

Times Change

Quarterly Political and Cultural Review

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The Famine History & Remembrance

- Unionists and
the Framework Document •
- Debating Divorce •
- Sandinista Divisions •
- Eric Hobsbawm's 20th century •
- James Kelman Interview •
- Chirac's France •



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PEACE TRAIN 14, OCTOBER, 1995

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THE MAUBERE PEOPLE WILL STAND FIRM!

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- *Unsettled and the Framework Document*
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- *China's Future*

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Quarterly Political
and Cultural Review

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Strong Words, Brave Deeds

The art of compromise

The peace process is in trouble. So says Gerry Adams, Bertie Ahern, John Hume, the *Irish News*, Bruce Morrison, and Albert Reynolds. And it's all the Brits' fault. Just as MI5 engineered the Fr. Brendan Smyth affair (what did they do - put something in his tea?), so too 'perfidious Albion' is - in the melodramatic words of Mitchell McLaughlin - holding a 'dagger at the throat of the peace process'.

Certainly, the British government has a responsibility to act so that the logjam is ended. It could begin with the release and transfer of prisoners. Nobody is realistically seeking an amnesty. What is needed is the phased release of prisoners with those who have served the longest sentences being released first. This can be done through the system of release on licence that has been used in the Republic - and indeed by the British government in the Clegg case - or by the restoration of the 50 per cent remission rate.

However, responsibility does not lie solely with the British government. Neither republican nor loyalist paramilitaries are as yet fully engaged in the peace process. Rather, they have thus far committed themselves to a cease-fire process. Both groups continue to engage in violence and each retains the capacity for armed violence.

Statistics show that republicans carried out 98 punishment beatings between September 1st 1994 and July 17th 1995, while loyalists carried out 59 - a threefold increase in such attacks. These beatings - which would not be tolerated in the Republic - cannot be compared to Saturday night brawls as suggested by Gerry Adams. The intention in all cases has been to cause grievous bodily harm and in most cases this has been the result. The purpose of such beatings is to exercise power and control.

What is the paramilitaries' purpose in holding on to weapons and explosives? The quantities involved suggest that they're not being kept as souvenirs. Logic would suggest that the paramilitaries have not ruled out a return to terrorism.

In his recent lengthy *Irish Times* and *An Phoblacht* articles Gerry Adams has not conveyed any commitment on the part of the Republican Movement to pursue an exclusively democratic strategy. His message is that the IRA will not

surrender its weapons and that Sinn Fein will not ask them to. The British government must drop its insistence on decommissioning otherwise it is jeopardising hopes of a settlement. Mr Adams points to the fact that the British government has talked to Sinn Fein while the IRA campaign was in progress.

The point that Mr Adams fails to address is that the unionist parties will not talk to one half of the Republican Movement while the other half sits on a ton of Semtex with detonators at the ready. Sinn Fein knows this but continues, despite the obvious contradiction, to demand 'All party talks now'.

So what is the Republican Movement prepared to do to move the peace process forward?

- Decommission arms? No.
- Stop punishment beatings? No.
- Release the bodies of the disappeared? No.
- Agree to reform of Articles 2 and 3? No.
- Agree to the principle of unionist consent? No.

Sinn Fein must do better if its claims to be a party of peace are to be taken seriously. Having over-dosed on media exposure, it is time to sober up. Perhaps Fianna Fail might take the (very) provisional democrats in hand and organise a summer school on 'Compromise and Core Values'. (It would be a more positive contribution than the monotonous banging of the nationalist drum.)

Compromise on the part of unionists is likewise called for. As the historian Paul Bew wrote in *The Times* on July 12th

... modernising Unionists need to get their acts together also. It is no good piously conjuring up a new vision of the Union without indicating to Nationalists where a realistic compromise might be reached.

Given time, such a compromise is possible. But if it is to become a reality, nationalists will have to stop forcing the issue while unionists will have to stop ignoring it. And the guns need to be put away. For good.

Finding a new balance

In a recent article in the journal *Parliamentary Brief*, Dick Spring wrote with some ill-concealed annoyance about the inability of unionists to recognise that the Irish Government had their best interests at heart. Had he not made a speech directly after the Shankill Road bombing in 1993 - the 'six principles' speech - which many unionists had warmly welcomed? That speech was all about balancing the legitimate interests of unionists and nationalists. Now that the framework documents have been published, Spring professes not to understand what all the fuss is about. Do the documents not propose institutions which simply embody those same principles? Surely unionists must accept that they are 'balanced'? Clearly, they haven't accepted any such thing. What is the problem these ungrateful unionists have with the idea of balance as it has emerged over the last few years?

In the Downing Street Declaration, which closely followed the spirit of Spring's six principles, the balance appeared to be this. On the one hand, the British Government seemed to

ARTHUR AUGHEY outlines the unionist response to the framework documents

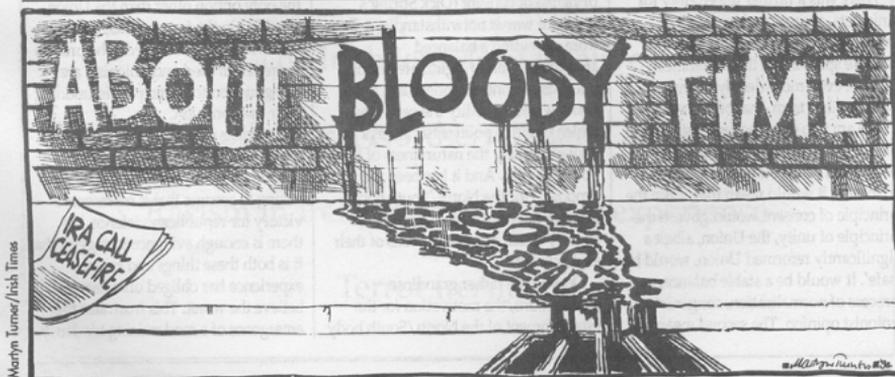
concede the principle of popular sovereignty to the Irish 'people'. On the other, the Irish Government seemed to concede the principle of constitutional

‘The overwhelming majority of unionists indeed assume that the principle of unity governs the principle of consent’

sovereignty to the 'greater number' in Northern Ireland. This balance was designed to accommodate two opposing political ideas: the unionist idea of the constitutional people and

the nationalist idea of the sovereign people. The unionist idea of the constitutional people is a people defined by the status and durability of its institutional life. It fixes Northern Ireland's statehood as part of the United Kingdom. The nationalist idea of the sovereign people asserts that the unit of self-determination for the governance of Ireland, 'north and south', must be the 'Irish people as a whole'. It transcends Northern Ireland's current statehood in an island framework.

The British Government seemed to confirm - as it had done in 1973 and in 1985 - the status of the constitutional people. It also made it known that the Government would legislate for any agreement between the Irish people as a whole. The Irish Government remained equivocal on this matter - as it had done in 1973 and 1985. The historic character of the Irish state has been defined not only by the gap between, but also by the claim to remove the gap between, the ideal of popular sovereignty (the 32 counties) and the reality of constitutional sovereignty (the 26 counties). It has



Martin Turner/Irish Times

never wanted to abandon the ideal, even if that ideal frustrates better relationships on the island. However, the Irish Government too appeared to accept that the British concession of the metaphysics of self-determination for the Irish people (as a whole) meant Dublin conceding the formal legitimacy of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom on the basis of consent.

The actual political outcome of such a balance on these matters of consent and self-determination was, however, uncertain. Unionists could not know whether the British government, by conceding the principle of self-determination to the 'people of Ireland', had made a fundamental concession to the goal of Irish unity. If it had, everything else, for instance the stipulation that this right of self-determination could only be exercised north and south, would be merely a temporary qualification of the governing (nationalist) principle. If, on the other hand, the acknowledgement by the Irish government of the principle of consent for constitutional change, were it followed up by a deletion of Articles 2 and 3, could be read as guaranteeing that the statehood of Northern Ireland would continue to depend on the will of the 'greater number'. Everything else would then be embellishment and detail.

There was a further uncertainty for unionists, accentuated by the IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994. The balance specified in the declaration became even more deeply confused with another term, that of process. There are two opposed understandings of process. The first meaning is open-ended and not pre-determined. In the Irish case, it would mean that, since the principle of consent would govern the principle of unity, the Union, albeit a significantly reformed Union, would be 'safe'. It would be a stable balance, a process of normalisation, congenial to unionist opinion. The second meaning

comes under the category of a law and is pre-determined. The peace process in this sense would project an inevitable, pre-determined course which is beyond the control of any single party to frustrate - meaning that it would not need the active consent of unionists and that the British government should not be 'unhelpful' in advancing it. The principle of unity here governs the principle of consent. It would be a dynamic balance, a process of constitutional transformation, congenial to nationalist opinion.

‘In other words, the process is predetermined and unionists are being invited to participate in undoing their own position.’

The hostile reception of the framework documents by the overwhelming majority of unionists shows that they do indeed assume that the principle of unity governs the principle of consent (Dick Spring's emollient words notwithstanding). Far from providing a balanced accommodation of legitimate political interests, unionists understand the Frameworks to codify the very idea which unionist politics has always denied, namely the naturalness of Irish political unity. And it has been the proposals for the North/South body (though not only these proposals, of course) which has been a focus of their acute concern.

Despite the rather grandiose justifications, the motivation for the establishment of the North/South body

is overwhelmingly political. Despite the cross-border business 'boosterism' of the last few years, there is no self-evident economic case for it. Unionists, therefore, feel they are being required to make a concession to the ideology of Irish nationalism. However, since the motivation is ideological there is a legitimate concern that the direction might be also ideological. Unionists take this to mean that nationalists may not only aspire to Irish unity. They may not only have an Irish dimension. They must also have established a functioning and dynamic institutional structure which will 'facilitate' the attainment of that aspiration. (Unionists note that they have no corresponding right to aspire to full integration with the rest of the UK).

This is not an irrational interpretation but is based on the following logic. First, the general balance proposed in the frameworks is between the status quo on the one hand and the aspiration to Irish unity on the other (Part 1, Annex A, paragraph 2, point 8). The language of the frameworks, however, is about dynamics and not about stability. This suggests, second, that since one cannot move towards the status quo one can only move (dynamically) away from it. Third, one might assume (logically, not irrationally) that the process will involve inevitable movement towards the only option other than the Union specified in the frameworks, namely Irish unity. In other words, the process is predetermined and unionists are being invited to participate in undoing their own position.

Unionists may be wrong to see the North/South body as an engine of 'rolling integration'. They may be wrong to assume that it represents a victory for republican violence. Yet there is enough evidence to suggest that it is both these things and recent experience has obliged unionists to believe the worst. This frustrates the emergence of a modernizing tendency.

The Progressive Unionist, David Irvine, is right when he argues that a mood does exist amongst unionists to find 'something they can say yes to'. Yet, the structure of the North/South body would appear to put unionists in a position of always saying 'no' to the dynamic which both Governments require such a body to have. It is, of course, an 'agreed' dynamic but it would be unionists who would frustrate 'agreement' (yet again), leaving themselves open to over-rule by the new Intergovernmental Conference. So how might unionists argue a case to make cross-border co-operation more acceptable and balanced?

Unionists might argue that to make co-operation acceptable, 'objective' criteria of co-operation need to be established for the operation of the North/South body. These might be: harmonisation limited to the material improvement of public services in Northern Ireland; any proposal for executive action which would threaten the general parity of provision between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom would be subject to referendum; consultation would have as its aim the improvement of the

international competitiveness of the economy and the institutions of Northern Ireland. The insertion of such criteria (or others like them) might allow unionists to play a positive role in a North/South body. They would restrict a purely ideologically motivated agenda. Moreover, such criteria would not be of value to unionists alone. Everyone in Northern Ireland (apart from nationalist ideologues) has a vested interest in such 'half-crown' matters. The taxpayers of the Irish Republic have an equal and opposite vested interest.

More importantly, one of the great difficulties for unionists lies in the fact that the northern assembly, a regional body within the United Kingdom, would be dealing directly with a sovereign state on its own domestic matters. This would not only be unbalanced but it would also encourage the belief that Northern Ireland was involved in a process which would transfer sovereignty from London to Dublin (interim joint authority). Unionists might argue, if the Irish Government is serious about an 'agreed', non-unitary, Ireland, that it too might reform its own state to

facilitate accommodation. The 1991 Local Government Act already permits the establishment of regional structures in the Republic. If these were to be set up, perhaps on a provincial basis, there could be a genuine meeting of equals within a North/South council of the regions. This would be a new sort of balance. Since it would be a sub-state association there would be no question of a slippage of sovereignty. It would allow for the consideration of issues of mutual and practical value on an intra-Ireland basis. There could be an island focus without there being a nationalist agenda. This was the argument advanced by the Cadogan Group in its pamphlet *Northern Limits*.

As they stand, the frameworks have proposed some half-way house between unionism and nationalism, thereby equating the fact of the Union with the aspiration to Irish unity (without a proper deal on Articles 2 and 3). That is what Dick Spring understands 'balance' to mean. For the reasons I have outlined, such a balance is unacceptable to unionists and will not achieve widespread acceptability. There needs to be fresh thinking ■

Next issue

The Irish left: dead or alive?

A model for a Northern Ireland assembly

Racism in Ireland - the traveller experience

Terror in Algeria

Debating divorce

In examining the dialogue surrounding the 1986 divorce referendum, the work of Max Weber provided a useful theoretical framework. Weber, one of the founding fathers of sociology, looked at how actions were informed and suggested that there two types of rationality relevant to that thought process. He identified formal and substantive rationalities. He explained that both are ideal-typical constructs, i.e. one can measure actions against them. Essentially, Weber saw formal rationality as something unique to the westernised world and the inescapable fate of modern society. Formal rationality was concerned with facts, he argued, whereas substantive rationality was concerned more with values. Tradition and status mattered more in the case of the substantive type according to Weber. Much of the conflict in modern society, according to Weber, could be traced to what he called the fact-value conflict - the clash of the rationalities. Much of the tension in the 1986 debate can be traced to fact-value conflict.

To illustrate how certain actions can be measured accurately against the formal rationality type, take an example of one TD's reasoning in favour of divorce. According to Fianna Fail's Charlie McCreevey, divorce and the right to remarry should be granted because 'marriage is a contract and in any ordinary contract there is a way of getting out.' Weber saw formally rational actions

FIACHRA O CELLEACHAIR examines the fact/value conflict evident in the debate on divorce prior to the 1986 referendum

as being characterised by the kind of factual outlook exemplified by McCreevey. An emphasis on efficiency, reliability, and precision are other traits according to Weber. He also identified a reluctance to make decisions based on personal considerations, a minimal recognition of status or tradition, a preoccupation

‘Emotional judgments and inflamed arguments featured strongly in the contributions of some opponents of divorce in 1986’

with order and a generally dispassionate, sober approach to situations as other principal traits. In Weber's view, the liberal and individual consideration prevailed over a communal position in such action. To assist in further

understanding Weber's concept he asks us to consider the analogy of the lawyer in the courtroom. We are familiar with the lawyer's regular appeal to judge or jury to consider cases in light of facts and the legal rules pertaining, rather than basing a decision on sympathy for perceived or alleged victims or by relying on emotion or particular values. In many respects, the Irish people were being subjected to a similar appeal in 1986.

In relation to the substantive rationality type, let us consider the conflictual stances to McCreevey's view of marriage and divorce. His party colleague, Michael Barrett declared that 'the bond uniting married couples is a sacramental bond which comes from God alone and no person can pull that bond asunder ... remarriage of a civil divorced person is not a real marriage in the eyes of God.' Further difference in interpreting social reality is evident from another Fianna Fail TD, Seamus Kirk. Disagreeing with McCreevey, Kirk insisted that 'the roots of Irish society will be severed by the introduction of divorce. Traditional attitudes which stood us in good stead will disappear. New attitudes will dictate a new order.' Weber identifies a scepticism of the new order of the western world of advanced capitalism and consumerism as being central to substantive rationality. Values are deemed to be more important than facts in this rationality. Respect for tradition, status, and common values

above individual cravings are further traits of the value-based action Weber calls substantive rationality. Things can be deemed irrational from a substantive viewpoint; actions corresponding to formal rationality could be seen as impersonal, unsympathetic, and too bureaucratic. Defining what is irrational works both ways.

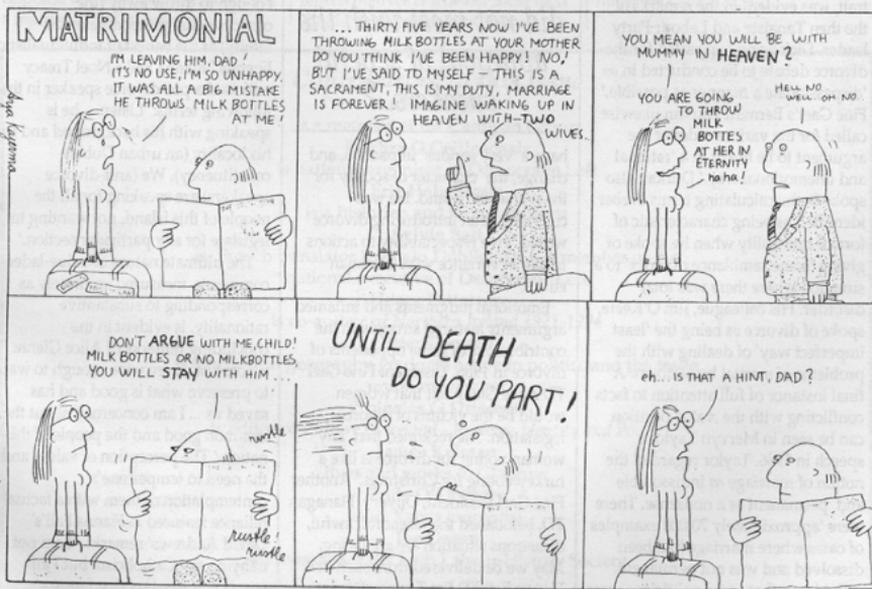
Weber saw the fact-value conflict as being critical to the dilemma faced by the individual in modern society. The breaking down of an old order where substantive considerations could have been more possible seem to be acknowledged in the contribution of the then Minister for Justice when promoting the Bill in 1986. Alan Dukes estimated that 'in an ideal world we would not, perhaps, need to concern ourselves with divorce but in the real world in which we live we cannot avoid the fact that many

marriages fail or the fact that, while much can be done to protect and support marriage, there will remain a number, and in the modern society in which we live, an increasing number, where the only answer on any view of the matter is divorce.' That is a strong rationalising of the position. A concern with disorder and irrationality is evident in further contributions from Dukes when he pleads that 'the law must eventually, I would suggest, take account of the fact (failed marriages) - otherwise there would be a danger that the law would lose touch with the lives of a growing number of people.'

Fianna Fail's justice spokesperson in 1986 was concerned that Dukes and the government were on the wrong track. Michael Woods was concerned that 'old values' were being undermined. Expressing his concerns, he declared that 'there is no

doubt in my mind that the concept and perception of marriage and its traditional role in society will change if divorce is introduced.' Outlining the negative consequences of divorce as he saw them, Woods argued that 'with the introduction of divorce it is inevitable that the status and social function in society of the institution of marriage as an indissoluble, permanent and lifelong contract or bond will change considerably and with it the attitudes and commitment of a significant proportion of our society.' Weber saw formally rational action as something that firstly changed structures, then minds. It appears that Michael Woods was thinking along similar lines.

Defining or interpreting social reality from a formally rational standpoint can be seen in the contributions from Fine Gael TDs Mary Flaherty and Nuala Fennell



Arjo Kalljemo/Dirty Dublin Strip Cartoons (1982)

(then Junior Minister for Women's Affairs). The introduction of divorce would reflect reality in Fennell's view. Mary Flaherty, acknowledging the complexities surrounding the question, felt the divorce proposals were moderate and reasonable - a point echoed by Gemma Hussey in the Dail debate. The then Minister for Education said she felt that modern social and personal problems would not 'disappear or go away because they are unpalatable.' Criticising opponents' arguments as being unreasonable and not responding to reality featured in Proinsias De Rossa's speech. He suggested that, in some cases, 'their position has been revealed by God ... and therefore the Roman Catholic view should prevail ... it is a fundamentally sectarian and undemocratic position.'

Appealing for a sober judgment of the issues, a strong formally rational trait, was evident in the remarks of the then Tanaiste and Labour Party leader. Dick Spring appealed for the divorce debate to be conducted in as 'dispassionate a manner as possible.' Fine Gael's Bernard Durkan likewise called for the various sides of the argument to be heard in a 'rational and unemotional way.' Durkan also spoke in the calculating terms Weber identified as being characteristic of formal rationality when he spoke of giving 'some semblance of order' to a situation where there was total disorder. His colleague, Jim O'Keefe, spoke of divorce as being the 'least imperfect way' of dealing with the problems of marital breakdown. A final instance of full attention to facts conflicting with the value position can be seen in Mervyn Taylor's speech in 1986. Taylor regarded the notion of marriage as indissoluble and permanent as a nonsense. There were 'approximately 70,000 examples of cases where marriage had been dissolved and was not permanent.'

Evidence that some politicians were

prepared to act in accordance with values, regardless of conflicting facts, were to be found in several contributions to the 1986 debate. Fianna Fail's Dennis Foley felt that Christian values which held our society together were under threat as 'the very basis of any Christian community is the family.' Family life would be undermined by the introduction of divorce, he felt. Independent TD Sean Treacy couldn't understand why 'in a Christian society such as ours' resources weren't focused on tackling other social evils. Fianna Fail's Padraig Flynn believed that divorce would

• The urban liberal perspective and the decline of tradition did not meet with the approval of several speakers •

have a 'very serious' impact on, and change, the 'character of society for the worse' in Ireland. He was convinced that introducing divorce would 'give respectability to actions totally at variance with Christian ethics.'

Emotional judgments and inflamed arguments featured strongly in the contributions of some opponents of divorce in 1986. Dissident Fine Gael TD Alice Glenn felt that women would be the victims of divorce legislation. She reckoned that 'any woman voting for divorce is like a turkey voting for Christmas.' Another Fine Gael dissident, Oliver J. Flanagan TD, bemoaned the 'dreadful, awful, disastrous situation we are facing. May we be delivered from such evil.' Fianna Fail TD Jim Tunney felt that

divorce would only be introduced at 'a cost to other people who will have to pay for it.'

The urban liberal perspective and the decline of tradition did not meet with the approval of several speakers. Oliver J. Flanagan referred to a number of factors in modern society that were threatening marriage and mentioned 'TV silences' whereby couples watched television without speaking to each other. Husbands who put their careers before their wives and children and the 'anxiety to be better than anyone else' were other causes of concern to him. Dennis Foley quoted from a letter from a constituent, which claimed that 'the proud heritage of our ancestors is being eroded and we are now told that unless we live in this so-called liberal society that we are backward and intolerant.' Alice Glenn hoped that 'we will not be foolish enough to throw away (the constitutional protection for the family) at the behest of individualistic liberals.' Fianna Fail's Noel Treacy criticised a pro-divorce speaker in the following terms: 'Listen ... he is speaking with his background and for his locality (an urban Dublin constituency). We (anti-divorce speakers) are speaking for all the people of this island, not wanting to legislate for any particular section.'

The ultimate nature of value-laden comments, measured accurately as corresponding to substantive rationality, is evident in the concluding remarks of Alice Glenn: '... some of us are wise enough to want to preserve what is good and has saved us ... I am concerned about the common good and the people of this nation.' The perception of values and the need to temper one's contemplation of them with a factual reliance featured in Fianna Fail's David Andrews' remarks. 'I am not denying my Catholicism but I am rejecting the notion that I as a

Catholic in this legislature should be required to legislate for Roman Catholics only. For that reason I endeavour to reflect in my approach to legislation the changing attitudes and beliefs amongst Irish people to moral and social issues.'

An examination of the rationale of the positions taken in the 1986 debate shows that Weber's fact-value scenario is identifiable. Views on marriage and divorce assist in interpreting change in fact-value conflict terms. The progress of the 'liberal agenda' lends itself to a Weberian analysis. This entails a look at how consistent attitudes relate to ways of life. A new attitude to divorce approved of by the legislature would promote a somewhat different way of life in Ireland. The possibility of terminating a marriage contract in a business-like fashion would be a rationalisation along formal lines - a response to the factual implications of a modern capitalist economy.

The perception is growing that social cohesion is under threat in the competitive society we live in. Individuals concerned with maintaining a cohesive force for community action are expected to put a rational case against the further erosion of traditional community values. In Irish society, the values associated with the existing constitutional protection of the traditional family unit are under threat. It is discernible from Weber's sociology that individuals will be regularly faced with situations where their beliefs and attitudes regarding how people behave may be compromised due to factual considerations. Politicians and people generally take no pleasure from the fact that many individuals in Ireland consider themselves to be separated and seek a legal acknowledgement of this fact. The dilemma for public representatives is whether these facts should be recognised and factual

action taken. When the government moves to formalise the situation encountered by separated persons, concerns will be expressed by those who feel that the tradition of the family and its special place in Irish society is being further eroded by actions associated with a rationality peculiar to the Western economic order. The proposed recognition of the legality of a second relationship will trigger further wide debate about the nature of the society we live in and what consistent attitudes and ways of life are most significant. It did so in 1986 when it was clear that there was a recognition of rationalised actions which were linked to the process of a de-traditionalising society ■

This article draws on the author's MA sociology thesis 'The Conflict of Rationalities: The Divorce Debate 1986', Maynooth College 1994.

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Tale of the century

There are three reasons for writing the history of *The Short Twentieth Century*. First, I lived through much of it. Secondly, I can look at it historically. There is both conflict and collaboration between writing from memory and writing as a historian.

In one way you find that what really happened does not agree with your memories. For instance, those of us old enough to have fought fascism in the 1930s thought we were mobilising successfully. In actual fact, there was very little mobilisation other than within the left until Hitler knocked all our heads together.

On the other hand there are times when memory and historical perspectives coincide. I can remember feeling, some time in the middle 1950s, that a new period was beginning with the rise of jeans and the beginning of rock and roll. It was around this time that I thought: 'I can plan ahead.' When I was brought up in central Europe, the only things Jews tried to plan for were having enough money to buy a ticket to another country and having a valid passport. This impression was historically correct.

The third reason for writing the history of the 20th century is that much of my life has been devoted to a hope that has faded both as a politics and as a cause – the communism initiated by the 1917 Russian Revolution. The question is not, what went wrong? The question is not even, could it have been different? The question is simply one of history.

Why was it that people of my generation believed that the old capitalist world was on the verge of

At a talk in London earlier this year ERIC HOBSBAWM spoke about some of the issues raised in his book *The Age of Extremes*

collapse; and that it was necessary, almost inevitable, to provide some alternative future?

The first thing to do was to try to stand back and emancipate oneself from having lived through a period of, effectively, religious warfare. It was a time when everybody saw the world as a choice between two mutually

‘The period of capitalist and communist alliance against fascism forms the hinge of the 20th century and was its decisive moment’

exclusive arrangements: capitalism and socialism. It is still very difficult for me to see it in any different way. But probably to someone in 30 or 40 years' time, the world will look like a whole range of systems within a continuum, stretching from a state-command economy, through a wide range of intermediate positions, to the extreme of a pure *laissez faire* economy.

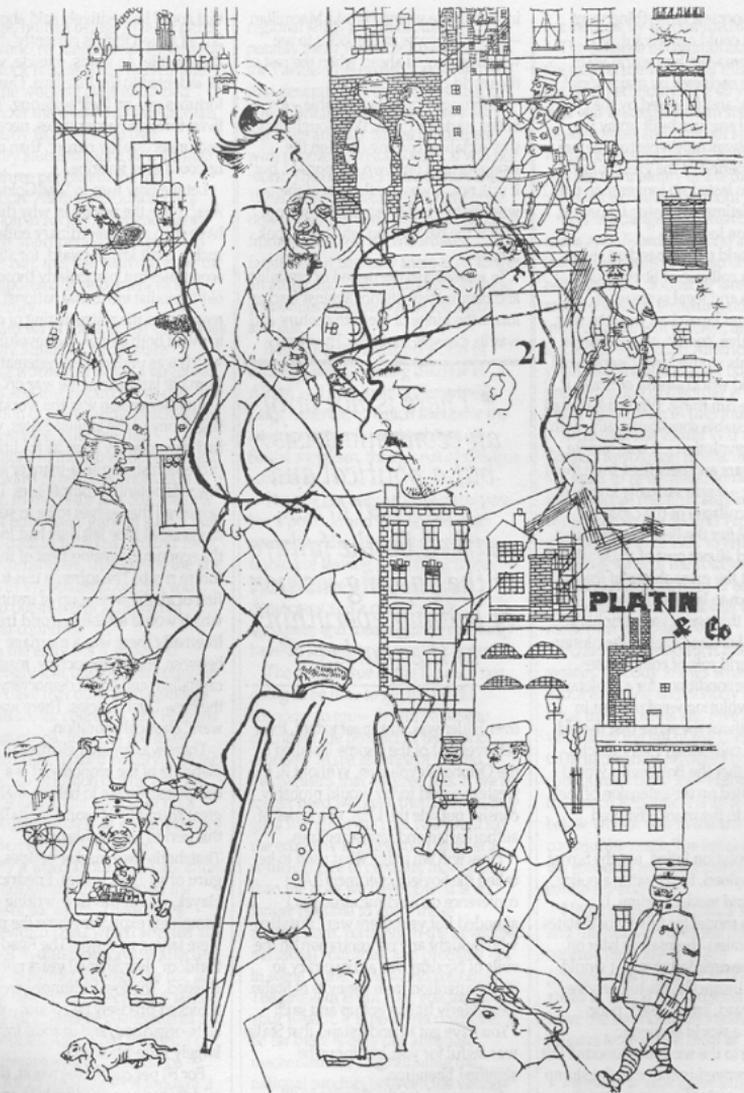
The main argument of my book is that in 1914 the society of 19th-century liberal-bourgeois capitalism did collapse. After that there were 30-odd years of what I have called 'The Age of Catastrophe'. After the Second World War, this liberal-bourgeois society was restructured, and entered a new phase of extraordinary expansion and change. This period, which roughly coincides with the late 1940s to the early 1970s, I call 'The Golden Age'.

It was certain western, advanced industrial countries that benefited most, but there were very few countries in which things did not improve. Even in the Soviet Union, probably the best time they ever had was the middle 1970s.

On the whole, a degree of optimism appeared possible. However, this broke in the early 1970s, and from then on we passed through what I call the 'crisis decades' or 'The Landslide'.

The third part of the book is concerned with this period, which takes us up to the present, and indeed into the future. At the end of the 1980s, the world was clearly in crisis. This was particularly obvious in the collapse of the socialist economies and societies. But this collapse coincided with what was the most serious crisis in the western capitalist economy since the 1930s (and in much of the third world it was more serious than that of the 1930s). At this turning point, I conclude the book.

Let me turn to the first of those periods, 'The Age of Catastrophe'. There is no disagreement among historians or anyone else that this was a period of catastrophe for capitalism and



'Cross-Section', drawing by George Grosz (1920)

liberal democracy. Everything went wrong that could conceivably go wrong. There were two world wars followed in each case by major social revolutions, and followed by the end of the colonial empires built up by the western powers only a century before. The entire period of the great colonial imperialism lasted no longer than one person's lifetime – Winston Churchill, to take a case in point.

In the world of independent states, there was a collapse of liberal political institutions and legal systems. If Germany and Japan had won the war, representative, constitutional, liberal governments would have disappeared from the old world almost entirely. It was a close-run thing. While the United States was stable constitutionally, with no risk of revolution – it was remote from the wars and benefited from them if anything – it was virtually knocked out by the collapse of the capitalist economy. After the First World War it represented 40 per cent of the world's output, but the great slump of the 1930s took it down to less than a third.

Without this age of catastrophe, you cannot explain the October Revolution, and the world role of communism. None of the conditions for a proletarian socialist revolution were present in Russia. Without the sense that the old world was collapsing, I very much doubt whether the Bolsheviks would have gambled on the extension of their revolution to the more advanced countries.

That revolution failed, but the Soviet Union remained. In adopting a policy of ultra-rapid modernisation, it provided a model for third world states which liberated themselves later on. Without the dreaded slump it would have been inconceivable to perceive this backward, improvised, poor country as a world economic alternative to the western economy. But the USSR proved immune to the slump which laid waste the economy of the west. Liberals and conservatives –

including the young Harold Macmillan – toured Moscow in the 1930s to see why they forged ahead when the rest of the world crashed.

Planning became fashionable – even Hitler started to plan. We thought this was socialism coming through the rising force of our own supporters, but it was not. It was a reflection of the weakness of capitalism in this period. This is the paradox on which the book is based.

In many ways the period of capitalist and communist alliance against fascism forms the hinge of the 20th century and was its decisive moment. The victory

There is not only an economic crisis, but a political and ideological crisis, marked by the failure of the passing fashion of leaving everything to the market.

over Hitler was, to a great extent, the achievement of the regime installed by the October Revolution. Without it, the western world today would probably consist, outside the USA, of a series of authoritarian and fascist regimes.

How will we judge what used to be called the Soviet experiment? At a conference on wartime atrocities I attended last year there were Russians who thought any concentration on the evils of Nazism was a conspiracy to divert attention from the evils of Stalin. One elderly Italian got up and said: "You have got to understand that Stalin was awful for you, but for us he signified liberation."

Sooner or later the Russians will conclude that there was rather more

that could be positively said about the Soviet Union than is currently fashionable. As for us, outside, we are all indebted to the Russians. Our good fortunes rest on their suffering. They lived through harder times, necessarily and unnecessarily harder, than most of us could ever imagine.

Let me now turn to 'The Golden Age'. Here the puzzle is: why did we have such an extraordinary outburst, such a great leap forward, for all economies but particularly those of the old capitalist industrial nations? One reason was the restructuring of capital to avoid both slump and revolution, which was undertaken systematically from the last year of the war on.

Another reason was the world hegemony of the United States, which had moved away from its traditional protectionist, dog-in-a-manger attitude towards potential competitors. They perceived themselves to be in such danger that they felt they had to assist the economic development of their future rivals. The formula this took was first of all the setting up of institutions which would establish world free trade. Internally there was a marriage between liberal democracy, market capitalism and social democracy – or the New Deal policies. There was, as it were, class collaboration.

There was another element – planning of the economy. It is a complete mistake to believe that the great triumphs of world capitalism in this period were achieved by Thatcherite free market policies. The guru of all Thatcherites, Friedrich von Hayek, was at this time writing dark pamphlets explaining how the policies were taking us down 'The Road to Serfdom'. For 30 or 40 years nobody listened. The great triumphs were achieved precisely by control – partly state-organised, and in some instances largely state-planned.

For 80 per cent of the world, the middle age came suddenly to an end in the 1950s. For the first time since the

stone age, human beings in large parts of the world no longer lived by farming or livestock raising. They moved into cities. The working class expanded throughout the world and intellectuals grew vastly in number so that university students alone now formed two or three per cent of the total population. All this, amounting to a revolution in society, happened in a relatively short period of 25 years. In the long run, this will turn out to be the most important development of the 20th century.

The success of the socialist economies was more limited. Central state planning works best when a target can be fixed and met regardless of cost. The restoration of the wartime destruction is one instance; building the foundations of industrial development in backward agrarian economies is another. In the 1940s and 50s, the new socialist economies grew at such a rate that Macmillan believed, around 1960, as did Khrushchev, that maybe the rate of growth in socialist countries was going to outstrip that achieved in capitalist countries.

From the early 60s it appeared increasingly that the socialist countries did not have that built-in dynamism. But even so, for countries like Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, this was the most advanced time in their history. The fact that the Soviet Union briefly beat the United States in the highest of high technologies, namely in space, cannot be written out of the scenario.

Finally a word about 'The Landslide'. This is not simply to be seen as the collapse of socialism. There was a general world crisis which affected all countries in different ways. It affected capitalism mainly through the rise of the new transnational economy largely outside the control of governments and their policies. All the old problems of mass unemployment and slumps – which for 25 years the west thought it had got rid of – reappeared.

At the same time there were massive

regional shifts within capitalism, notably away from the Atlantic and to the Pacific. This caused a crisis in the first generation of industrial states, of which Britain is one. We try to lower our costs and our wages to compete with people in Sri Lanka and it will not work. The net effect is that, from the 1970s onwards, real wages have gone down. This has been offset by changing from one-worker to two-worker families. But basically there is no longer an automatic upward draught in these economies as there was in the 1950s and 60s.

It has affected the third world in different ways, creating disaster in Africa, and economic upheavals in Latin America, of which Mexico is the latest example. It cut the throat of Soviet socialism, though not of Chinese socialism.

There is not only an economic crisis, but a political and ideological crisis, marked by the failure of the passing fashion of leaving everything to the market. There is crisis in social democracy and a crisis in state socialism, and most of us do not really have an adequate alternative approach.

The major issue in the future is not going to be how to get the world economy to grow. It will be how to distribute the product of the world economy in the absence of the old mechanisms that ensured this. If we no longer need workers, then how do they get a living? In the past you could say the economy is going to expand at a sufficient rate to generate more jobs than the ones we have now. It is no longer possible to make those assumptions, certainly in the developed industrial countries, and probably not in some of the third world countries. The problem is not how you increase your wealth, it is how you distribute it. So far there is only one adequate mechanism for redistributing the national product between the various regions, and that is the state, or other forms of public body. It cannot and will

not be done by market forces.

The collapse of communism is really the most acute version of this crisis in the world economy. The 40 years of the cold war created a certain stability for all economies and political systems. With the removal of this zimmer frame, you see the inability of the countries involved to manage without it.

This is a dangerous situation. The chaos and disorder we find at present, the armed conflicts and so on, will not be permanent. Sooner or later a relatively stable structure, domestic or international, will emerge, as happened in Central and South America 30 or 40 years after independence. But the present period of disorder is likely to be much longer than in previous times.

After the First World War and the Russian Revolution it took maybe six to ten years to re-establish some international stability, although it did not last. After the Second World War it took from 1945 to 1952 to establish the firm structures of the cold war, and the war-ravaged economies of east and west restored prewar levels within little more than five years.

Today there is no such international system. Nobody knows what to do about anything and nobody knows what the problems are. Five and a half years after the fall of the Berlin wall, GDP in the most favoured post-communist countries – Hungary and the Czech Republic – is 20 to 25 per cent below what it was in the last communist years. The breakdown of the economy in the former Soviet Union continues unabated.

Nothing about the future is certain and the situation is all the more grave because there are very few governments prepared to do anything about it. This is the situation as we leave the second millennium and prepare to enter the third ■

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Chirac's French lessons

After the Cannes summit, French Euro-observers nostalgically looked back to 1961 and De Gaulle's plan for Europe. Harold Macmillan had commented that 'when De Gaulle speaks of Europe, it's really France he's thinking of'.

This is an apt introduction to Jacques Chirac, recently elected fifth president of France's Fifth Republic. Losing no time in reaffirming his loyalty to the Gaullist legacy, his aim is to disassociate his new administration from the past 14 years of Socialist rule.

The timing of his decision to 'end' nuclear testing – after the final eight blasts – exposed it as a political muscle-flexing exercise, coming as it did on the eve of the G7 summit. More significantly, the announcement was made as France still held the presidency of the European Council, and less than a year before the review of the Maastricht Treaty. De Gaulle pulled out of Nato because France was self-sufficient in military terms, and to this day her defence is based on nuclear dissuasion. Constantly aware of a formidable military-industrial lobby, Chirac's assertiveness gives a clear indication of the shape of things to come in the upcoming debate on Europe's future common foreign and security policy.

Chirac has a tough task ahead of him as France is experiencing its most serious slump since the late Fifties. France is a self-absorbed nation, and the current malaise is partially explained by the identity crisis the French (in 'ethnic' terms) are going through. Having being convinced, century after century, that they were a great nation, once the second biggest colonial power in the history of mankind, the current implosion of what many thought was a homogenous

Despite the outcome of the presidential election and the alarming vote for the National Front, SYLVIE BATT sees signs of hope in France

society has finally been recognised as a fact of life.

The results of both the presidential and the local elections give serious cause for concern as the extreme-right National Front consolidated the steady gains of previous elections, with an alarming 15 per cent of the poll. In both elections, the first round showed a divided and volatile electorate, whereas the second conformed to more traditional patterns. The results of the second presidential round were very similar to those of May 1981 which had seen Mitterand elected. Traditional patterns hadn't budged: 69 per cent of voters on the Riviera (mostly comfortable pensioners) backed Chirac, and 68 per cent of those in the hometown of Jean Jaurès, the father of French socialism, opted for Jospin.

Workers, wage-earners, the unemployed and teachers rallied behind the socialist candidate. Chirac was the obvious choice for the managerial class, wealthy pensioners, farmers, the professions, and employers. One can say that the left voted for the left, the right for the right. The only exception were the young, who this time round leaned towards the right. The Mitterand generation chose Chirac, much in the same way the Giscard generation had chosen Mitterand.

The French are coming to grips with the painful reality that the National Front is now firmly rooted in political life. The absence of proportional

representation has so far prevented any of their candidates from winning seats in the National Parliament, but they are now a force to be reckoned with at local level. The strong network of NF councillors means a voice in Senate elections, posing a major challenge for the mainstream 'establishment parties'.

While it is to be welcomed that 'Republican' Fronts (Left/Moderate Right alliances in the second round), where they were offered to voters, did succeed in blocking the far-right, the potential short-term impact of NF councillors and mayors bears a closer look. Because of the considerable executive powers of French mayors and local authorities, the extreme-right is empowered to take major decisions, hitting at the very heart of France's institutions based on human rights. Many NF councillors have, shrewdly and effectively, demonstrated over the past ten years their ability to integrate into the lives of their local communities and leave their obnoxious party slogans outside the council chambers.

Immediate reaction to the NF's gains focused on the extensive cultural events scheduled every summer around the South of France, with performers announcing boycotts of festivals located in towns with a NF mayor, including Orange with its Roman amphitheatre. The director of the world-renowned municipal ballet of Toulon resigned, refusing to take his troupe on world tours in honour of a city led by the extreme-right. Referring to the choreographer's Albanian parentage, Le Pen quickly retorted that if he wasn't happy he should be given a one-way ticket back to Tirana.

The NF's commitment to apply 'national preference' in administrative decisions, i.e. preferential treatment for French citizens, is worrying. Mayors

wield considerable powers. They act as executors of national laws, ranging from electoral procedure to school registration. Overseeing the local police force, they may initiate inquests. A widespread fear applies to the registration of immigrant children in pre-school or primary schools, which mayors could theoretically block (and did in the famous Montfermeil case). Though technically impossible to stop registration on 'ethnic' grounds, the mayor who holds the municipality's purse strings, can juggle with class numbers and teacher/pupil ratios. So far such decisions have been reversed by the local Prefect, but their symbolism is not lost on the NF. Other burning issues are social housing allocations, increased evictions and mixed marriages, the latter an obvious sticking point as it is the mayor who officiates at the ceremony.

The local elections results, coming so closely behind the presidential one, will sharpen the thinking of the left and the moderate right. Weighing up the causes of the NF's success are not as complex as assessing their potential long-term impact. French public life, as in Italy, has over the past few years suffered from a constant drip of corruption scandals involving dubious party fund-raising, public building contracts, and in Paris a social housing scandal which led to the Gaullists losing control of six districts.

Disenchantment with party politics is widespread, and Le Pen's description of himself as leader of the opposition paid off. Many voters choose the NF as a rejection of the 'classical' right. In fact the National Front has several electorates, and not a unified, committed one. Apart from a genuinely (and unashamed) neo-fascist core, there are at least three distinct sources of support.

First, the 'antis', rejecting both the right, the left and the establishment, not to mention Europe, taxes etc. Next, a more formidable and clearly



reactionary electorate dreaming of law and order, a strong nation-state, obsessed by insecurity and loose morals (France's AIDS victims have nothing but themselves to blame, etc.) and openly revolted by the left and anything smacking of it (trade unions and the French Revolution). They live comfortably in the conservative and prosperous strongholds of Alsace or Nice, where unemployment and hunger are relatively rare.

The third type of NF voters are those left behind by the recession. Blue-collar workers disillusioned by social fragmentation, miners or steel workers dragged from one re-conversion scheme to another. Their vote is a vote of despair, and a condemnation of the failures of previous administrations.

The left, however, has not lost heart. Many socialists are making a serious effort at distancing themselves from social-democracy, and the communists are holding their own under their serious and affable new leader, Robert Hue. There is an evident desire for change at all levels in the entire communist party machinery. The party still holds a respectable number of seats at national, regional, local and European level, and a younger

generation of reformists with proven track records is slowly gaining influence. Despite stubborn attachment to an outdated analysis of society's ills, the PCF seems to want to change. They have consistently kept issues such as exclusion and homelessness on top of their agenda, and intend to focus on this during the Intergovernmental Conference.

At regional and municipal level, many communists have demonstrated remarkable managerial skills and have earned the respect of fellow councillors. One shining example is the municipality of Saint-Denis which secured the 1998 World Cup Stadium (France's first 80,000 seater) on an employment and wealth-creation platform. Saint-Denis, once a relatively prosperous industrial suburb just north of Paris, now has up to three generations of unemployed. Close to half its population are of immigrant stock, and its high-rise council blocks replace the sprawling shanty town which even France's thirtysomethings can remember.

After years of intense negotiations, *Le Grand Stade* is well on schedule, but the real victory lies in the local employment and training commitments linked to its construction. Local residents have been consulted at every step of the process, and will benefit from preferential ticketing. The sporting facilities will be open to local clubs, and the region's infrastructure will be greatly enhanced. This includes major improvements in public transport and the covering of two major motorways.

The willingness to co-operate and implement constructive policies gives reason to believe that France's progressive decision-makers, not yet mobilised into a political force, are more than capable of dulling the impact of their country's regrettable but predictable shift towards reactionary politics ■

Sandinista divisions

In *Times Change* 3 Steve Munby provided an informative survey of the Latin American left which referred to the risk of splits in the FMLN in El Salvador and the FSLN in Nicaragua. Since then these splits have become a reality. In El Salvador Joaquin Villalobos announced the departure of the ERP (Revolutionary Army of the Poor) from the FMLN and its desire to join with other 'Social Democratic tendencies' to form a new political party. He justified the departure by claiming that the other factions in the FMLN 'continue in their Marxist-Leninist definitions or maintain an ambiguity in their identity'.

The split in Nicaragua was clearly manifested at a meeting of 600 or so Sandinistas in the University of Central America in Managua last September. It had been publicly organised by Sergio Ramirez and four of the fifteen members of the ruling body of the FSLN, the National Directorate who had advertised it under the title of Movement for the Renovation of Sandinismo. Ramirez had been the FSLN's vice-presidential candidate in the 1990 elections which, to their collective astonishment, the FSLN had lost. He was at the time of the meeting the leader of the Sandinista deputies in the National Assembly and it was in this capacity that he had become involved in a bitter dispute with former president and secretary general of the FSLN, Daniel Ortega. Another key participant and National Directorate member was Dora Maria Tellez, a key military leader in the insurrection, Minister of Health, and since 1990 one of the most articulate critics of the 'vanguardist' tradition of the FSLN.

The immediate issue was the decision of Ramirez and a majority of the

HENRY PATTERSON outlines the background to the divisions which have emerged in the ranks of Nicaragua's Sandinistas

Sandinista deputies to support the introduction of a major raft of constitutional reforms. This decision contravened the statutes of the FSLN as it went against the wishes of the Sandinista Assembly which is supposed to be the ultimate decision-making body in the FSLN between its Congresses. However, supporters of the Ramirez position were able to point out that for the best part of a year the leadership of the FSLN had been committed to a process of negotiation with the government and a range of the parties that supported it which focused on the need to reform the 1987 constitution. The political purpose of the negotiations had been to create the conditions to break a political logjam which had existed since the autumn of 1992 and which made any progress of dealing with the country's massive economic and social problems impossible.

However, the 1987 constitution provided for a heavily executive-dominated form of political process and the reforms which threatened to undermine this were not welcome to the president, Violetta Chamorro and her chief minister, Antonio Lacayo. From Chamorro's accession to power in April 1990 to the end of 1993, the country had been run by an informal system of consultation with a section of the Sandinista elite centred on Humberto Ortega, the head of the armed forces. Called 'co-government'

by its critics it reflected the fact that the FSLN with over 40 per cent of the poll in 1990 was by far the largest and best organised party in the country- the victorious UNO coalition was made up of 14 parties many of them composed of a fractionalised elite with little organisational reach. Sandinistas also controlled important unions and peasant organisations and most crucially still controlled the armed forces and police.

Chamorro and Lacayo signed up to a Transition Protocol in March 1990 which promised to respect the Sandinista agrarian reform and their control of the armed forces in return for a commitment by Humberto Ortega that the army would behave in a non-partisan way and respect the mandate of the new government. Heralded at the time as an emblem of national unity after almost a decade of civil war, the Protocol soon became another source of fierce debate and division within both the UNO coalition and the FSLN.

For the Sandinistas it served to protect surviving pockets of influence in the bureaucracy, judiciary and the armed forces. But it also led to their becoming tied at an elite level to the Chamorro government- on the basis of the argument that the alternative was an even more reactionary regime. For their supporters however, there was little or no benefit as the government implemented an orthodox neo-liberal prescription which on top of the legacy of war and the Sandinista's own mismanagement produced massive increases in unemployment, poverty and social disintegration.

Disquiet with the leadership's strategy coupled with the loss of revolutionary mystique produced by *la pinata* the widespread looting of state

resources by middle and high level Sandinistas in the months between the election and Chamorro's accession has produced an almost continuous process of internal argument and conflict since a dazed party began to try and come to terms with the loss of power.

The faction led by Ramirez represents those most willing to make an auto-critique of the nature of the FSLN as a political-military formation and the top-down *Verticalista* style of politics and government this gave rise to when in power. Its opponents in the FSLN and some academic critics claim that it represents a 'social democratic' dilution of Sandinismo which reflects the 'bourgeois' class origins of many of its leading members who moved to the left in the 1970s but now simply have adjusted to a new world order where the US is the preponderant power and socialism is seen to have been defeated.

At an extraordinary party congress in May 1994 supporters of Ramirez's 'Majorities' tendency lost out badly to the 'Democratic Left' or 'Orthodox' tendency led by Daniel Ortega and Ramirez lost his place on the National Directorate. The Democratic Left emphasised the need to lead the struggles of the most oppressed against the government's economic and social policies, and adopted an increasingly belligerent tone in their public pronouncements. Thus it refused to return to power. Yet, the DL has failed to produce anything amounting to an alternative economic project to that of the government and for all its rhetoric of class struggle and taking the side of the most oppressed, some of its key members have been supporters of 'co-government' and others have been badly tarnished by corruption scandals.

The recent rapid descent into factionalisation may well be related to the decision of Chamorro - under intense US pressure - in September 1993 to announce the retirement of Humberto Ortega. It was Ortega,



Dora María Tellez

without doubt the most politically astute of the Sandinista leadership, who designed the strategy which allowed the *Frente* to take the leadership of the mass anti-Somoza insurrection in 1978-9. Although formally not a member of the National Directorate since July 1991, he remained a powerful and decisive influence behind the scenes. Committed to cohabitation with Chamorro, he had in his brother the leader with most support amongst the unions and the urban masses. Daniel's more incendiary rhetoric was seen as a means of pressuring the government to respect the *Frente's* quota of power in the state. As one Sandinista critic has noted this approach elevated a tactic into a strategy: everything was done to maintain *Frente* positions of influence in the state without a consideration of the

purposes for which this influence would be brought to bear.¹ As the government's economic policies decimated the public sector - the source of the *Frente's* most organised support - and reduced the size of the army drastically as well as using it increasingly to repress social unrest, the core 'strategy' followed since the defeat disintegrated.

Although there may well be many 'social democrats' in the Ramirez faction, it includes many of the most innovative and perceptive thinkers in the FSLN - including Carlos Fernando Chamorro, sacked from his position as editor of *Barricada* for supporting Ramirez. The fact is that the term is used as an epithet of abuse not a category of analysis. Neither faction has gone far in the development of a serious economic strategy. In January of this year, after a bitter internal battle, Ramirez resigned from the FSLN and his Movement for the Renovation of Sandinismo has become an independent party. Daniel Ortega now leads an FSLN shorn some of its most articulate and politically intelligent members. The split in the FSLN means that the chances of that organisation reinvigorating itself in time to face the challenge of Arnaldo Aleman, the right-wing populist mayor of Managua in next year's presidential election are slim. The split will also make it all the more difficult for the FSLN to carry through the radical reassessment of ideology and strategy being urged by some of the major voices on the Latin American left. ² ■

¹ Aldo Diaz Lacayo, *El Frente Sandinista despues de la derrota electoral*, (Caracas, 1994)

² See the very important book by Jorge Castenada, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War* (New York, 1995). Available in Ireland and UK from the Latin American Bureau, 1 Amwell Street, London. EC1R 1UL

Revisionism and The Great Famine

A recent newspaper headline had a Minister of State denying that the Government was trying to sanitise the commemoration of the Great Famine for fear of harming the peace process. Interpreting the past remains a live issue in Irish public life and, this year, public debate on the Great Famine has thrown into sharp focus some of the key themes which have informed the writing of Irish history.

In the past twenty years Irish history has been written in the context of a debate on the merits of historical revisionism. Revisionism in the Irish context has meant different things to different people. Indeed Roy Foster, the doyen of revisionists, has gone so far as to say that we are all revisionists now. And in a sense, but only in a sense, he is correct. In a recently published series of essays entitled *Interpreting Irish History*, the Trinity College historian Dr. Ciaran Brady has traced the origins of Irish historical revisionism to the 1930s and to the emergence of a cadre of professional historians led by T.W. Moody and R.D. Edwards.

Their project was to write a more scholarly history, to comb the sources, apply modern research methods and, significantly, to publish a body of work which would be of immediate educational value to the reading public. Alongside this was the aim of writing a history which confronted the old myths. Invariably the myths which were confronted were the myths of nationalist historiography which held sway in the early decades of the century and which permeated school

PETER CONNELL takes issue with Roy Foster's treatment of the Famine

history books into the 1960s.

This was a history peopled by heroes and shaped by certainties. Larger than life figures such as 'Red' Hugh O'Neill and Hugh O'Donnell, Patrick Sarsfield, Robert Emmet, Wolfe Tone, Daniel O'Connell and Padraic Pearse embodied the struggle for national independence against foreign oppression. But it was also a history which, in the context of decreasing tolerance of pluralism and growing censorship in the 1930s, contributed to a more sectarian public discourse. Viewed in this way the emergence of a revisionist school was a progressive development and, as Brady points out, had much in common with the project Sean O'Faolain, a radical republican, set out for himself in *The Bell*.

How fares the revisionist project thus far? This is a big question for a short article but I would argue that in one key respect - its capacity to engage in and influence public discourse - it has failed. The nature of its failure is emphasised by the current public debate around the Famine.

Roy Foster's survey *Modern Ireland, 1660-1972* is regarded as the classic revisionist survey and has been praised as a model of dispassionate and lucid writing. But it has also been widely criticised as being selective and evasive, promoting ambiguity and uncertainty to undermine the broad sweeps and

continuities of Irish history. Turning to the Famine we find that only twelve of the six hundred pages which constitute his survey are given over exclusively to discussion of it. Within this section he quotes a senior economic historian as stating that we simply don't know what happened during the Famine thereby eliminating the possibility of making any definitive statements about the most traumatic event in Irish history in the past 250 years (probably since the previous great famine of the 1740's). He claims that historians who have viewed the famine as a truly cataclysmic event also view it as a watershed in Irish history - a view which he then easily refutes. The problem is that most economic historians, whether revisionist or not, now regard 1815 as a more pivotal year in Irish history. Foster sets up a straw man right at the beginning of his deliberation on the Famine and, having dismissed him, assumes to have gained the confidence of his reader as a guide through the rest of the section. He proceeds to argue that the Poor Law system was simply overwhelmed by the sheer weight of numbers seeking assistance during 1846-49. Government policy is described as being ill-founded.

Unlike other sections in the book where Foster continually explores the nature of the relationship between Britain and Ireland, his analysis of the Famine and its causes sheds no light on this key theme. One million people died from starvation and disease in what was after the Act of Union in 1800, probably the richest country in the world. Some historians have asked the pertinent question as to whether the



The Famine led to high levels of emigration

British Government would have acted differently had famine conditions occurred in Cornwall and Devon. The answer is obvious but its implications are ones which the revisionists care not to address.

This year public interest in the Famine is phenomenal. The Thomas Davis lecture series published by RTE under the title *The Great Irish Famine* has been in the top sellers list for months. Personal experience suggests that local history groups are very active in holding field trips and researching local

sources. Here and there the folk memory of the Famine is still alive. There is a widespread demand for information about workhouses, pauper's graves, soup kitchens and the role of local landlords. This interest cannot possibly be satisfied by the revisionists version of the Irish Famine which, while rightly undermining some of the old nationalists myths, entirely fails to find sympathy with the trauma of the Famine. The public need appears to be one which seeks to identify with the trauma and to find

some meaning in it. The tone struck by the revisionists is one which blurs the Famine's impact, promotes uncertainty and ambiguity and highlights the accidental at the expense of the causal.

The centenary of the Famine in 1945 provoked little public interest or debate. In 1995 it appears that we are keen to confront the meaning of the Famine. It is the business of our historians to facilitate that engagement, to challenge but not to deride, to educate but not to preach ■

Sites of commemoration

Washington's centrality to the 'peace process' mirrors the extent to which artistic and cultural life in Ireland is a function of cultural politics in North America. Field Day's controversial *Anthology of Irish Writing* was American financed and had American academia, where its overall editor now resides, as its principal market - something realised by its feminist critics, whose campaign against the anthology was directed at universities in the United States. Plays by Field Day's founder are deemed to be successes or failures not in Derry or Dublin, but on Broadway. Ulster's stoutest cultural defender, John Wilson Foster, writes his critical works in Vancouver. The most influential purveyor of images of modern Ireland, Neil Jordan, following the unanswerable logic of the Hollywood commercial tradition, has explained Irish political violence in terms of a romantic psychosis rather than politics and, by way of assistance, re-named his film, *Angel as Danny Boy* for North America distribution. Hollywood's representation of Ireland as simultaneously the locus of innocence and terror is the same combination of allurements smiling from the photographs of Gerry the Belfast barman chatting to his Hollywood hostesses.

As the industries which Ireland never really had depart for Asia and Latin America and as environmental awareness makes the siting here of 'dirty' industries more problematic - what party would now seek to win seats through the offer of a Russian metal smelter? - 'heritage' and

**PROINSIAS O DRISCEOIL
argues that commemoration is
likely to become a primary site
of cultural politics**

'tourism', individually and in combination, have become key terms of economic strategy. In North America, heritage' fades easily into 'ethnic' and

‘The engineering and promotion of a version of the Famine deriving principally from John Mitchel is likely to be in its simplistic allure as irresistible to the tourist as it has been to the nationalist.’

in a society where religion, occupation, address and political affiliation have historically been determined by ethnic membership, the marketing of ethnicity has made packaged and decontaminated versions of history as fungible as Fungie. Among the most successful economic groups, and those thus most likely to travel, ethnicity has maintained its subjective appeal not as

socially defining but as a measure of disabilities successfully fought and proof of a cultural past and depth which present lifestyles may appear to belie.

Which brings us to the Famine centenary (and a half). Ignoring the massive proportion of Irish emigrants who were Protestant and, as was so discreetly achieved, those Ballyporeen tenants who 'turned' after emigration, nationalist ideologues and tourism promoters have in the Famine commemoration an unsurpassable opportunity to combine in 're-living' (and in selling) a Catholic Irish trauma which transferred to North America and which can capably match the *weltschmerz* of any ethnic competitor. If, as Cormac O Grada's wonderful short book, *An Drochshaol - Bealoideas agus Amhrain* demonstrates, the limited folk memory of the famine is marked more by religious fatalism than by nationalist recrimination, then the engineering and promotion of a version of the Famine deriving principally from John Mitchel is likely to be in its simplistic allure as irresistible to the tourist as it has been to the nationalist.

Those doubting the opportunism and knowingsness which threaten to engulf the Famine commemoration should refer to Jim Jackson's essay, 'Famine Diary - the Making of a Best Seller' (*Irish Review*, no. 11). Here Jackson demonstrates that *Famine Diary - Journey to a New World*, an Irish best seller ostensibly written in 1847 by Gerard Keegan, a Sligo schoolteacher and New World emigrant, actually began life as one of many stories



published in 1895 by Robert Sellars, a Scots Canadian and Protestant militant. The story was re-written for Canadian publication in 1882 by James J. Mangan, a de la Salle brother who added a number of characters as well as providing, with the assistance of John Mitchel, a completely new account of conditions in Sligo as Keegan left. The Irish edition was a reissue of Mangan's version but derives its supposed authenticity from being 'packaged in such a way as to foster the impression that the text is some long-lost historical document'. Jackson attributes the success of the book as having 'as much to do with the current state of historiography as with the effects of any media hype'. Recent historians of the Famine have, he says, 'attracted considerable criticism from certain quarters and been denounced as anti-nationalist revisionists in so far as they appear to explain away the Famine in a welter of graphs and statistics and to exonerate the British of any wrong doing'.

The enthusiasm with which both American and Irish supporters of constitutional Irish nationalism have embraced yesterday's gunmen has gone well beyond the need to achieve strategic incorporation and belies the belief that what

Desmond Fennell terms, 'the anti-nationalist revision of modern Irish history' had altered substantially the thinking of establishment politicians. Historically, the retrospective mandate has offered post-factum justification for the key events of republican history and commemorations, notably in 1898 and 1966, have sanctified their authenticity. But such events are matters of present not of past politics and as anniversaries as diverse as those of the '98 risings, Young Ireland and the Orange Order fall due, commemoration is likely to become a primary site of cultural politics.

The staging of the past in 1898 and 1966 utilised the media then available - statutory and newspaper in 1898, television in 1966 - to create an imagery which both invoked and defined, utilising a limitive symbolism to define those belonging and identify those excluded by reason of religion, lifestyle or national affiliation. What is required of those commemorations now falling due is not the 'amnesia through consumption' of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* but the cultivation of a culture of conflict, an acknowledgement that, as between Jews and Christians, conflict is not only a reality but can be expedient and positive in circumstances where ultimate resolution would entail the extermination or total surrender of one side. If an appreciation of a constellation of cultures, equal in their validity and acknowledging the reality of conflict, can be cultivated through the honest contemplation of past events, then the commemorations held will be worthwhile. Political and commercial opportunism and the refusal to engage with history, however, continue to menace. Of only one thing can we be certain: both the events selected and the manner of their commemoration will be matters more of present politics than of past events ■

Straight talking

You've referred to English literature as an element in the colonising process. Could you elaborate?

In the English-speaking world generally we have to distinguish between English Literature and English-language based literature. We can speak of at least two literatures in Scotland: the Gaelic and the English-language based.

The language of a culture is not separate from it. The dominant culture of England is that of the upper middle class. Everything is relative to it. In Scotland (as in England itself) if you want to "get on in the world" you assimilate the values of this culture. You are taught the "proper" way of conducting yourself in society; how to speak properly, how to dress properly; how to respond to art properly, and so on. This is reinforced by the various institutions; crucially, the legal and education systems.

In Scottish schools our children are more or less taught to be upper middle class English. Of course they never quite succeed. In 1994 a teenage youth was jailed in Scotland for contempt of court; he persisted in saying 'aye' instead of 'yes'. The majority of Scottish children leave school regarding themselves as failures, knowing that their culture is third-rate, knowing that their language is debased.

This kind of inductive process is an essential aspect of colonisation. Indigenous peoples are taught their own inferiority.

Occasionally they are taught that

'Without recourse freely to the language there is no freedom of literary expression.' PADDY GILLAN interviewed the writer JAMES KELMAN

they don't exist.

At the present time all English-language based literatures are evaluated by the criteria of English Literature. Writers begin from an upper middle class English voice; they have to learn how not to use it.

'It is difficult for the dominant elite to conceive of the Mob as composed of individual human beings - even worse, thinking beings!'

If not they cannot hope to reach within the life of their own culture; they remain on the outside, sociologists or anthropologists, doomed to observe.

Without the language of the culture the culture doesn't exist.

Your success in The Booker Prize outraged sections of the literary establishment. What is about your

work that prompts such hostility?

I suppose I was not grateful enough; not content with taking their prize I had the impudence to make them a statement. On the whole the literary establishment is not outraged by my work. They found it difficult at first. This is because they define and evaluate all literature by the criteria of English Literature. This was seen at base level during the 1984 Booker Prize shenanigans when the committee chairperson (Richard Cobb) scoffed at my novel *The Bus conductor Hynes*, it was 'not even written in English'!

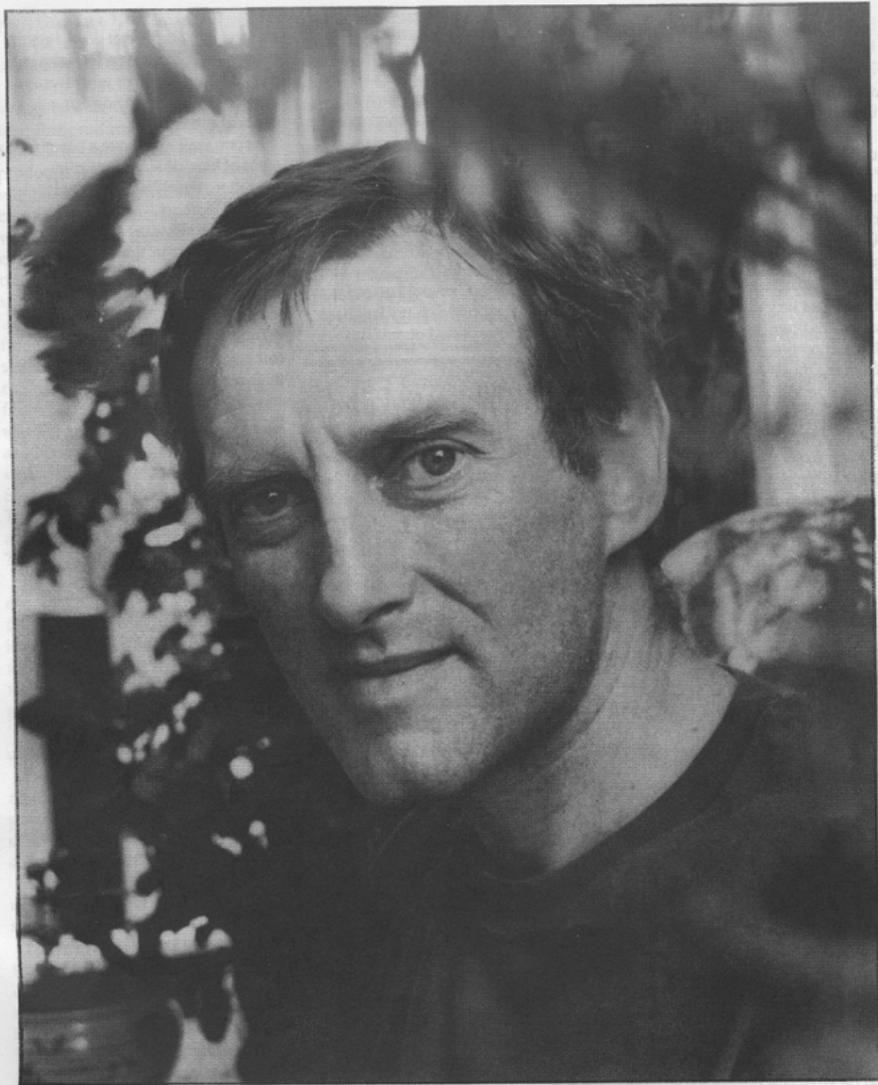
Nowadays when the literary establishment is favourable to the work of writers like myself they tend to view it as 'European', the de-colonisation context doesn't enter the equation.

In English Literature there is the Mob, The Uncouth Rabble, The Great Unwashed, etc. It is difficult for the dominant elite to conceive of the Mob as composed of individual human beings - even worse, thinking beings!

Maybe they find my work peopled by the Mob. Not only do these people occupy roles, they exist as participating individuals. The dominant elite perceive this as threatening, even in fiction.

What was the response of the Scottish establishment to your work?

In Scotland artists generally are ranked as volunteer workers on behalf of the tourist industry. You find the fictions of writers like myself being denounced as detrimental to the national 'image'. We are said to



James Kelman

be bad for Scotland (i.e. bad for business); not only do we frighten off holidaymakers from overseas, we scare away potential foreign investment.

Our fiction is frequently condemned as being 'unrepresentative', bearing no relation to reality. Michael Kelly, one of the ousted controllers of Glasgow Celtic football club, was moved to write to *The Scotsman* newspaper that he hadn't read my novel but from what he gathered the language I used was not fit for the page, being the sort of thing one could hear daily from the mouths of 'plumbers and taxi-drivers'. Kelly is, of course, a prominent Labour Party member, a former Lord Provost of Glasgow.

We are often advised to choose other subjects, that there is far too much concentration on 'so-called urban realism', that we write as though only working class people exist, that there is neither breadth nor diversity in our work, there is no richness, no quality of life, that what we write about only depresses people, etc. Some say we are an embarrassment, that we give Scotland a 'showing up'. I've been described as a 'bad influence' on younger writers. At least one academic is especially outraged, he spends time attempting to prove I'm a charlatan.

How does censorship affect writers and writing?

Censorship and suppression take place all the time in the national media. Over the years there must have been many writers who gave up trying to 'tailor' their work for television, radio and film. The writers who survive are either third-rate to begin with or else the nature of the compromises asked of them obliges them to become third-rate. Poetry and prose fiction remain the outposts of literary freedom. But it would be a mistake to take this freedom for

granted. There have been a few attempts to suppress the work of some contemporary writers (including myself) from such as school libraries. It happened recently in Renfrew District.

But the best method is to induce repression and self-censorship.

Obviously if I accepted an offer to write for an ordinary newspaper, for radio, television, or for film, I would be 'tactful'; I would write something 'suitable': nobody would go so far as to advise me to 'watch my language', it would be expected of me. This is

“Censorship and suppression take place all the time in the national media”

the situation for all writers in these U.K. and Irish media outlets. It is one glaringly obvious reason (but never publicly acknowledged) why so few genuine writers are involved in them.

It is crucial to understand what the effects of 'ordinary' censorship actually are. I refer of course to the continued assault, to a lesser or greater extent, on terms like 'fuck', 'cunt', 'shit', 'bastard', 'bugger', 'shag' etc. Without the use of these terms no writer can hope to create freely from within the daily experience of much if not the majority of the male population, which is what we used to term 'working class'. There are many red herrings tossed into the argument. But the position is quite fundamental; without recourse freely to the language there is no freedom of literary expression. Either there is freedom or there isn't, This seemingly trivial piece of censorship has a quite extraordinary effect, it

means for example that no ordinary conversation between a few men in a pub or betting shop or wherever can ever be rendered truly on our national media.

At one stroke we have a beautiful piece of blanket suppression in operation, which almost nobody appears to notice.

What is your view of private and public subsidy of the arts?

Obviously a private business will not subsidise art unless it is in its interest to do so. People who seek private subsidy from the business community look for ways of making their product appeal to them, showing the company that it lies in their own particular interest. They can either do this prior to the production or else examine their production as it exists and particularise wee bits here and there (if one scene is located in a pub then you approach a brewery). If you want to write a play about the trials and tribulations of an offshore oil-worker then you might apply to BP for sponsorship; on the other hand you might not, depending on the substance (the politics) of the trials and tribulations. If your theatre company is prestigious then the bottom line of appeal to the business community might simply be association by name.

Certain art forms are also prestigious, e.g. opera; to sponsor an operatic production will appeal to many sections of the business community, it won't matter too much what kind of production or opera it is. In order to approach the business community you have to find a way of communicating; generally it is best to use a language they are familiar with. Euphemisms such as 'quality of product' should be used, for instance, instead of referring to 'good art' which might just scare a businessman away.

How was the production of your

play, *One Two Hey!* financed?

In the first place no public funding or subsidy would have been allowed. Sound House Theatre simply because *One Two - Hey!* was their first production. But no publicly funded company would have produced the play anyway, not without forcing impossible constraints on the production. It would have been considered too expensive. Only the business community would be prepared to sponsor such a project. In the event we received almost nothing at all from the private sector aside from some return tickets donated to the company by Sea-Cat. It wound up a financial disaster - our trip to Dublin was the cement in the coffin. Brendan and Maureen McLoughlin underwrote the loss, they run the Scotia and Clutha bars in Glasgow. They're good friends of the musicians and myself. Not a nice situation. Theatre winds up a sickener.

There again public funding comes about in different ways, not just via the Arts Council. Local government is another source of public funding for the arts, in fact I think it's the major one. But obviously if local government doesn't see these arts as 'suitable' then they won't get any dough.

Public funding of the arts is always relative to the controlling political power-base. Art should either be decorative or else it should toe the correct political line.

You're arguing that artists must ultimately rely on their own resources?

So much nonsense is spoken about the public funding of art. The 'public debate' as conducted via the various media is a complete charade. There is no necessity in respect of 'the good'. No one in power seriously considers the value of contemporary art in any aesthetic sense.

Questions to do with ethics often

arise; arguments are put forward which purport to be rational, premised on 'reasonableness', whether it is 'right' that 'we' spend such and such an amount on 'our' health and social services, or whether 'we' should try to find some money from 'our' budget so that 'we' can support 'our' artistic productions. If a rationale exists for this kind of expediency it only exists within a small elite of powerful individuals. I don't see such decisions as 'rational', I think it's a misuse of the term.

At a lower level there is an issue

There is no liberation struggle - and never has been any - that is divorced from artists and writers. How could there be?

concerning art and therapy (keeping idle hands busy), and often parties of the left or liberal centre get involved here; they see 'a need' and want to channel funding towards diverse 'disadvantaged' groups (unemployed young people, deaf people, single parents, whatever) so they can 'express' or otherwise occupy themselves. Obviously this has nothing to do with art; it is expressly political.

As far as the state is concerned the only great art *a priori* is that created by dead artists. Otherwise the only valid art is decoration.

As far as being an artist recipient is concerned I just don't distinguish greatly between the public and the

private. It would be a mistake for an artist 'to rely' on any sort of external funding, whether public or private. Your only support comes from immediate family and friends, sometimes not even then. You find young artists have expectations; they tend to equate 'the good' with economic value. Society teaches them that. It's one of a set of myths central to our culture. Many people believe it outside of the world of art, including intellectuals and academics. But when these young artists continue working at their art properly they discover reality; many of them sell out quite quickly; others just get bitter or look for jobs, some enter the teaching profession and wind up indoctrinating the next generation; a few continue working properly.

For any artist, as far as the public and the private go, whichever funding system allows the greater freedom would appear the more acceptable. Sometimes one allows this, sometimes the other. It depends on a variety of variables. If I believed that the existing political order offered a means by which radical change can occur then no doubt I would see the way public funding operates as just another 'betrayal of the people'. But as things stand in the real world it would be pointless getting hot and bothered about such a thing, not to say naive.

You're wary of the growth of arts administration. But can't it be argued that a professional approach is required to develop the arts in a world dominated by market values?

Why should we equate specialist arts administrators with professionalism in the development of art? What does 'professionalism' mean in this context? Does it mean efficiency? In what way can an administrator who is not an artist develop art efficiently? Over the past couple of decades there has been a great development in the field of arts

administration. It can easily be argued that this has coincided with a degeneration in the development of art itself.

Given that many artists devote their life to the development of art they are regarded as something akin to precocious children; their opinion on that development is treated as amateurish and irrelevant.

Nowadays most arts funding winds up in the field of arts administration. As an analogy take the way funding operates within certain charities, where the running costs reach around 60 per cent. Like the victims these charities exist 'to help', those who actually create art get next to nothing at all, whereas yet another batch of university-trained specialists wind up with careers and good salaries.

An essential part of what the specialist administrators do is control; they control both the product (art) and the producer (artist). They are managers.

Any specialist in arts administration who is genuinely open to disillusion about 'the good' and the funded must retain some sort of hangover relating to 'the distinction between art and politics', as though such a question (never mind 'distinction') exists in the real world.

Five years ago, with others in the Workers' City group, you were strongly critical of Glasgow European City of Culture. Do you stand by your critique?

The criticism from myself and other artists based in Glasgow during the Year of Culture was varied so there was no one thing in particular. There was the idea of artist as volunteer worker on behalf of the tourist industry. Artists were given no alternative by the Labour administration of Glasgow. Our work was a novelty gift to potential corporate finance on behalf of the

municipality. We were expected to put the city first and play our part as 'patriots'. We were to forget all our juvenile notions about art, literature, politics, principles, morals etc. We were co-opted onto the 'promotional team' whose primary aim was to transform the city into a place where corporate finance would feel free to exploit whatever they wanted at whatever price they wanted.

Of course the same applied across the board: every person in Glasgow was forced into the same position: if for example we asked why it was that the authorities should put up a nine month temporary exhibition which resulted in a loss to the city of £13 million, we were deemed unpatriotic, a lunatic fringe of perverse kill-joys who were essentially opposed to 'art and culture' - although none was able to say what exactly s/he meant by 'culture'; Mr Pat Lally who has returned to the centralised power-base in the city, was confident to the point of arrogance, how else could he have made the classic statement to the *Glasgow Herald*, that 'he didn't know what art was but he would milk it for all it was worth'.

Obviously the media played along with the City Fathers; those who condemned the Year of Culture were condemned as 'anti-art', as philistines. Nobody thought there was anything absurd about describing a group of artists as 'anti-art'. We were also condemned (and still are) as workerist.

You're not impressed with the Labour Party or its attitude to the arts?

You have to remember that in Glasgow and Strathclyde Region the political authority is Labour-controlled. There is no question about its socialism, it doesn't exist. Whenever anything 'radical' is afoot (the self-determination movement; poll tax 'disobedience'; the closure of the steel industry, the coal industry,

etc.) the party sends out its dwindling backbenchers, the characters referred to by the media as 'hardline marxists'. The 'hardline marxists' then show solidarity with whoever is in conflict with authority. In doing so they perform functional roles, both for the party and the British so-called democratic process. The British Labour Party prides itself on its potential as managers of the market economy, and the municipal and regional Scottish branches are at one on this. Nowadays they don't even bother paying lip-service to anything outside it.

At the same time that hoary old chestnut, the equation of the Labour Party with socialism, still retains enough play to allow a sideways swipe at art and artists. The usual stuff: all art is elitist and all artists are self-indulgent bourgeois bastards. They are content to assume as given that 'art with a capital "a"' is both product and property of society's upper orders'. Of course many people on the left actually do still believe that, from trotskyst to anarchist. It's incredible how pervasive and successful this myth has been among European and American left wing circles. There again it is consistent; the politics of the vanguard are inherently elitist. The Stalinists have always found the myth extremely functional.

All genuine art becomes dangerous, it can only be dangerous since what it also does is offer a form of critique of that which exists - it makes no distinction between left or right authoritarianism. There is no liberation struggle - and never has been any - that is divorced from artists and writers. How could there be? ■

James Kelman will read from his work at the Model Arts Centre on Thursday 7th September in Sligo as part of the Scriobh literary festival.

The songs our fathers sang

Patrick McCabe *The Dead School Picador* £14.99

Patrick McCabe's last novel, *The Butcher Boy*, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and won the Irish Times/Aer Lingus Prize in 1992, was a genuine example of what the blurb-writers like to call, too indiscriminately, a tour de force. A shortish novel, no more than a slightly stretched novella, the story of Francie Brady's wild, careering descent (or perhaps ascent) into madness and violence grabbed you by the lapel from the first paragraph, letting you go only at the end with a slight contemptuous shove and a smiling 'How did you like that?' in its best menacing Monaghan. It wasn't, for everyone, exactly a pleasant experience, but while it breathed its hooting, sneering pub bully 'wisdom' down into your face, it certainly kept your attention. Though it took its author several years to write, most people seemed unable to avoid finishing it at a sitting.

The Dead School is a bit harder to swallow, and not entirely because of its much greater length. The novel follows the career of two very dissimilar national school teachers, traditionalist martinet Raphael Bell (born 1913) and airhead, sometime hippie and hopeless case Malachy Dudgeon (born 1956). Raphael is born in the Co Cork countryside, in a place 'where nothing much has happened for around a hundred years, and probably never will'. Nothing much, that is, except the War of Independence and Raphael's father being murdered in a hayfield by the Black and Tans, which violent beginning does not stop our hero developing into a pillar, or rather a totem, of new independent Ireland.

After a brilliant career at school, seminary and training college,

distinguished equally by academic excellence, prowess on the playing field and steadfast observance of his religious duties, Raphael is appointed to a small Dublin school, where his simple maxim - once they know you mean business your boys will respect you - leads to his rapid promotion to the principalship of St Anthony's Boys', the school around the corner you might say.

Raphael's world is a secure and happy one, as was possible then in dear old Dublin when it was still the capital of Ireland and before it went to hell in a handcart. Boys would be boys, of course, but this was a time when men were also men, and the Master was the master. And if some awful gurrrier of a docker would now and then come up to the school with his forearms bare to find out who gave his little Christy a clip on the ear, well he soon went home with a flea in his own thanking the master for all he was doing and would continue to do.

And Raphael *did* continue. Continue first and foremost 'the wonderful work being done (the Inspector said) ... as regards training in good habits, the formation of character, and the pride clearly being taken in all things Gaelic and Irish'. Continue his equally sterling efforts with the choirs and the football, continue too, in his few leisure hours, the trips to Croke Park, to the Abbey to see the great FJ McCormick or the Royal for Jimmy O'Dea.

Raphael continued as long as it all continued, which was for quite a long time. But when (in 1965) he heard a young pup of a broadcaster on the make by the name of Terry Krash - a man who thought it amusing to talk about articles of women's underclothing over the national airwaves - make fun of his listening highlight of the week, *The Waltons Programme*, well it didn't take a great genius to see that something was up and that the songs our fathers loved were clearly on the way out and due to be replaced by something a great deal

less sweet and melodious.

That something might well be represented by young Malachy Dudgeon, though he wouldn't have realised it himself. But then Malachy wouldn't realise much, with his head as full of hep talk and Horslips and Hollywood as his belly is of beer and takeaway chilli. Since Malachy is not, as they say, 'cut out' to be a teacher while old Raphael is so NT he might have been cut out specially, it is plain for all to see that the two of them are heading for a tumble.

King Lear, on one of his bad days, thought that life, when all is said and done, was a cruel business: 'Like flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,/ They kill us for their sport.' The characters of Patrick McCabe's novels could be excused for feeling the same, for try as they might to fly away, they keep getting themselves caught under the authorial left forefinger while the right hand cheerfully plucks off bits of their wings. Mr McCabe here is of course not just wanton boy, but god too. It is his universe. He made it, and he rules it, with, it appears, considerable glee.

Anyone for whom *The Butcher Boy* was too 'black' would be well advised to leave *The Dead School* on the shelf. Those who thought it the best Irish novel for years should take their chances, though I can't guarantee they won't be a little bit disappointed: McCabe as god (or devil) is not only cruel but prone to be a bit tedious by times (as, I'm afraid is his creation poor old Dudgeon) and we are kept a long time waiting around for his apocalypse.

For all that, and for all the somewhat over-schematic structure of this novel, there are very few in Ireland writing with such verve and courage and with so sure an ear. McCabe's last book probably should have won the Booker prize. Shorn by a decent editor of a good 80 pages this one would have been a dead cert.

Enda O'Doherty

A life on the left

H. Gustav Klaus (editor) Strong Words, Brave Deeds: The Poetry, Life and Times of Thomas O'Brien, Volunteer in the Spanish Civil War; O'Brien Press; £15.99

Tom O'Brien was born in Dublin in 1914 of working class stock. His father died when he was six years old and his formal education ended at 14. Stints of work followed alternated by long periods of unemployment.

In 1932, he joined Sinn Fein, the IRA and, later, the communist movement. In 1938, he went to Spain to fight fascism with the International Brigade. In later years, he disengaged from active involvement in politics in order to provide for a large family of seven children.

In common with other veterans of the International Brigade, O'Brien's prospects of employment were poor particularly so since jobs were scarce. However, he was defiantly tenacious and he developed a mobile lending library working from a bicycle and a small hand-cart. This activity earned him a modest living.

He graduated to a small duplicating business in Dublin's Parliament Street which later became a printing company - O'Brien's Printers. Later still, in 1974, the O'Brien Press came into being. Tom O'Brien died in the same year aged 60. It is possible that a wound suffered in Spain contributed to his relatively early death.

Tom O'Brien had a deep interest in the arts. He was a poet and playwright and a founder member of a left-wing theatre movement in Dublin during the 1930s and 1940s, the New Theatre Group (N.T.G.). This pioneering group made a brave and sustained effort to develop a

distinctly socialist culture and for some years it made its mark. Tom O'Brien was one of its most active members. He wrote some group plays and contributed to the group's magazine *Surge*. The group survived on sheer commitment.

Strong Words, Brave Deeds commemorates Tom O'Brien's life and consists of an outline of his life, a selection of his poems and plays, and a short history of the N.T.G. There is also a section entitled 'Spanish Correspondence' and three essays on different aspects on the Spanish Civil War and Ireland.

‘Furthermore, it is unlikely that there would have been any organised Irish anti-fascist contingent in Spain but for the CPI.’

The correspondence section is especially riveting. It consists of 17 letters to Tom while he was in Spain written by relatives, friends, and political and theatre comrades. They provide a rare sense of the period from a left-wing perspective. The most poignant letter is from his fellow brigadier, Liam McGregor, signed 'Bill' and dated 27th August 1938. Tom O'Brien received it on the 23rd September, the same day that the sender, Liam, was killed in the battle of the Ebro, the last military engagement of the 15th International Brigade.

The essays give a social and political background to the O'Brien story. One by Sean O hEidersceoil is a personal memoir that depicts the

impact of the 1930s on a young middle-class intellectual. He was an active N.T.G. member who wrote plays and poetry. He later achieved high office in the Civil Service.

Another essay by Manus O'Riordan gives a graphic account of the hysterical hatred that was generated against the left, especially communists, during the 1930s. O'Riordan details how this anti-left fanaticism extended to the labour movement and included the Labour Party. While some readers may consider that he flatters the Communist Party of Ireland, it would be difficult to dispute his assertion that the CPI was in the vanguard of the anti-fascist struggle. Furthermore, it is unlikely that there would have been any organised Irish anti-fascist contingent in Spain but for the CPI.

In his essay, 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War', J. Bowyer Bell shows that he is no friend of the left. He lays much stress on the 'persecution of the Church' and the 'atrocities of Spanish Communism' but ignores the strong anti-clerical tradition in Spain based on the extreme poverty of the people and the enormous wealth of the Catholic church. Likewise, Bell makes no mention of the thousands who died at the hands of the church-supported armies of Franco. He does, however, detail the attitude of the Irish government, church and Blueshirts to the Spanish conflict.

H. Gustav Klaus who was recently appointed to the Chair of British Literature at the University of Rostock has done much to promote working class and socialist writing. We are again indebted to him. *Strong Words, Brave Deeds* is an eloquent tribute to one man and his comrades from a heroic page in our history.

Joe Deasy

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