struggling to update their homilies on defeating Britain and reuniting Ireland, whether to achieve the workers' republic or otherwise.

Marc Mulholland

## Flying column culture

Joost Augusteijn *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare: The Experience of Ordinary Volunteers in the Irish War of Independence 1916 - 1921* Irish Academy Press £45 hb £17.50 pb

The truth of the matter is that we still know surprisingly little about the nature of the Irish revolution of 1916-21; in part, because short term conjunctural factors (the fear of



conscriptio for example) helped give certain types of Gaelic ideologues a new prominence, but are we justified in saying that Aodh de Blacam, for example, is really our best guide as to what Sinn Féin stood for? Instinctively historians turn to local grass roots studies for answers. In this context, Joost Augusteijn's book has long been awaited with high expectations. It owes much to the widely admired approach of his thesis supervisor, Dr David Fitzpatrick of Trinity College, Dublin, whose study of Clare, *Politics and Irish Life 1913 - 21* (1977) is a classic. In considerable measure, these expectations are justified; it is a meticulous, thorough source-based account, even if there is surprisingly little use of the national and provincial press. If only as a counterbalance to the left romanticism of Conor Kostick's recent book *Revolution in Ireland 1917 - 1923* (Pluto), it is instructive to record Augusteijn's firm insistence: 'Contrary to the image of the IRA portrayed by its enemies as "people with no stake in the country", the IRA clearly appealed more to people who did have a stake in the country though possibly not the largest.'

The broad interpretative line of Augusteijn's book is, however, hardly a surprising one. 'Although the growing violence was initiated by the IRA, it led to deteriorating relations between the

◉ Unlike Robert Kee, however, Augusteijn does not concern himself too much with the moral and political complexities of the war process ◉

Crown forces and the population, while the IRA often became more popular.' The violence of the Crown forces used against the populace in Tipperary was an important factor in this development. This is hardly a new idea - Robert Kee's *Ourselves Alone*, the third volume of *The Green Flag* (1972) demonstrated this in its account of the military restrictions on ordinary people which followed the killing at Soloheadbeg (Augusteijn, though, is particularly interesting on the central leadership's cagey attitude to Soloheadbeg). Augusteijn is on firm ground when he stresses the incoherence of a British government which vacillated between repression and conciliation. At times, though, the explanation becomes circular and even platitudinous: 'As a result of the confrontation in Westport a bomb was thrown into the RIC barracks in March 1918. The diminishing acceptance of the Crown forces as the legitimate authority justified this in the eyes of the population.'

Unlike Robert Kee, however, Augusteijn does not concern himself too much with the moral and political complexities of the war process. Kee was interested by the fact that even the 48 per cent who cast their vote for Sinn Féin in December 1918 had not been asked to support a war policy - many Sinn Féin candidates dismissed the idea - whilst, of course, unionists and 'democratic nationalists', as the old Redmondites styled themselves, were solidly opposed. (In particular, Sinn Féin's vice-president Michael O'Flanagan, was identified with strong opposition to the coercion of Ulster.) Let us dramatise this by focusing on a particular constituency - Dublin, St Stephen's Green: in 1918 this was won by Thomas Kelly for Sinn Féin with 8,461 votes; second was P. J. Brady, Irish Party, on 2,755 votes. (Henry Hanna, the third candidate, was a unionist.) Kelly was a well known Sinn Féin dove and opponent of violence; Brady's own nephew in the RIC was to be killed by the IRA in October 1920. It is difficult to see this result as a mandate for the killing of local detectives.

Augusteijn's account of these developments is - to say the least - low key, unemotional and matter of fact and there is certainly no sense of critical engagement with the broad political implications. There is no reference, for example, to Tipperary man Sgt Barton's dying appeal for a priest after he was gunned down on the street. Other

references to the 'high number of civilian informers shot' (p. 291) look a little bland when set alongside the recent Public Records Office file revelations that the majority of those so murdered were not known to the British authorities in any capacity. At the end of all this, of course, Collins settled for the model of settlement proposed by the defeated Redmondites of December 1918 and conceded in principle by the British government at that point. The author of *From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare* may not want to engage with the question first raised by Robert Kee in 1972 but, to echo a famous phrase: 'They haven't gone away, you know.'

The strength of this important book lies elsewhere - in the mastery of local and regional detail. It throws new light on the reasons for Munster's greater violence in this epoch as compared with Connaught's relatively low key participation, a reversal of the respective positions of these two provinces during the land war.

In 1989, this reviewer, Ellen Hazelkorn and Henry Patterson argued a case based largely on the disappointment of agrarian radical aspirations in the west, but Augusteijn more proactively tries to explain the reasons for the greater significance of a 'flying column culture' in Munster. Now that we have this book - and a number of other helpful recent studies and memoirs - we are beginning to make some progress in our understanding of this era. The next crucial stage is likely to be Peter Hart's book on Cork.

Paul Bew

## Olympian certitudes

Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd  
*The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: power, conflict and emancipation* Cambridge £15.40

There have been thousands of books written on Northern Ireland's 'troubles'-good, bad and appalling. But at the launch in Belfast of this book, Dr Maurice Hayes said that it stood out from the crowd, akin to the late John Whyte's *Interpreting Northern Ireland*.

It represents, indeed, the product of a massive labour of love over many years. And while there were fieldwork

interviews, since these took place in just a year during 1987-8, it is, essentially, like Whyte, a massive survey of the literature; the 25-page bibliography is testament to just how massive it is. And it was clearly written with Whyte in mind-seeking to update his 'internal conflict' paradigm for understanding the conflict. The sheer prodigiousness of this digestive effort is matched, at many points, by a sharp sensitivity to detail and nuance. The complex evolution of the British state, for example, usually treated as an externally imposing black box in most accounts of Northern Ireland, is well addressed in a chapter on its role.

Unfortunately, the book must be judged a failure in one sense-as set against its highly ambitious goal not only to survey the literature comprehensively (which it valiantly achieves) but also to chart a course of 'emancipation' from the 'troubles'. For what is remarkable about the last chapter, setting out this approach, is its thinness compared to the rest of the book.

No one, of course, can easily chart the path to a settlement in Northern Ireland. But Todd and Ruane's bold and well-intentioned effort is weakened by a rather crude ideological grid they impose on the material at the beginning of the book. In a brusque, three-paragraph section on 'The role of theory', they say their theoretical schema 'emerged' from the field research and from primary and secondary sources. Unfortunately, it reads like an ex-cathedra assertion and, rather than illuminating the empirical material, it has a constricting effect.

A mere four paragraphs are devoted, first, to the rejection of Whyte's own paradigm. But there is no effective reply to Whyte's fundamental point. This is that nationalist and unionist accounts have attributed the conflict to an external relationship (the role of Britain or 'Dublin' respectively), whereas in reality even if either of these relationships was satisfactorily addressed (as John Hume and David Trimble variously propose) the intercommunal conflict within Northern Ireland would remain: hence his emphasis on the internal dimension. And the fact that all the attempts to 'internationalise' the conflict since 1985 have left those of us living in Northern Ireland inhabiting a society more segregated and polarised than ever should surely give pause for thought.

Todd and Ruane's alternative approach is based on what they call a

'system of relationships': (i) 'dimensions of difference', (ii) 'a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality', and (iii) communal polarisation. Since the first and third of these are descriptive rather than explanatory, the significant concept is in fact the power relationship between the two communities in Ireland. Much of the book is presented as the outworking of this relationship, which is traced back to its origins in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The 'system' is held to be constitutive of the two communities, monolithically conceived (unapologetically so), and is represented as having 'self-reproducing' tendencies-as the struggle for power has worked on dimensions of difference, enhancing polarisation, and so on.

Far from heralding a new paradigm, this in fact reproduces the reductionisms characteristic of a very traditional radical mode of thinking. The discourses in which the conflict of nationality is played out are reduced to the interests held to underpin them; individual actors, even whole communities, are reduced to acting out the scripts history wrote for them long ago. This, as ever, begs the question as to how the authors are able to peer behind the ideological veil in which everyone else is shrouded. And such a super-deterministic approach is of course barren ground for 'emancipation': on the contrary, all scope for human agency or liberation is thus eliminated.

To sustain this relentless ideological grid throughout, Todd and Ruane have to go out of their way to downplay the work of those striving for cross-communal solidarity and intercommunal reconciliation (which might be thought a *sine qua non* of any 'emancipatory' strategy); their efforts are described in quaintly O'Neillite language as 'bridge-building'. Research based on the 'internal conflict' paradigm is meanwhile labelled, with an almost Leninist ring, 'liberal-reformist'. The deployment of new political concepts-consociationalism, bills of rights, etc-is given similarly cursory treatment, as an implicitly misguided project of attempted 'modernisation'. And there is a persistent refusal to accommodate in the schema the very real modernisation of the republic-who would recognise it in such references as to 'the weakness of the economy, the dominance of the Catholic church, the illiberality of many of its laws'?

The very idea that a progressive hegemonic project for Northern Ireland is

possible rests on the principles that traditional ideological discourses are not fixed but can be rearticulated in ways that may render them no longer antagonistic, that individuals can transcend communal particularisms in the name of universal values of freedom

and equality, and that a widely based social moralism of reconciliation can constrain the apparently all-powerful forces of sectarian protagonism and violence. None of these is possible within the ideological schema this book imposes. It is thus an intensely

frustrating read: superb in the scope of its overview, it is maddening in its Olympian certitudes.

*Robin Wilson*

*Next issue*

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