

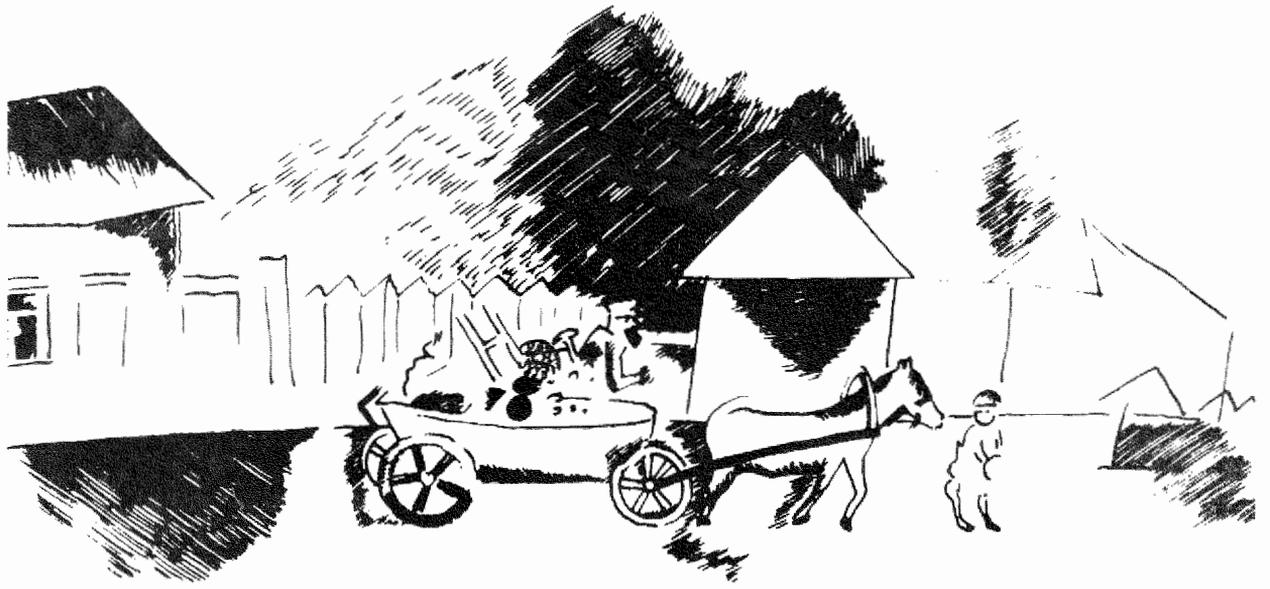
*making*  
**SENSE**

ISSN 0791-0770  
No. 20 January/February 1991  
Price 90 pence

**Industrial relations**  
Marchais marches on  
**Art and subsidy**  
'Hidden Agenda'



**NO SOLUTION**



chagall

A U R O R A   A R T   P U B L I S H E R S

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Ireland's political and cultural review

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Number 20 January/February 1991

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## 'A great tragedy'

'SADDAM HUSSEIN is a murderous gangster, just as he was before August 2, when he was an amiable friend and favoured trading partner. His invasion of Kuwait is another crime, comparable to others, not as terrible as some: for example, the Indonesian invasion and annexation of East Timor, which reached near-genocidal levels thanks to diplomatic and material support from the two righteous avengers of the Gulf.'

Thus Noam Chomsky, the noted American scholar, drew attention to United States and British doublethink on the Gulf. It is clear now that the US decided as early as November to opt for a military solution. By committing a further 200,000 troops to the Gulf area in that month, the US forces changed from a defensive to an offensive deployment. US leaders continued to pay lip-service to sanctions which had been imposed in August in the knowledge that they would take a year to have a decisive effect.

Sanctions could have worked and they should have been given time. Intelligence sources in both the US and Britain reported in December that sanctions were beginning to bite and strongly recommended their continuation. Autumn was considered the best time for military action as a greatly weakened Iraq would not by then be in a position to resist. As the US General Schwarzkopf said: 'If the alternative to dying is sitting out in the sun another summer, then that's not a bad alternative.'

So why the rush to war? The US was determined that Iraq should not control the world price of oil: the Gulf oilfields had to be kept in 'friendly' hands at all costs. One of the first results of the attack on Iraq was a drop of nine dollars in the price of a barrel of oil and a surge in the world's financial markets. (A great day for free enterprise!) It would appear also that George Bush's notion of a 'new world order' envisages the US running the show now that the Soviet Union's role has diminished. As such, the US will bypass diplomacy and resort increasingly to force, unchecked by the Soviet deterrent. This was evident in the lead up to hostilities. US diplomacy was distinctly half-hearted while peace initiatives by other countries and agencies were treated with barely-concealed contempt.

Britain obediently toes the US line. This arises partly from imperial nostalgia but it also shows that, when the chips are down, John Major measures up to no more than Thatcher Minor. The less said about Labour leader Neil Kinnock the better whereas Denis Healy had plenty to say against the war drive — and said it with great conviction and passion.

This was in stark contrast to the humming and hawing of Gerry Collins, Minister for Foreign Affairs. When the government finally announced it would provide unconditional landing and refuelling rights for the US airforce at Shannon it did not even bother to consult the Dáil and sought approval only after the event. This decision further undermines Irish neutrality by giving tacit support to a totally unnecessary war.

Media coverage of the conflict so far has been for the most part one-sided and, in some instances, disgraceful. Television reports from US and British sources have simply echoed official propaganda and have trivialised the death and destruction involved. That RTE has relayed these reports largely without critical comment is a disgrace. A timely antidote to the war hysteria came from Robert Fisk when he said: 'I think this is the commencement of a great tragedy. The losses in human life will be very high.'

In a prophetic article published last August, the Palestinian writer Edward Said outlined the nature of the tragedy: 'The Palestinian drive toward self-determination is being dealt a grievous, perhaps even a catastrophic blow ... Governments in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and perhaps Jordan (to say nothing of those in the smaller Gulf states) are likely to recover badly, if at all, from the US rush to military reaction. Immense economic and ecological changes unforeseen in their scope will, I think, radically change the face of the whole Middle East. And I greatly fear that what will once again get pushed under — Arab nationalist hopes and cultural assertions — will be re-channelled into xenophobia, religious revivalism, the politics of hostility and revenge.'

And thousands will die. But what's that when set against the price of a barrel of oil?

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# Is Ireland ready for divorce?

*'No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage.'*

The words 'in any circumstances' were not included in the 1937 Constitution's ban on divorce. The prohibition was absolute, nonetheless. Irish society has had to endure edict for over fifty years. Yet the State and respect for the family managed to survive from 1922 to 1937 without such an unyielding regulation. The Constitution of the Irish Free State contained no such denial of the Parliament's right to legislate on civil marriage. The 1937 bar on divorce mirrored the position of the Catholic Church, which was also granted recognition of its 'special position' in Irish society. That recognition, or bias as some would regard it, was removed from the Constitution in 1972. The question now is when we will remove Article 41.3.2 which prevents divorce and thereby refuses a second chance to those whose first marriages fail.

It is almost five years since the referendum on divorce and the rejection of an amendment to the Constitution. Since then the political climate has changed and social attitudes have progressed. Fine Gael has a new leader and new wind, if not a bellows, for the campaign to introduce divorce. The Progressive Democrats have promised action and are in government. Their draft constitution carries no prohibition on divorce. The Workers' Party and Labour both favour an immediate ending to the ban. Both parties have previously introduced their own Bills in the Dáil and have campaigned strenuously on the issue. Most importantly, the party which connived against the 1986 referendum, Fianna Fáil, has moved from its obdurate position of opposition. Spurred by recent events, not least the election of a woman President who has campaigned actively for divorce in the past, Fianna Fáil are prepared now to

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**Divorce is once again on the political agenda. What, asks PAT McCARTAN, are the prospects for a successful outcome of a future referendum?**

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*Garret FitzGerald*

discuss marital breakdown in a government White Paper. Ominiously, Mr Haughey has made it clear that all this does not mean that divorce will be introduced. But, it is still progress. Divorce is back on the agenda as an issue. What is the prospect for success this time around?

During the last referendum campaign the biggest problem to emerge was the uncertainty surrounding the consequences of divorce. Issues of child custody, family home protection, maintenance and distribution of property caused more worries than the actual acceptance or rejection of

divorce as a concept. The anti-divorce lobby, including the Catholic Church, both exploited and added to these fears.

Answers were not provided by the promoters of the referendum, the Coalition government of Mr FitzGerald. The absence of clear and united leadership by government turned nervous people against the proposition. The polls once more suggest that a majority exists for change. This majority has existed since before the last referendum. Fianna Fáil's tactics in opposition, when they had no other interest than to trip the government of the day, ensured that the issues were obscured and people confused. Since then we have on the statute books the Judicial Separation Act of 1989. This Act provides for all the legal consequences of divorce, except for the judicial dissolution of marriage. Applications for judicial separation have risen dramatically in number under these new provisions.

The operation of the Act will demonstrate how orderly and humanely the Courts and other authorities can deal with the consequences of irreparable marital breakdown. The terrain for the next referendum will be more friendly. The result will be more positive.

On the 6th of November last a mother of two from Baldoyle in Dublin was convicted as a criminal before the Dublin Courts. She was given a suspended sentence of twelve months for the crime of bigamy. The judge in passing sentence noted that had she chosen to simply live with her second husband, no offence would have been committed. The fact that she participated in a marriage ceremony, which was invalid, made her a criminal in the eyes of the law. The real criminals, those who contrive to deny proper and humane considerations for people whose marriages have failed, should soon be back in the dock.

# The right to strike: a thing of the past?

THE 1990 Industrial Relations Act is the first major reform of Irish trade disputes law in 84 years. The main impact of the Act is to impose extensive new restrictions on trade unions and their members, particularly in relation to the right to strike and the right to take other forms of industrial action.

Less than three months after its enactment, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has been asked by the Marine, Port and General Workers' Union to discontinue its support of the Act and to seek its repeal. The MPGWI has also voted to campaign against the new legislation.

This reaction to the Act will come as no surprise to the ICTU. Last April the chairman of their Public Services Committee and executive member, Mr Greg Maxwell, said the proposed legislation represented the worst dilution of workers' rights in the history of the state. 'If enacted the legislation will be a victory for extreme employers' views and the most explicit statement of anti-union ideology embodied in law in this country.'

These remarks contrast sharply with the welcome given to the legislation by the ICTU when it was introduced in December 1989. Even when they proposed changes to the draft legislation, the ICTU insisted that these changes were not 'substantial' but rather practical ones that would ensure the effective working of the proposed legislation.

The ICTU defence of the legislation continued at their 1990 Annual Conference when they quoted the UK experience on mandatory secret ballots as justification for their introduction in Ireland.

It is unlikely that the ICTU would have given such support for the legislation had they not been involved as social partners in the Programme for National Recovery. When the

## **MAURICE SHEEHAN outlines the growing criticism of the Industrial Relations Act, 1990.**

Minister for Labour, Mr Bertie Ahern, addressed the Senate in July he confirmed that it was the progress made between the social partners under the PNR which had allowed the changes in the law come forward.

Last September Workers' Party TDs Pat Rabbitte and Eamon Gilmore produced a booklet to warn trade unionists about the Act. Their document highlighted three of the key measures which in their opinion tilt trade disputes law decisively in favour of employers.

**Disputes involving one individual.**  
Under Section 9 no industrial action

involving a dispute over the conditions of an individual worker can take place until procedures have been resorted to and exhausted.

This section hits at the very heart of a cherished principle of trade unionism that 'an injury to one is an injury to all'. In practice it may take from four to six months to exhaust procedures. In the case of a dismissed worker there is virtually no chance of his or her colleagues taking supportive strike action after such a time lapse. Justice delayed is justice denied.

This measure will pose great problems for trade unions, especially where an individual member is being victimised for trade union activity.

The Act does not contain a satisfactory definition of a dispute involving one individual as opposed to a group of individuals. This is bad law. **Picketing.** Section 11 introduces a number of restrictions on the right to

## Changes under the Act

*THE stated purpose of the Industrial Relations Act is to bring about a better framework for collective bargaining and the resolution of trade disputes by making a number of important changes in trade union law and industrial relations law generally.*

*The Act includes the following changes:*

- The restriction of picketing in trade disputes, especially secondary picketing.

- The introduction of mandatory secret ballots prior to strike action and every other form of industrial action.

- The prohibition of industrial action in disputes involving one worker where procedures have not

*been followed.*

- The regulation of the granting of injunctions in trade dispute situations when rules for ballots and other procedures have been complied with.

- Further measures to facilitate the rationalisation of the trade union movement.

- The establishment of a labour relations commission which shall have amongst its functions: (a) the provision of a consultation service and an industrial relations advisory service; (b) the preparation of codes of practice relevant to industrial relations.

- Changes in the structure and operation of joint labour committees and registered employment agreements.



*The trade union movement lacks a coherent approach to labour law.*

picket during the course of a trade dispute. It ignores the complexities of company law and employment relationships and gives an almost watertight formula for employers to obtain injunctions against secondary picketing.

Under this section workers in dispute may picket the following places only: the place where their employer works or carries on his business, or the place where another employer, who has directly assisted the primary employer to frustrate the industrial action, carries on his business. This is what is meant by a 'secondary' picket. Irish judges have always been reluctant to allow secondary picketing. This was not enough for employer organisations such as the Federation of Irish Employers who wanted all forms of secondary picketing banned. Section 11 goes most of the way to meeting their demand.

**Secret Ballots.** Irish trade unions support the principle of secret ballots. They use secret ballots extensively in the day to day running of their affairs. In fact they conduct more secret ballots in their daily operations than employers or the government do.

The initiative for the statutory regulation of secret ballots has come from employers and must be treated with suspicion. An examination of their arguments shows, not surprisingly, that what they want most is not secret ballots as pre-conditions of strike action, but no strikes or other industrial action at all.

Under Section 14 a union will have

to hold a secret ballot prior to any strike or any other form of industrial action. The union must also disclose to its members the number voting for and against the proposed action as soon as possible after the ballot.

These balloting provisions are almost identical to the anti-union legislation introduced in the UK by Mr Norman Tebbit. One important section is taken word for word from UK law despite Mr Ahern's promise that he would resist employer calls to copy that law.

In addition, the new balloting provisions make incursions into union rule books which are surely contrary to the International Labour Organisation's convention No. 87 on Autonomy. The ILO is an agency of the United Nations and has as its primary function the establishment of a code of international labour law and practice.

Article 3 of Convention 87 states that the public authorities shall refrain from any interference which would

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*'Trade unions still derive much of their bargaining power from the ability to strike effectively'*

restrict the right of workers' and employers' organisations to draw up their constitutions and rules.

However, the Industrial Relations Act provides that the rules of every trade union must contain a provision that the union will not organise, participate in, sanction or support a strike or any other form of industrial action without a secret ballot. This requirement applies not only to unions registered in the state but to British based unions operating within the state, such as MSF, UCATT, NUJ and AEUW.

If a union fails to amend its rules accordingly the union itself and all of its members and officials will lose the right to go on strike or take any form of industrial action.

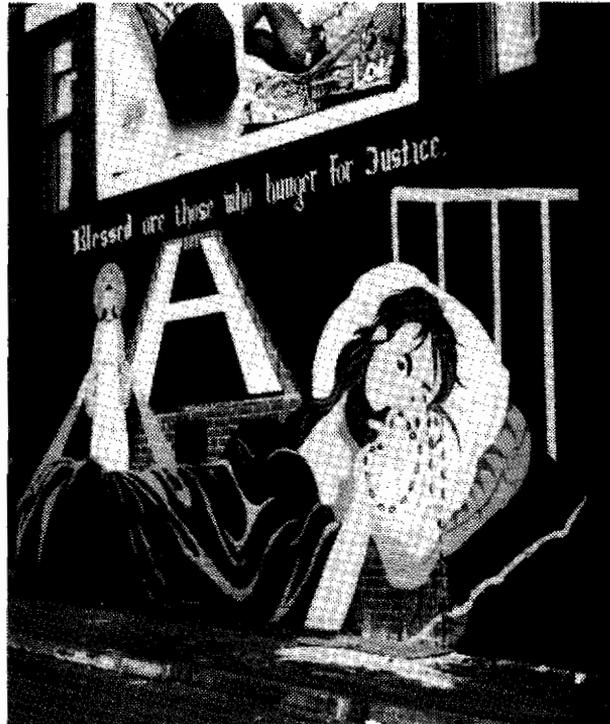
Trade unions still derive much of their bargaining power from the ability to strike effectively. These new restrictions have blunted severely the strike weapon, almost to the point where it is impossible to take effective industrial action and stay within the law.

It remains to be seen if the MPGWU campaign against the Act will gain momentum. It is not expected that the negotiators for a new national economic programme will commit themselves to an immediate review of the 1990 Act.

However, the disparate response from the Irish labour movement to the new legislation underlines the need for it to develop a coherent and united approach to all aspects of law relating to workers.

Maurice Goldring

# Faith of Our Fathers



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# Tough times, tough choices

THE DEBATE among socialists on economic questions is politically highly charged as everyone realises that the socialist project is in 'crisis' — (when was it not?), and in need of a fundamental reappraisal. Again, everyone agrees that statist command economies failed comprehensively but differ on whether this failure means the end of socialism as such. The true believers say that 'real' socialism has never been tried, while the sceptics counter that socialism as an ideal can hardly be abstracted from every attempt that was ever made to implement it. What follows is a short, subjective comment on this debate as it intersects with economic theories.

It is not only state socialism that has failed. Also discredited is the Anglo-American casino capitalism of the fast buck, the predatory takeover, rampant financial markets and short-time horizons. The most enthusiastic economic liberals are now to be found in the new governments of Eastern Europe. Elsewhere there is increasing rejection of the simple-minded dichotomy between state and market, command and exchange, individual and collective. Does this herald the return of the mixed economy? Not if it means the resurrection of the managed welfare state as once advocated by Tony Crossland and which ground to a halt in the 1970s. However it is a fact that we will have to earn our living for the foreseeable future in increasingly competitive global markets, often dominated by large multi-nationals. This raises the question of how these are to be controlled and also the implications for the goal of social ownership. Major theoretical and empirical work is needed to show how a transforming dynamic can be introduced into a complex capitalist economic system.

But how exactly should socialists view markets? For some the market is

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## Socialists face the challenge of producing an efficient economic model and, writes GERARD O'QUIGLEY, must make some tough choices.

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inextricably linked with commodity production, private appropriation of surplus value and, consequently, the exploitation of one class by another — all of which go against core socialist values. An alternative approach is to construct a healthy symbiosis between market and planning, in which the latter dominates long-term and environmental decisions, overall frameworks like transport, education and health and capital goods. Measures are required to counteract the bad features of markets (encouraging acquisitiveness; inequality), and allow their good ones to flourish (flexibility; innovation; quality variation). Communist societies failed because they eventually became too complex to be directed from the centre without huge amounts of waste and dishonesty throughout the system. Complexity and reasonable levels of honesty seem to require market mechanisms.

The search for a better future might begin by looking for signs of its nature and feasibility in the present. Anglo-American casino capitalism is a busted flush. Instead, one might usefully investigate the high quality social-market capitalism of the Germans, the Austrians and the Scandinavians which is sustained by an intricate web of co-operative practices, socially responsible institutions and solidaristic values. The values and habits that sustain these countries owe far more to social christianity and social democracy than

to economic liberalism. Successful economies are the result of a balance between state intervention and the free market, individualism and collectivism, deregulation and control. These processes are often *as hoc* and improvised, informed more by good political commonsense than by economic textbooks.

What is possible at the level of the nation-state is inevitably conditioned by the world-capitalist system as a whole, and it is here where significant change has been occurring, including the emergence of the Newly Industrialised Nations (NIC's) and the appearance of 'third world' enclaves in the core countries. Some argue that the fordist system is coming to an end in the mature capitalist economies, and is being replaced by 'post-fordism'. A notable element of post-fordism is flexible specialisation ('flec-spec') which involves skilled workers producing customised goods using re-programmable technology. This process is said to enhance the autonomy of the individual worker, a fact recognised by some leading European trade unions who provide a more individualised mode of worker representation. Critics argue that the extent of these supposed transformations are exaggerated. Nevertheless it is reasonable to view post-fordism as the 'leading edge' of current developments insofar as it indicates the likely way of the future.

The credibility of the socialist case will diminish further unless it fully engages with arguments based on the physical and social limits to growth and the need to preserve the environment from lasting damage. The challenge is to come up with a model that is efficient, socially responsible *and* ecologically sound. It may not be possible to meet all these criteria simultaneously, in which case some tough choices must be made.

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# On the outside, looking in

WHEN you leave a party, it begins to look different. You cease to have a vested interest in the correctness of its policies, however much, if the parting has been amicable, you might still hope that the organisation would prosper. Of course, if the parting has not been amicable, you would have a vested interest in proving its policies *incorrect*. Some readers will think that there is at least an element of that feeling in what follows. I cannot prove them wrong; I can only say that I have not been stirred to write this piece out of any spirit of rancour that I am aware of. On the contrary, the goodwill I have always felt for the WP since I left it has, if anything, increased with the changes which have taken place over the last few years.

As I say, things look different when you leave a party, and more so with the passing of time. Away from the hurly burly of party activism, certain things seem to become clearer. Just sometimes the hurler on the ditch may see things the players have missed. Whether that is true in this case is obviously for the reader to judge. The game has got a lot more open and exciting in recent months, and that has finally prompted me, rather reluctantly, to throw in my tuppence-worth. What follows makes no claim to be comprehensive. It takes no account of the many positive things which have made the WP increasingly attractive to an increasing — but still very limited — number of people over the last decade. It simply tries to raise questions which seem important to an outside observer, and which don't seem to get answered. It is a purely personal view. I am grateful to *Making Sense* for giving me the opportunity of expressing such a critique of the WP here.

To put the personal in perspective briefly: Five years ago I left the Workers' Party (amicably, I think) after some 10 years membership. I left largely for personal reasons, and certainly not as a result of any specific disagreement. In fact, I used to think wryly that I agreed with more aspects of party policy when I left than I had agreed with when I joined.

But I was aware of a certain weariness with the often unstated constraints which severely limited debate within the party. I know that this weariness was shared by others who left or drifted away at the time, and I suspected that it was shared by many who remained active party members. The torrent of debate which

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**'Things look different when you leave a party... Just sometimes the hurler on the ditch may see things the players have missed.'**  
**PADDY WOODWORTH**  
**offers a critique of the Workers' Party today.**

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has been surging through the party in the last year, reflected in, but evidently not limited to, this magazine, certainly suggests that a lot of people have been champing at the bit for a long time.

Reading through the contributions made recently in this magazine, fresh perspectives are obviously being opened up on many aspects of politics, in articles of a range and depth which would have been unthinkable — let's face it, simply heretical — in any WP publication not too many months ago. Among these articles I include, of course, Eoghan Harris' characteristically incisive and entertaining declaration that he comes to bury Stalin, not to praise him, delivered with a zeal which might make even Mark Anthony blush.

Of course, a lot of people thought that Eoghan Harris had set about burying socialism when he master-minded that quintessentially Stalinist instrument, the *Irish Industrial Revolution* in 1977. But those of us then in the party who shared this anxiety were told that all the *IIR*'s critics were Trots, Provo-Trots, or, God save the mark, *social democrats*, so we ignored their warnings. Some of us did wonder, though, how almost every aspect of party policy could be reversed without debate at the diktat of an unelected 'industrial' faction, who sounded like Stalinists but behaved more like members of the Trotskyist Militant Tendency.

We wondered, but we generally kept our mouths shut. At the most we voiced our doubts privately to party leaders, who might privately confess to sharing many of our concerns, but would assure us that the party remained in sound hands, that the new 'industrial strategy' was, after all, a strategy and not a principle. Above all, they would remind us that unity of the party was paramount, and that any open dissension about the contents of the *IIR* could only benefit our common enemies.

Unity was always the great silencer on the pistol held in the fist of the Stalinist Left. It was the demand for unity which led Bukharin, and a multitude of lesser known Bolshevik revolutionaries, to confess to the most absurd crimes and put their own heads into the hangman's noose. It seems almost incredible that people who were not lacking in courage, intelligence and integrity could be bullied so easily, but it perhaps becomes more understandable when one recalls the internal dynamics of the Workers' Party. No dramatic sanctions were applied to dissident members of the WP in the early 1980s, but I can clearly remember motions in favour of 'Eurocommunism' (not so different to the principles of perestroika) being withdrawn from consideration before Ard Fheiseanna, not because they were wrong, but because they might be 'divisive'.

Today, it seems, all that has changed. All sacred cows are up for slaughter, and the blood lust unleashed is remarkable. Looking at the situation now from the perspective of an outsider, I think it is important to ask why this should be so. The answer may seem blindingly simple, but it seems to me that its implications are rather more complex than has been acknowledged to date.

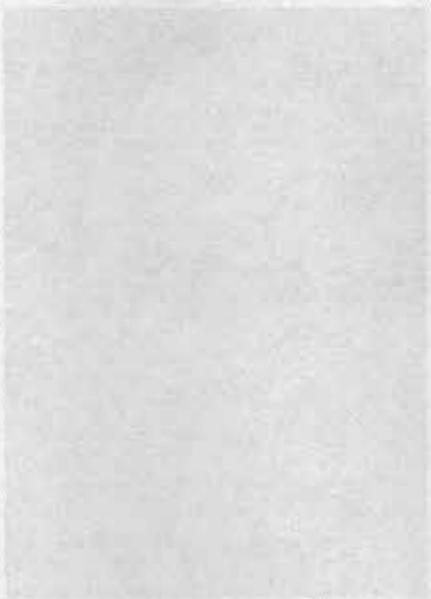
I think the answer runs like this: debate, and debate to the point of a public display of disunity, is now possible in the WP because, and only because, the Soviet model of socialism is in deep, if not terminal, crisis. (There are other contributory factors, such as the emergence of a new generation of TDs as an independent-minded grouping, but I think this is subsidiary and, indeed, in many ways also attributable to the new atmosphere created by the Soviet crisis).

The impact of the Soviet crisis on the party has been so immense, precisely because the party had tied itself so closely to the Soviet model in the past. In this respect, the WP is in an even more difficult position than most Western European communist parties, because the Soviet model was neither publicly embraced nor properly debated internally by the party. Instead, like the decisions regarding the Official IRA in an earlier period, the Soviet model was part of a semi-hidden but absolutely central agenda for the party.

The fact that the WP can now openly debate that model is directly due to the fact that that model has

# Matches on

Words in italics in the  
Event Community Party  
were held in week of the  
party's recent success  
STEPHEN HOLMES  
reports



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## Year's end

### Reflections on Eastern Europe

#### Spain's united left

The year has been a year of reflection and change. In Eastern Europe, the fall of the Iron Curtain has led to a period of transition and uncertainty. Spain's united left has emerged as a significant force in the country's political landscape. The year has been a year of reflection and change.

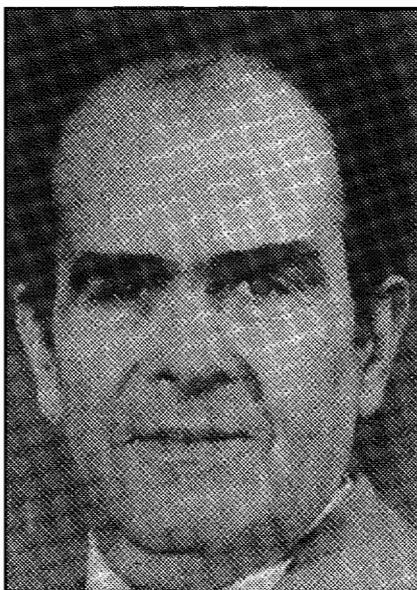
# Marchais marches on

THE FINAL outcome of the 27th Congress of the French Communist Party (PCF) which took place in December was frustratingly predictable.

The *projet de resolution*, submitted by the Central Committee of the party for discussion and amendment in September, aroused a wide variety of responses. Three essential themes concerning the role of the PCF caused controversy: the attitude that should be taken to events in the USSR and Eastern Europe (the question of the international communist movement); the PCF's strategy to reverse its marginalisation within French politics, and the erosion of its traditional social base; the thorny problem of the internal functioning of the party.

These issues have provided the background for conflict between the leadership group (based around General Secretary, Georges Marchais, in effective power since 1970) and generations of dissenters. In the 1980's, PCF approval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, confusion at the party's tactics with regard to the Socialists (oscillating between aspirations to unity and sectarianism), and the rigorous implementation of democratic centralism in internal party affairs produced two dissident movements of unprecedented strength. The first (1984-7), known as *renovateurs*, was led by Pierre Juquin, who stood in the 1988 presidential election against the 'official' communist candidate, Andre Lajoinie. This movement fizzled out with Juquin drifting into the Greens, others to the Socialists. Those that remained within the PCF formed this next wave of dissidence, the *reconstructeurs*.

**Would-be reformers in the French Communist Party were held in check at the party's recent congress. STEPHEN HOPKINS reports.**



*Georges Marchais*

In the wake of Gorbachev's programme of reforms the time seemed ripe for internal reform within the PCF also. However, Marchais and the leadership have managed to contain this impulse, and the outcome of the recent 27th Congress has further cemented the process of containment. The *reconstructeurs* were marginalised within the PCF apparatus, and are

now largely peripheral. But throughout 1990 political commentators speculated about a new attempt at refounding the party led by the pragmatic ex-minister, Charles Fiterman. Other ex-ministers and many of the PCF's mayors/deputies, as well as leading members of the communist-based trade union (CGT), made sympathetic noises, but the movement was deliberately low-key, as if the new generation of dissidents recognised the fate of previous, more public, reformers.

The extent of the crisis affecting ruling Communist parties, the disintegration of the international Communist movement, and the PCF's increasing isolation in France combined to produce the real prospect of change. The Congress was testimony to the fact that free debate, a pluralistic culture and open dissent would be tolerated (even on certain occasions encouraged) by the leadership, but was also a severe reminder that the leadership still control, through the subtle management of Marxist-Leninist ideology and democratic centralist organisation, the parameters of any evolutionary process.

International events weighed heavily upon the Congress. Criticism had been directed by dissidents at the invitation offered to the Chinese CP to attend the proceedings. Perhaps in deference to this controversy, Georges Marchais in his opening report condemned the 'murderous repression' of Tiananmen Square, whereupon the Chinese delegation walked out of the hall. The General Secretary went on to paint a gloomy picture of the international communist movement. With regard to Eastern Europe, the PCF leader employed the following logic: the PCF

*Next issue*

*Reflections on Eastern Europe  
Spain's united left*

knew of course that there were problems with socialist development in these societies — several citations of PCF criticism from the 22nd (1976) Congress onwards recurred throughout the week — however, there was 'a mistaken analysis and appreciation' of the depth of the crisis; nevertheless, the PCF has learned the lessons of uncritical obedience to the Soviet model, and 'has as a project a completely different society from actually existing socialism'. In conclusion, Marchais argued that the task was to give 'a second breath' to the communist movement, and he invoked in particular the Cuban and Vietnamese CP's as co-participants in this project.

The dissidents shared the belief that the PCF should remain a communist party, but as Fiterman's intervention underlined, there were crucial differences in outlook, both in terms of past PCF positions and future strategy. 'It is necessary to bury that which is dead, for all that attaches us to it condemns us.' Fiterman expressed the view that the party must continue to deepen its commitment to the strategy undertaken since 1976, but also broaden the scope of its self-criticism.

On France, the resolution highlighted the essential continuity of PCF policy from the 26th Congress. Priority should be given to the 'popular movement', and union of progressive forces should stem from common struggles rather than alliances between sets of leaders. In effect, the party recognises the mistake of the Common Programme (signed with the Socialists in 1972), and analyses its present electoral weakness (circa eight/nine per cent as compared to over 20 per cent in the '50s, '60s and early '70s) as a failure to mobilise the PCF's 'natural' constituency, the working class. To this end, the PCF leadership has prioritised social and industrial struggle and has recently voted a motion of censure against the Socialist government (and with the Right) over new social security legislation. Fiterman, on behalf of the *refondateurs*, whilst in basic agreement with Marchais' perspective, argued that the PCF 'had passed from priority accorded to the popular movement, to priority for essentially defensive social struggles.'

Future strategy and analysis of past positions, both in the international and domestic spheres of French communist activity, rely heavily upon the functioning of the Party. The 27th Congress witnessed a certain 'relaxation' of some of the democratic centralist norms, but was characterised more by its continuity with past practice than by its self-transformation.

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*'It is necessary to bury that which is dead, for all that attaches us to it condemns us.'*

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Although the *tribunes de discussion* in the party press (*l'Humanité* and *Revolution*) published more openly critical comments than had ever previously been the case, Fiterman still decided to resign from the committee charged with handling them, on the ground that he was excluded from the decision-making process. There were calls for an extraordinary Congress, a comprehensive revision of the PCF's statutes, and even for the resignation of the General Secretary. There were repeated efforts to force the leadership to allow more than one *projet de resolution* to be sent forward for discussion in cells and sections. All of this was resisted. But, as *Le Monde* (23 December) commented, the preparation of the Congress was 'without precedent within a party where the historical culture precludes, on principle, instances of indiscipline in the face of the headquarters' staff.' Although all of the PCF federations (based on the French administrative *departements*) voted for the *projet*, with the exception of Corsica South, the dissidents claimed that in conferences at cell and section level as many as a quarter of all communists either voted against the resolution, abstained or didn't vote at all.

In his report, Georges Marchais gave the statistics concerning the *projet de resolution*. At section conferences, 13,496 'propositions of amelioration or modification' were sent up to federal conferences, where 4,461 were

retained. 'Enriched' in this manner, the *projet* was adopted by 91.4% of delegates at the 1,528 section conferences (representing 51,300 delegates of cells). In the 96 federal conferences (16,205 delegates) the voting was 93.5 per cent in favour, 2.4 per cent against, and 4.1 per cent abstaining. At the Congress itself, the *projet de resolution* was adopted as follows: 1,670 for; 3 against; 22 abstentions. The following morning *l'Humanité* congratulated the PCF on having given itself a 'clear political line, decided after an immense democratic debate.' Interestingly, three members of the outgoing Political Bureau (Fiterman, Seve and Hermier) abstained, but were re-elected to their positions (albeit with votes that were well down on the average).

In the voting for the new leadership bodies of the PCF (Central Committee, Political Bureau and Secretariat with respectively 144, 21 and eight members) there were no real surprises. All 144 candidates to the Central Committee were elected (18 new members), although the scores of the *refondateurs* were, as a rule, appreciably lower than those of the *orthodoxes*. All 21 candidates to the Political Bureau were elected (five new members), and there were three new members of the Secretariat, from which Fiterman stood down. Marchais was re-elected for a seventh mandate unanimously, minus the abstention of Anicet le Pors, former minister.

In short, the 27th Congress of the PCF ended with no new breakthrough for the reformers within its ranks, but rather a consolidation of the political line decided by the leadership group. The prospects of the PCF being instrumental in re-constituting an international communist movement are extremely slim. Hardly better are the prospects for halting, let alone reversing, the PCF's further marginalisation within the French political system and wider society. But, by the same token, the 27th Congress re-affirmed the fact that it is difficult to forecast anything other than the further marginalisation of dissenting movements within the PCF. Fiterman and company now face the unappetising choice of remaining within the party, largely neutralised and further compromising their position in the eyes of the non-communist left, or leaving the PCF, thereby in effect acknowledging their political defeat and the unreformability of the PCF. Ironically, the challenge of the *refondateurs* having failed at the 27th PCF Congress, they may have avoided the tragic fate of actually presiding over the ultimate decline of the communist movement in France.

# CULTURAL FRONT

JAMES KELMAN views art and subversion as true allies and argues that the notion that creative endeavour has a right to public — let alone private — subsidy is something of a contradiction.

## Art and Subsidy

ONE PRIMARY PART OF THE 'CITY OF CULTURE' concept as applied in Glasgow is particularly crucial to anybody with the slightest interest in art, and I'm talking generally, not just about painting but literature, theatre, music: anything. It's at the heart of the concept, part of the actual premise: that a partnership can and should exist between the arts and big business. It's a natural extension of the way funding now operates, on both public and private subsidy, suggesting a heady mixture of high principles coupled with sound common sense. This further implies that left to their own devices those already engaged in the field are not quite up to the more mundane practicalities. Folk engaged in the arts might hold lofty ideas to do with morality, aesthetics, the human condition, and so on and so forth, but when it comes to making a thing 'work' they need help from more down-to-earth sort of chaps. Art is all very well but out there in the 'real' world it's a fight for survival.

Business sense is now equated with common sense. Art doesn't just need the money, it needs the thinking behind the money.

But any argument against public funding for the arts in our society is irrational. And decisions to cut or withdraw public subsidy are always political. Greed is the ultimate motivation. This is illustrated, for example, by the national government in Britain which pretends to various philosophic absurdities while doling out massive sums of public money to private enterprise. It also applies to local government. And in Scotland local government where it matters is not Tory, it is Labour.

Within the arts the battle has been on for a while, people struggling for private funding, trying to tempt open the sponsor's purse; competing with each other, some winning, some losing. Anything too radical or experimental, or in some other sense 'geared to a minority audience' begins with a handicap. Like any successful product, a work of art should be acceptable to as wide-ranging a market as possible. 'Market' here means media-response as much as potential audience. If a subsidised theatre company or gallery is doing its job properly, — that is, acting in line with current philosophy — then 'sponsor-appeal' exercises an influence on how it *commissions* plays, events or exhibitions. A theatre company no longer approaches a wide band of little sponsors for various bits and pieces connected with the production itself. Nowadays an initial cash injection is essential. Therefore the criteria of the

market-place come to form part of the theatre company or gallery's *own* criteria for judging the worth of new work. Not the merit, the worth. Its value is determined by its potential 'sale' to the private sector. A 'difficult' play or novel, or painting, is no longer a challenging piece of original work, it is one deemed worth while but thought unlikely to find major funding from private sources.

I don't want to get too bogged down in particular instances because, of course, what is happening in theatre and the arts generally is happening in every field where public funding is paramount, especially in those very rare instances where actual profit *remains* with the public. In our society profit is supposed to be private; the ordinary public is left with the loss. But the question of art and subsidy moves rapidly into other areas.

When a theatre company wants to produce a so-called 'difficult' play but cannot entice a private funding body to help subsidise the enterprise it is left with two or three alternatives. Offering a 'workshop' production is one of them. This immediately breaks through the public subsidy 'barrier'. Any publicly funded arts body in Britain must abide by certain agreements, one of which guarantees the artist a minimum fee for her or his work. On a 'workshop' production the playwright has the freedom to choose either a token fee or else no fee at all. It further solves the 'union problem': the company need not pay its members to the minimum Equity rate. In fact, they need pay no wages at all, only expenses. A 'workshop' production offers not the ultimate exercise in cost-cutting, which is voluntary liquidation, but it does mean great savings all the same: no rehearsals, no set, no sound, no lighting. The actors wear their own clothes or no clothes at all, and stand on the stage with manuscripts in hand, doing a sort of performance reading.

Obviously there are drawbacks: nobody has the remotest sense of being involved in an actual play; and for the audience (who frequently have to pay at the door for the privilege) the experience is not quite as good as being present in a recording studio when a radio dramatisation is taking place. 'Workshop' is a way of paying lip service to original work and new writing. Few companies like doing it. And one that maintains full production interest in a 'difficult' play might feel entitled to wonder if an element of 'script-liberation' could broaden its sponsor-appeal, i.e. can the manuscript be adjusted slightly to make it that bit less off-putting to the folk holding the purse. So as well as

*'They're always surprised by the idea  
of working class people reading a book,  
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The possibility just never occurs  
to them'*

controlling initial decisions on the production of new work, the private sector quickly comes to exert influence on 'script-development'.

WHAT IT COMES DOWN TO IS IMPOSITION, THE imposition of external value on criteria that should be the province of art. The folk with the money hold the power. This is true to the point of banality for those writers, directors, actors and others engaged in dramatic art forms within film and television; and a short answer to the depressing state of affairs in either medium, where to describe current output as second-rate is generally taken as a compliment. And at the risk of overstepping the bounds of hospitality: I can think of one home-grown movie I saw here in Dublin a month ago which maybe might have had a chance of working — speaking as a writer, the signs were there — but overall artistic control seemed so obviously to have been lost, lost to the folk holding the purse, and the end result was to my mind an incoherent mishmash. I'm speaking about *The Field*.

The one obvious, though seldom acknowledged, correlate of the shift from public into private sector arts subsidy is the increase in suppression and censorship. It's very hard to imagine a dramatisation of the offshore oil workers' fight for improved safety conditions being sponsored by the major oil corporations; as hard as it is to imagine US corporate funding for a realistic portrayal of its entrepreneurial activity in Central America or the Middle East, or anywhere else for that matter.

And oppression leads to repression; the situation where writers and artists stop creating their own work. They no longer see what they do as an end in itself; they adopt the criteria of the 'market-place'; they begin producing what they think the customer wants. The customer is no longer even the audience, nor in the case of drama is it the commissioning agent of the actual theatre company; the customer has become the potential sponsor, the person holding the purse strings on behalf of private business interests. What the artist is now producing has ceased to be art; it has become something else, perhaps a form of decoration, or worse, just another sell-out.

People engaged in art — all forms of art — continually make decisions on whether or not to continue working at what they do. Even where it becomes possible to survive economically. This is because the vast bulk of the work on offer is geared to the needs of private sector money. Such work is not only meaningless but often in direct conflict with the artists' own motivation, I mean political, moral, aesthetic, the lot. Some hold out by entering extended periods of 'rest'; others try for a compromise; they do the hack stuff and trust the money earned 'buys time' for more meaningful work in the future. But anyone who relies on the private sector for the economic means to create art, and continues to believe they are in control of the situation, is,

to my mind, very naive indeed. And, of course, for those who persevere on their own account, putting their own value on what they do, the chance to earn a living is really slim.

Within the higher income bracket in Britain and in Ireland many people express concern at the hardship endured by artists and writers. They assume the group is part of their own and therefore empathise with them; 'That could be me', they think. Others from the same income bracket are not depressed, they take the more aggressively romantic line and accept the necessity of suffering for art's sake. They do not for one minute think 'that could be them' but believe in the freedom to starve. Members of either faction assume artists receive their just reward at some indefinable point in the future, in the form of cash or glory, perhaps posthumously. If some artists never succeed in 'winning a reward' from society at all then they couldn't have been worth rewarding in the first place; perhaps the work they produced wasn't very good; perhaps it was 'wrong' — maybe it just wasn't Art — for within these circles of conventional left as well as right wing thought the myth that art with a capital 'a' is both the product and property of society's upper orders is taken for granted. They're always surprised by the idea of working class people reading a book, or listening to a piece of classical music. The possibility just never occurs to them.

And there's another line springs from the same mentality, the opposite side of the coin; it's often thought to derive from a 'class position'. This faction accepts the elitist myth wholeheartedly, and denounces all Art as elitist; and all of those engaged in its creation self indulgent time-wasters. They usually try to make a case for Agit Prop, or Social Realism, or revues where every song, joke or dance is followed by a presumptuous little polemic — usually reminding me of the Band of Hope when I was a boy; they gave you a biscuit and a cup of milk as long as you watched the slideshow on the missionaries. In that sort of company it never crosses the mind that people living in one of the outlying housing schemes might like to see a play by Chekov, or a painting by Cezanne. Right enough, they might make a case for so-called 'community art', where you give a crowd of folk trying to survive on social security a tin of Dulux and tell them to go and paint some murals on top of the graffiti.

IN THIS PAST YEAR IN GLASGOW, CONVENTIONAL myths to do with art and culture and public funding and private funding have been given full rein. The concept itself, 'City of Culture', was always hazy, extremely dubious indeed. It has more to do with etiquette than anything else. But if boldness is one essential ingredient of entrepreneurial activity then those who decided to 'go for it' back in Glasgow are champions of the new realism, which nowadays seems to cross not only national but party political



Paul Cézanne: 'Mount Sainte-Victoire,' 1990

boundaries, by folk on the left as well as right. What is becoming clearer by the day is that both the adoption and application of the concept derives from another heady mixture: intellectual poverty, moral bankruptcy and political cowardice.

It may appear paradoxical to describe such a bold and grandiose scheme as cowardice; there was after all an outlay of some £50 million, given in the name of art and culture, to entice private investment to the place.

But it was an act of cowardice. You have to remember that Scotland is ruled by a tiny minority party. The Tories only have around 20 per cent of the vote. The Labour Party in Scotland sends some 50 MPs to Westminster compared to only 10 Tories. The holders of municipal and regional office were elected by the people to offer some sort of challenge to the Tory national government of Britain. Instead of this they have capitulated in what I personally regard as a disgraceful and quite shameful manner. They are implementing the sort of attack on the people that no Tory administration would dare attempt, not in Scotland. And as will be seen over the coming months and years, the costs of this one PR extravaganza will have gigantic repercussions for the ordinary cultural life of the city. I mean by this that the money has to come from somewhere. The cuts will take place in those areas precisely concerned with art and culture. The public funding of libraries, art galleries and museums; swimming baths, public parks and public halls: it will all be cut drastically; and in some cases these services to the community will be closed down and sold off altogether, to private developers, to big business. In fact the Glasgow District Council recently tried to force through a sale of one third of the historic Glasgow Green itself. Absolutely outrageous. I'm glad to report that this was thwarted at the last minute, by a campaign set up for the purpose. But the other 'assets' of the people are still being stripped. What has been presented as a celebration of art in

all its diversity has become an actual attack on the cultural life of the majority of the Glaswegian public.

After 1990 of course, there must be some spin-off for the community. No one can spend that amount of money and fail to buy something. But authentic benefit for the many rather than the few seems destined to concern Art. And art is the product of artists. And so-called 'community' art is also the product of artists, that is, if so-called 'community art' is anything other than a necessary part of that fore-going elitist myth — the product of artists, not the product of 'the cultural workforce', a term I have come upon only recently and which seems to refer to those who administer public funding and/or private sponsorship for arts initiatives, and gives rise to the peculiar notion that without such a workforce culture wouldn't exist *properly*, that without such a team of administrative experts, operating on behalf of that heady mixture of public and private enterprise, *art* itself wouldn't exist, not 'out there', in the real world, where life is a war and the poor old artists, with all their high principles and quaint ideals, need protection.

In that so-called 'real' world the only real terms are cash terms. And the only criteria are the criteria that set the conditions for real cash profit.

The architects of the adoption of the concept 'City of Culture' have been politicians and entrepreneurs; the politicians represent themselves as the public and the entrepreneurs represent themselves. Cash investment in the city and environs has been the sole motivation, as the politicians have confirmed publicly. There is nothing wrong in that as far as their view of the 'real' world is concerned, it is perfectly consistent. And also quite consistent to assume, given the criteria, that profit in real cash terms from the investment will remain private, that the costs and any ultimate loss will once again belong to the public. It is important at this point to distinguish between politicians and those whom they are elected to represent.

*'Under the new-style philosophy of government, which seems rooted firmly in the structure of US corporate business management, those who should be our elected representatives and custodians are transformed into chief executives'*

Folk who defend or justify the expense in terms of art and the cultural benefits to the public seem to me to have no valid argument at all. If they manage to rid themselves of the criteria of the so-called 'real world' then they are left with millions of pounds of public money to spend on the arts and culture in this world. This world is different from that other world. In that other world there is only one set of criteria, designed to set the conditions for monetary gain: in this world, the one where art and culture exist, there are a variety of sets of criteria, they include the one mentioned, but also include others such as the moral, the aesthetic, the humanitarian and so on.

The people — artists and all — were presented with a *fait accompli* by a team supposedly there to represent public and private interests. But in reality the interests were always private. The only surprising thing about the fact is that people are surprised by it.

Meaningful debate on the subject was never allowed. This too should not be surprising. Censorship and suppression are essential ingredients of the 'real world' of private profit and public loss. These days this is achieved by open decree; taking its lead from the present Tory administration at national level, local government officials have tried to suppress voices of dissent. And when that failed they tried and have occasionally succeeded, in punishing those who dare to speak out. Particular examples are Michael Donnelly of Glasgow's People Palace Museum who was publicly humiliated and then sacked; and Elspeth King of the same museum who was also publicly humiliated and then downgraded. Meanwhile the social and historical relics of the museum are themselves being down-graded, perhaps prior to dispersal. Within the closed ranks of the city's political establishment itself who knows what's happening. Secrecy is yet another essential ingredient of the so-called 'real world'.

UNDER THE NEW STYLE PHILOSOPHY OF government, which seems rooted firmly in the structure of US corporate business management, those who should be our elected representatives and custodians are transformed into chief executives. At the highest level their power is centralised to the point of autonomy. They are no longer accountable to anyone. The assets of our cultural life have become their property, not to keep for themselves but to dispose of, and to dispose of entirely as they see fit, to whomsoever they see fit. Our police has become their police; more and more it takes on the aspect of an army and is already empowered with decisions that cannot be made but by blatant political preference.

The mainstream media and the problems faced by those who attempt to work within the field while retaining a degree of integrity is much too large an issue to discuss fully here, but many of the points raised above are applicable. It doesn't matter how good a journalist is if the work cannot

be done in the way it should be done, if the values of the journalist are not only an irrelevance but a positive hindrance in the face of those who own or control the purse strings. Unfortunately, mainstream journalism in Britain is so far repressed that many of those engaged in the field have lost sight of the reality. When confronted by folk who persist in criticising aspects of society, they cannot get beyond the criteria within which they themselves are forced to operate and thus, intentionally or otherwise, are forced to seek ulterior motive or personal interest where none exist.

There's a group by the name of Workers' City which I became associated with several months ago. It isn't a party, and has no especial line. What I am saying today is being said on behalf of myself, as a writer, an artist, but also as a citizen. I am not speaking on behalf of the group. I don't have the right to. Nor do I want the right to. Workers' City is simply a collection of individuals — about a dozen, twenty at the very most — of different left wing bias and includes members of the Labour Party itself. Our success as a campaigning body is quite evident from the tremendous hostility we've received, not just from the ruling administration but from folk you might expect to have sympathised or even empathised with what we've been doing. Part of what we've been doing is offering a critique of 'City of Culture', not in a positive way and not in a negative way; in my opinion, what has aroused the hostility is that our attack has been at the very heart of the thing, at the premise itself. We have tried to define the context as much as possible, which is difficult when you have to try and use the mainstream media for example, or lobby local government, or try to climb these other barriers erected by the establishment in order to keep control of dissenting voices.

Some folk maintain that An Age of Liberalism existed from a point in the mid 1960s until a point in the early 1970's. I'm speaking of the arts in particular although some might want to generalise. In either case it may or may not be true. It probably is true for those who assume that the British Broadcasting Corporation was once an authentic instrument for freedom. But in present day Britain, and I suspect here in Ireland, it isn't art and big business that are close allies, it's art and subversion; the notion that creative endeavour has a right to public — let alone private — subsidy, is something of a contradiction. It is much more consistent, given the nature of society, that people engaged in the field as honestly as they can should continue being punished for it, in one way or another.

*James Kelman delivered his talk to a Workers' Party conference, 'Culture is for everyone' at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, on 24th November last. It follows a line of thought continued in the foreword of his new collection of plays Hardie and Baird: the last days which will be published by Secker & Warburg in April.*

# A forgotten chapter

LOGAN LAYFETTE lies in a disremembered place. Only a brace of small, cheap, plastic Old Glories stuck in the earth by the gravestone mark it out as something very special — but these modest flags were all the more powerful because of their modesty.

They are not the Old Glories which, for example, Ronald Reagan, his heirs and successors would wrap themselves in; nor the ones which Mr Oliver North saluted so frequently and so televisually. No: they were likely more redolent of the Old Glories carried, say, by the thousands who set out in the spring of 1965 in Selma, Alabama, to march to Montgomery, Alabama, with an intent to get America to take down and dust off all that old guff about freedom and the equality of humankind and such. And, of course, they knew the price — the insults, the cracked heads, the gassings, and worse.

Logan Layfette knew people who paid a price for similar sentiments about 100 years before.

## A visit to a New York cemetery led NOEL McFARLANE to uncover a forgotten chapter in black American history.

We cope with cemeteries, even decrepit cemeteries like the one where Logan Layfette rests, Mount Moor Cemetery, near the town of Nyack in New York (from where, by night, you could probably see the *aurora metropolis* of New York City) by imbuing them with a sense of wonderful peace. Well, let us therefore indulge ourselves and take our minds off maggots — it was, indeed, astonishingly restful on the summer morning I was there. There was sunlight on the freshly-greened trees along the overgrown and tangled hillside. Old headstones peeped from verdancy. There was considerable

birdsong. There were morning doves and azaleas.

Mount Moor Cemetery, was a 'burying ground for colored people', according to a quotation used on a plaque placed there by an African-American historical group. It held veterans of the Civil War, the Spanish American War, the first World War, the second World War and the Korean War. And from the dilapidated state of Mount Moor Cemetery, you would wonder once again if the Civil War had been fought and won at all.

A few yards across from these graves, the earth is cleared for the building of a shopping mall.

The gravestone of Logan Layfette says: 'A soldier in Company A, 54th Massachusetts Volunteers. Died June 22nd, 1881, aged 49 years.'

There is a story in these faded words.

The 54th Massachusetts, an all-black Civil War regiment (with the white officers deemed requisite), part of

## c o n t r i b u t o r s to this issue

**Pat McCartan**

is Workers' Party TD for Dublin North East

**Maurice Sheehan**

is a trade union official and writes in a personal capacity

**Gerard O'Quigley**

is a research student and tutor in politics at University College Dublin

**Paddy Woodworth**

is an *Irish Times* staff journalist

**Stephen Hopkins**

is a researcher at the European University Institute in Florence

**James Kelman**

is a novelist, playwright and short-story writer based in Glasgow

**Noel McFarlane**

is a writer and critic based in New York

**Ronan Sheehan**

is a writer, critic and television script editor

**Robert Armstrong**

is an artist and designer based in Dublin

**Lorraine Kennedy**

is a member of the Workers' Party

**Gary Kent**

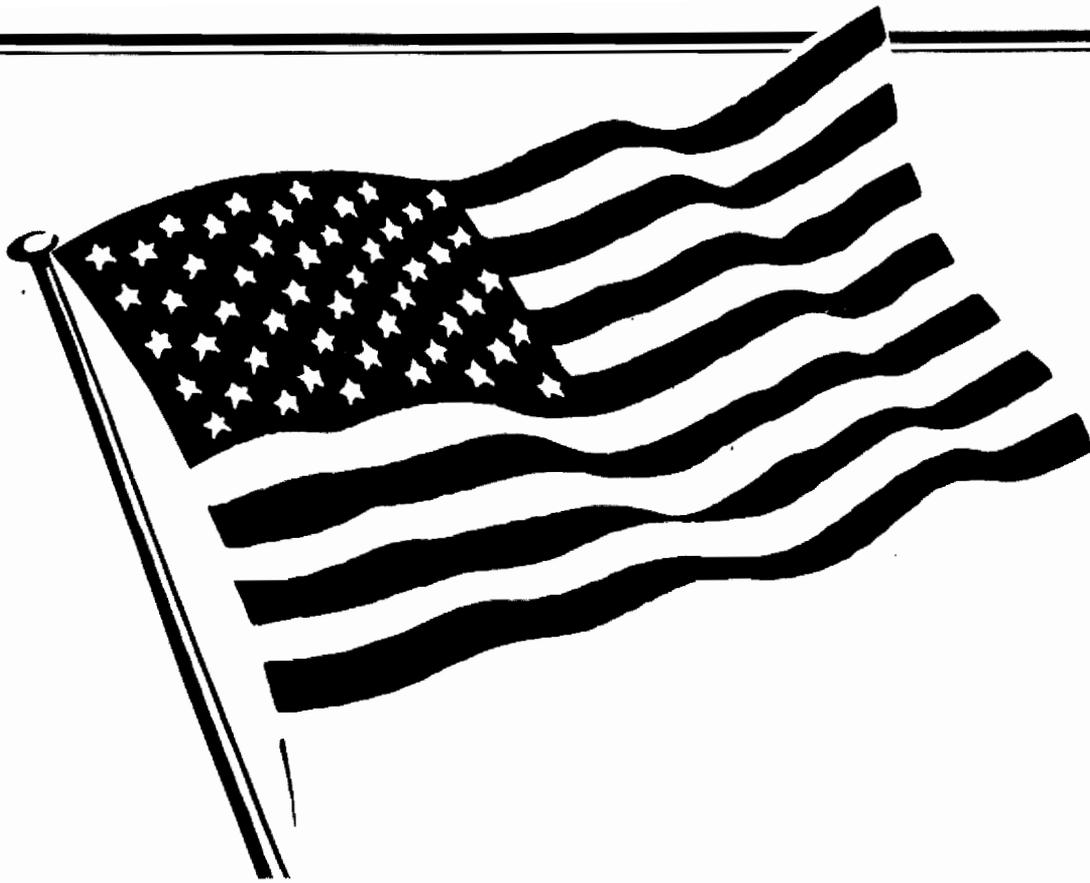
is press officer of the British Branch of New Consensus and a member of the editorial board of ILP magazine. He writes in a personal capacity

**Pat Rabbitte**

is Workers' Party TD for Dublin South West

**Jim Kemmy**

is Labour Party TD for Limerick East



whose story was told so authentically in the recent under-publicised, under-distributed Tristar film *Glory*, numbered among them the people of their day who freely made the decision that they would die, if required, for the advancement of their race and for equality, and for a fighting chance at freedom. Trooper Logan Layfette, whose gravestone I cleared of any weeds or wild flowers that might conceal his contribution, and the likely fact that his heart was brave, may well have been among those who gave a lot of thought to freedom.

Eugene Andreassi, a New Yorker whose entire free time is an exploration of history, played, in *Glory*, 'the role of a common soldier in the Union Army'. His knowledge of the Civil War is most extensive; he is particularly reflective too, on the popular motives that mould a period. He says *Glory* is 'without exception the most authentic portrayal of the Civil War that has ever been put on film.' It is, he says, a very rare and much-needed lesson in black American history, in what is carefully forgotten in American history.

The 54th regiment was unique, a reflection of revolutionary times. It was set up in 1863 and numbered, effectively, at any one time, about 600 or so men. It was the first unit of 'free-born' black men, who were mostly northerners. To many of them, the current term 'a brother', had it been about at the time, would not have been mere jive.

Was it a significantly political Union administration move that sent them to do their disciplined and efficient fighting — and their unstintingly courageous dying — in the South?

Young Logan Layfette survived the battle of Fort Wagner, at the mouth of Charleston Harbour in South Carolina in 1863. Half of his regiment did not. It may take its place among the terrible and sacrificial statements made in pursuit of dignity.

He would have carried a muzzle-loaded .577 calibre Enfield rifle, and responded to commands transmitted verbally, by bugle and by drum. He would have been proficient in one of the most crucial aspects of soldiering then — drill, group response, moving as a body. The acrid stink of 'black-powder' gunpowder would have been so familiar that he would hardly notice it.

If he was typical, he would have held his commanding officer, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, in esteem. Shaw was a Bostonian, whose wealthy, staunchly progressive family worked tirelessly to abolish slavery. Gould had a crucial bond with many of his men — he had taken his place in an ideological war (certainly in the 54th's case) as freely as they had theirs, for he certainly didn't need the salary. And when the army paid the ranks less than they did white soldiers, officers (white) and men threw the money back — they would fight for nothing, they said, because they were fighting for freedom.

We do not know how Logan Layfette made it out of the suicidal assaults that cut the 54th Massachusetts in half at Fort Wagner. They did what they had to do — die. They faced huge coastal defence guns (much bigger than the usual 12 lb howitzer field pieces) and infantry fire too. They were men, of course, with something to prove. They had to do it in blood, through pain.

Eugene Andreassi, who is half Irish, half Italian, and who worked on the re-enactment of the Fort Wagner battle in *Glory*, says: 'To see that place and to know what they were going into; to see the mouths of those guns pointed in their direction; to understand that they had to go forward while their comrades and friends and family members were falling all around them, and to keep moving forward into the face of such appalling fire, must take a measure of bravery which I am certainly not familiar with.'

It may be as much a revelation to many in the US as well as to many in Ireland that black regiments of the Union Army comprised 180,000 men, and played a role of consequence in the resolution of the dreadful conflict. Groups who value history and people like Eugene Andreassi do their best to keep their memory green. I asked him why we'd heard so little, apart from works such as *Glory*, about this black contribution to the 'United' in United States. 'Because,' he said, 'it's always been, and it's a sad fact, a racist society.'

# The lie of the land

DESPITE the rural setting of many films made in Ireland, agricultural production or struggle over land have rarely been the subject matter of such films. Only *Captain Boycott* (1947), a British film about the Land War of 1879–82, dealt, however inadequately, with that struggle, though a now lost early film, *A Cattle Drive in Galway* (1908) and *Knocknagow* (1918), from Charles Kickham's novel and set during the 1840s Famine, were also set on the land. The former film demonstrates that emigration to America was the only way out of rural poverty for a landless labourer, while *Knocknagow* simplified social class difference on the land and laid the blame for grazier/tillage conflict at the feet of a reprehensible land agent. These two themes — emigration and land ownership — are also central to the concerns of *The Field* (1990).

It was suggested by some writers upon *The Field's* release that the central character, Bull McCabe (Richard Harris), was a mythic or archetypal figure, even a King Lear. While these resonances are indeed in *The Field*, they are not particularly helpful in examining the 'primeval' relationship to the land displayed in the film.

Landless but for the field he has cultivated from rock-strewn barrenness, and rents from the Widow (Frances Tomelty), the Bull is in the position of many Irish tenant farmers prior to their victories of the Land War. Unlike the outcome in the early 1880s and subsequently, when the British State funded the purchase of land from landlords to tenant farmers, he has to contend with the open market to achieve his goal of buying the field after the Widow decides to sell it by public auction. In this way he is made vulnerable to the full force of the capitalist market represented by the Irish-American (Tom Berenger).

Bull's threats to would-be purchasers is heeded by the locals but holds no fear for the representative of American capital. His ancestors' sentimental attachment to the land has long since been dispelled by the Famine exodus and its aftermath. He sees the field simply as a piece of real estate. In the face of this assault by capital all that

**The land question has long been central to Irish politics. LORRAINE KENNEDY notes its absence in Irish cinema.**



*Raging Bull*

the Bull can counter with are insulting references to the American's ancestors deserting Ireland, (an exchange which is unlikely to endear the film to Irish-American audiences).

The American is only one amongst a group of outsiders who help define the Bull, if not the local community. As well as the Widow, who wishes to return to her home district after selling out, are the priest, the garda and the unsettled and unsettling community of travellers. As in many films such as the Westerns of John Ford, the outsider defines and helps consolidate the settled community. It is one of the peculiarities of *The Field* that a series of outsiders *fails* to define the community. Indeed, the Bull's rather odd alliance with the publican/auctioneer (John Cowley), goes against the grain not just of the American Western archetypes of farmer versus businessman, but it would be as incongruous in the West of Ireland as in the American West. Yet the

publican/auctioneer is seen at least in sympathy, if not in league, with the Bull's struggle against the American. Surely it would be in the interest of the local petit-bourgeois to align themselves in this instance at least with foreign capital. This imbalance can in part be explained by how the film-makers shifted the time frame of John B Keane's play from the late 1950s/early 1960s (and a real event) back to the 1930s. The intensity of rural/urban and foreign/native capital conflicts, as well as attitudes to more general modernising influences, were much more in evidence in Ireland in the late 1950s than in the 1930s. As the film lays claim to a mythic dimension it is worth examining this in the context of how it transcends 'material' reality.

When the Bull kills the American, and his son (Sean Bean) sets out to leave with a travelling girl, he becomes deranged, destroying first his home and then, in an echo of the Cuchullain myth, driving his herd of cattle over a cliff-top, killing his son in the process. While this mythic element has the Bull raving with 'madness' the film's final image at least encourages a different reading of the Bull's actions.

Wading into the sea screaming for his dead son, he appears to be trying to push back the waves, but they come forward relentlessly. Just as there is no chance of reversing the tide, neither is there any turning back the tide of history. In this way, the film's makers achieve a degree of reality which is lacking in much of the film. For to present a mythic or primeval relationship to the land is to disguise more crucial social and cultural attitudes to the land, and thus replace the local with a dubious 'universalism'. Unlike the epic *Man of Aran* (1934), where the family ultimately triumphs over both sea and land, *The Field* presents a gloomy prognosis of the landless labourer or even small farmer. Though set in the 1930s its conclusion is apt today when capitalism is driving from the land those who continue to ignore the nature of the market.

*Film history references in this article are drawn from Cinema and Ireland, Rockett, Gibbons, Hill, London, 1987.*

# Secrets and stereotypes

KEN LOACH's latest film, *Hidden Agenda*, is a controversial thriller set in Northern Ireland. It won the Cannes Jury prize last year, much to the anger of some of the British tabloids, whilst the *Daily Telegraph* condemned it as 'pro-IRA'.

It is a fictionalised, composite account of the dark, subversive secrets of the British State. It includes *Spycatcher's* view of the security services as out of control in the mid-Seventies with paranoid plots against Harold Wilson and Ted Heath as well as the mid-Eighties Stalker enquiry into the security forces' own private shooting war. Former Army Intelligence officer, Fred Holroyd was an adviser to the film and himself plays an MI5 thug, let loose on the streets of Dublin.

*Hidden Agenda* depicts Northern Ireland as virtually under military occupation. As one of the characters says: 'if the great British public knew what was happening they wouldn't sleep in their beds.' The scenes of daily life, house searches, kids playing under the guns of British soldiers and the Divis Flats are grim.

The film opens with the murder of an American civil liberties lawyer from an organisation like Amnesty International which is investigating allegations of widespread torture and mistreatment of suspects. A Stalker-type figure, Kerrigan, is sent to investigate and comes up against RUC obstructionism and threats. Kerrigan is the good guy committed to justice, whoever it hurts, but in the end even he can't deliver the goods. The message is that there is clearly no British justice for Irish people. The

## GARY KENT reviews Ken Loach's new film 'Hidden Agenda'.

enquiry is inconclusive yet we all know that the lawyer was murdered by the State to cover up a treasonous plot.

As a dramatised account of the murderous activities of the British State it's a fairly fast-moving and gripping movie. For this, Ken Loach must be congratulated. He has also assembled good actors, a reasonably credible script by controversial *Perdition* playwright, Jim Allen, and all on a shoe-string budget of only £2 million.

*Hidden Agenda* does not pretend to be anything but a committed film from a director who believes that 'Ulster is living through the last stages of a long war of independence which will end when the British leave.' As such, the film only reveals a part of the reality of life in Northern Ireland.

Last year the film was screened at the House of Commons. In debate, Ken Loach explained that his sympathies lay with the catholic population who are at the sharp edge of injustice and discrimination. In fact, the actors who played the civil liberties team visited Belfast before they started the film so that they could acclimatise themselves but only visited catholic areas. This probably explains the very superficial portrayal of the protestants in the film who really only get a walk-on part. They appear briefly as sectarian stereotypes; marching with drums, uniforms and regalia. An actor comments that it is just tribal rights; and that's the last we see of the

majority population — unless they turn up as dodgy cops. Jim Allen's response to this criticism was that he had not written a film for the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. This is too flippant for words.

My own view was that the Republican movement was also sanitised although an actor comments that not all Republicans are IRA. A republican reporter, and sympathetic character, explains that her husband is doing time for a punishment shooting against 'a gangster terrorising the local community.' Sounds reasonable at first hearing but it slides over the reality of such paramilitary 'justice' in Northern Ireland.

One of the more positive, recent developments was the formation of a non-sectarian campaign — Families Against Intimidation and Terror — which campaigns against all such punishment shootings. Currently, the fledgling peace movement in Northern Ireland is campaigning for the release of Mickey Williams, a Derry man they describe as a hostage. Williams heard a neighbour's scream, phoned the police and unwittingly exposed an IRA operation. He is now in exile and under an IRA death threat if he returns. We could do with a movie about these activities.

Ken Loach's own perspective on the troubles is made clear throughout the film — and that's his right. We get over-simplified and wooden speeches on 800 years of British imperialism and James Connolly quotes in the setting of a friendly Republican club. And the baddies are bad. The MI5 chief calmly explains that 'Ireland would be a lovely place if it weren't for the Irish,' and then proceeds to try to blackmail the Stalker figure. The RUC chief explains, on his way to another funeral, that if you want to bring home the bacon, you have got to kill the pig.

Fair enough, you might say, for it is clearly an agitprop film. You can see it as a gripping movie and have your views confirmed or confronted. But I doubt that it will change most people's views of Northern Ireland, summed up by one actor: 'nobody gives a shit about what happens in Northern Ireland.' It does little to enlighten debate about the future for the troubled province but it's good crack. If, however, the film does provoke debate then it will be worthwhile for that, especially given that so many supporters of a 'troops out' position resort to abuse rather than real dialogue.



Frances McDormand and Brian Cox in 'Hidden Agenda'

# A book with a purpose

THIS is the fable of a peculiarly Irish Camelot. There is no doubt about who Queen Guinevere is. Who plays King Arthur or Sir Lancelot depends on your point of view. Fergus Finlay's point of view is that of Labour Party press officer and is, on occasion, accentuated by selective amnesia.

Mary Robinson's determination, single-minded professionalism and extraordinary self-belief is faithfully recorded. Her gruelling six-month campaign is described in detail. From Allihies in West Cork to Donegal, from the Aran Islands to emigrant groups in London, from Ballymun to Belfast, she went where no presidential candidate went before.

The role of Dick Spring is not ignored. In fact, the book proper opens and closes with fulsome tributes to the Labour leader ... 'it can never be forgotten that this victory was conceived in the first place by Dick Spring...' In between, the heroic contribution of many leading Labour personalities is faithfully recorded. The author even throws an occasional bone to the publicist Eoghan Harris. The unflappable contribution of 'Meathman' (I think in fact he's from Ballina) Declan Geraghty is quite properly recalled. The dedication and professionalism of the candidate's driver and hair stylist and the coach driver from Cronin's in Cork is duly chronicled. However when it comes to the role of the Workers' Party, Fergus Finlay's phenomenal memory lets him down. The reference to the Workers' Party involvement in the campaign is minimalist and patronising. To be precise it takes up one nine-line paragraph in the entire book. There are about three other one sentence allusions throughout the book all adduced to make a negative point.

A seeming exception is the author's pat on the head for Eamon Gilmore whom he mentions as joining the campaign committee 'later in the campaign.' But this is misleading. The Workers' Party understood from an early stage that Mary Robinson was not only agreeable to, but positively encouraged, representation on the committee from the Workers' Party. At a private meeting with her and Bride Rosney, I advised her during the course of the meeting that the Workers' Party was nominating Eamon Gilmore TD, and Peter Kane as our representatives to the campaign committee.

In fact Gilmore alone finally managed to effect an entry to his first meeting of the committee on October 10th and only then in unforeseen circumstances. Finlay's book is not the first time that

## BOOKS

**MARY ROBINSON: A President with a Purpose by Fergus Finlay; O'Brien Press; IR£5.95.**

the Workers' Party membership or non-membership of the campaign committee has been misrepresented by senior members of the Labour Party. For example, as complaints from Workers' Party members piled up about the party's non-profile or low profile in the media, we made an interesting discovery after several conversations which were conducted at cross purposes with RTE personnel. It emerged that RTE's policy approach was to regard the forces on the presidential election as representing three 'camps', Lenihan, Currie and Robinson. For example, the format and participants for programmes such as *Questions and Answers* were agreed with representatives of the three camps in advance. RTE executives were somewhat puzzled at WP protests at its regular exclusion and the Workers' Party were bemused as to why RTE was puzzled. The penny eventually dropped when a senior executive told me: 'All of this was agreed with the Robinson camp and your Eamon Gilmore was part of this agreement.' The executive was clearly taken aback to learn that Eamon Gilmore agreed to nothing, was told nothing and wasn't even on the committee until long after all this was 'agreed'. Up to this time, were it not for the thoughtfulness of, firstly, Fine Gael and latterly Fianna Fáil in playing the 'red card' the Workers' Party, whose members were vigorously involved on the ground, would scarcely have been visible in the media. WP members contrasted this at the time with the profile of the Progressive Democrats who were officially not involved in the campaign.

A further example encompasses both the gaps in Fergus Finlay's memory and the treatment of the Workers' Party on another RTE programme, this time *Morning Ireland*. The book refers inaccurately to the Taoiseach seizing 'on De Rossa's use of the word "we" to suggest that the Workers' Party had some kind of secret plot to take control of the Áras.' What is being referred to here is the controversy surrounding whether the Taoiseach abused an Army

officer in Áras an Uachtarán and, specifically, De Rossa's remark (actually on a *Today Tonight* programme on October 31st) to the effect that 'after President Hillery retires and is succeeded by Mary Robinson, we'll be better able to investigate the entire incident.'

De Rossa's remark meant no more than when out of office, Dr Hillery — who had behaved extremely honourably in the 1982 controversy — might be prepared to throw some light on the affair. After all Brian Lenihan told the nation on *Six-One* that he would be meeting the President to reassure himself that his 'mature recollection' was correct. In so far as there was anything sinister involved it was in the menacing conduct of Fianna Fáil in the Dáil on 1st November led by the Taoiseach and his Minister for Justice.

The exchanges were mild compared to what was to come as Fianna Fáil heaped vitriol on the Workers' Party hoping to damage Mary Robinson's candidacy in the process. They issued sometimes up to three statements per day, the high point of which — or more properly the low point — was a smug statement from Seamus Brennan professing indignation at the prospect of foreign capital taking flight if Mary Robinson was elected to Áras an Uachtarán!. The ugliest manifestation of this dimension of the Fianna Fáil psyche was Mr Haughey's dishonest harangue to the Nuremberg-Rally style final meeting in the National Stadium.

*Morning Ireland* next day used an excerpt of the Taoiseach's most explicit attack on the Workers' Party. It was followed by an interview with the Minister for Agriculture, devoted almost entirely to an uninterrupted hatchet job on the Workers' Party in which, at his sanctimonious and self-righteous best, Michael O Kennedy seemed to challenge the legitimacy of the party's existence. Amazed members of the Workers' Party listening to the programme and expecting at a minimum a party spokesperson to reply, couldn't believe their ears when for the umpteenth time in the course of the campaign, *Morning Ireland* called in the Labour Party leader, Dick Spring. Amazement turned to anger when Spring refused to defend the Workers' Party participation in the campaign which instead he described as 'the weak link'. This programme was the culmination of a unique record by *Morning Ireland*. Not once during the course of the entire campaign was the Workers' Party invited on the programme.

It was against this background that Proinsias De Rossa was invited to

appear on the final *Questions and Answers* programme two days before polling and at the height of the 'red scare' storm whipped up by Fianna Fáil. As a result of the controversy surrounding the Duffy tapes affair which had originated on *Questions and Answers* (although only a few of the cognescenti appreciated the significance of Lenihan's denials at the time) the programme was eagerly awaited. As Fianna Fáil statements became more hysterical I had low key queries from Labour Party sources questioning the wisdom of De Rossa appearing in what they correctly predicted would be a 'packed audience'.

In the event, the programme was a real boost for the Robinson campaign for two reasons. The two reasons were Proinsias De Rossa and Bobby Molloy. De Rossa routed Tourism Minister, Seamus Brennan who had his worst television experience since he first graduated from Bunny Carr. Molloy's was also a tour de force in which he managed to communicate to PD voters official sanction to vote for Mary Robinson.

This time the phone calls were two to one from non-party members and were rapturous about De Rossa's performance, a reaction that was again encountered widely on polling day. Strangely, it seems to be the only television programme that Fergus Finlay missed.

Finlay does however, deal frankly with the tensions between the Robinson household and the Labour Party. Essentially the Robinson household was unimpressed with the professionalism of the Labour Party and felt that Mary Robinson was being used in the limited objective of broadening the appeal of the Labour Party, and, accordingly, felt 'compelled to turn for advice and guidance wherever they could get it.' Meanwhile the Labour Party was harbouring suspicions that Mary Robinson was using the Party to get a nomination and then determined to put as much distance as possible between her and the Party 'in the belief that the association would damage her chances'.

Unfortunately Finlay does not record that some of the tensions between the two 'camps' concerned the role of the Workers' Party. The full extent of grievance by WP members concerning the manner in which some Labour Party TDs seemed to be committing more energy to excluding the Workers' Party from information and participation than they were to the campaign itself, never reached the committee.

The book is admirably up-to-date in so much as it includes the text of the new President's address on her inauguration. But it omits reference to the briefings given to journalists immediately after polling day, by the author — the



Mary Robinson

decision to refer to himself for the most part in the third person is irritating — John Rogers, and to a lesser extent Ruairi Quinn. Understandably the purpose of the briefings was to garner the optimum political credit for themselves and the Labour Party from the victory. However there was a dual purpose: to play down the involvement of the Workers' Party. Generally speaking the media post-election analyses faithfully reflected these briefings. One journalist, Mark O Connell of *The Sunday Business Post* reported that it reflected the 'insecurity' of the Workers' Party that its 150,000 pieces of literature featured the Starry Plough. The Workers' Party produced and distributed 500,000 copies of a main leaflet with Mary Robinson's symbol and none of the literature featured the Starry Plough!

This was continuing the tone set by the Labour leader Dick Spring on the immediate post-election *Today Tonight* programme. I waited in RTE along with the Chairman of the Progressive Democrats, Michael McDowell, to go on the same programme. McDowell watched in disbelief as Spring in his very opening contribution deplored the part played in the campaign by the Workers' Party which was far 'more minor than (I) would have expected!' Responding later on the programme I congratulated Dick Spring for selecting such an outstanding candidate as Mary Robinson — (Finlay attributes the original choice of Mary Robinson to a political assistant in the Labour Party, Ms Denise Rogers) — and the potential for public conflict between the two parties died.

Later that night, however, Ruairi Quinn highlighted on television the failure of the Workers' Party to contribute financially to the campaign. From the very outset nobody in the Robinson camp was under any illusion but that the Workers' Party would be very hard pressed to discharge the £23,000 that our own campaign eventually cost.

The post-election political comment

has generally been to the effect that relations between the Labour Party and the Workers' Party have improved as a result of the election experience. That conclusion, I think, is true as far as it goes. It also seems to me that the speech by Proinsias De Rossa on becoming leader of the Workers' Party in 1989 giving priority to the need for left co-operation and specifically arguing for principled co-operation between the Workers' Party and the Labour Party is more valid now than ever. However the tenor of this book and other events, during and arising from, the election experience confirm me in the fear that principled co-operation between the two parties may die from lip service.

The conventional view now is that the post-Robinson electorate will demonstrate little patience with petty bickering and jealousies between the two parties. We are urged to move to the centre and go after the Moby Dick vote and abandon outdated concepts such as exploitation and poverty which so upset sections of that vote. Moby Dick can be a very selfish animal (or mammal if you like) with a voracious appetite for smaller fish.

It is scarcely to bicker to wonder aloud whether left co-operation is being abandoned in favour of a larger political ship to hunt Moby Dick.

It would be dishonest to neglect the possibility that what is being contemplated is the resurrection of the 1982 discussions between Garret FitzGerald, Michael O Leary, Dick Spring and Liam Kavanagh to create a Social Democratic Party? If that is so I have no doubt but that the political system can absorb such a realignment but it is not the realignment that I would like to see or that at least one third of our people need. I would hazard a guess that a great many Labour Party rank and file agree.

Alternatively, in so far as the 'New Direction' is actually thought out, and I believe it is not, advocates of the move to the centre by the Labour Party will probably argue that what is being teed up is a new coalition. After all history teaches us that it is our duty to provide an alternative government to Fianna Fáil? And coalitions are indisputably the pattern of the future. This is not a cheap shot at coalition. It is understandable that politicians who have ideas and who campaign for policies should want political power to implement these ideas.

But history also teaches us that coalitions are about *knowing* who you represent and having sufficient strength and conviction to actually *represent* them. Otherwise the left are merely guests in power.

*Pat Rabbitte*

# Descent into wasteland

**BANNED IN IRELAND: Censorship and the Irish Writer.** Edited by Julia Carlson; Routledge; £7.99 stg.

The tyranny of the Irish Church and its associated parasites, the upstart bourgeoisie ... maintains itself by the culture of dung, superstition and ignoble poverty among the masses. And the censorship of literature was imposed, lest men like me could teach the Irish masses that contact with dung is demoralizing, that ignorance is ignoble and that poverty, instead of being a passport to heaven, makes this pretty earth a monotonous hell. The soutaned bullies of the Lord, fortified in the dung-encrusted towns, hurl the accusation of sexual indecency at any book that might plant the desire for civilisation and freedom in the breasts of their wretched victims.

Thus Liam O'Flaherty described Irish censorship in November, 1932. Up to the publication of *Banned in Ireland: Censorship and the Irish Writer*, the most comprehensive study of the subject was *Censorship: The Irish Experience* by Michael Adams (1968). The present book, edited by Julia Carlson for Article 19, the International Centre on Censorship, complements and augments the earlier work. *Banned in Ireland* provides a platform for seven writers — Benedict Kiely, John Broderick, John McGahern, Edna O'Brien, Lee Dunne, Maurice Leitch and Brian Moore — whose work has been prohibited under the provision of the 1928 Censorship Act. While the editor, Julia Carlson, deserves appreciation of her energy and dedication in tracking down and securing interviews with these novelists in various locations, writers invariably do much better with the written rather than spoken word. In short, I believe that many readers would have preferred written responses from the writers on the large and painful question of Irish censorship rather than recorded conversations in relatively short interviews.

However, having said that, it must also be stated that the book is a most interesting and valuable work about a sad period of Irish life. The descent into the wasteland began in 1929 with the enactment of the Censorship of Publications Act. In his preface to the book, Kevin Boyle describes the effect of the Act, and what the book has set out to achieve



John McGahern — one of the banned

The book reveals the less well understood side of Irish culture and community, a society that at least until 1970 was in the grip of cultural isolationism, anti-intellectualism, and sexual repressiveness... (this) is the cautionary tale of a public that failed to come to their (writers') defence and that spurned their creative achievement.

Fanned by the invective of two cheap monthly magazines, the *Catholic Mind* and the *Catholic Bulletin* and a host of other religious publications, the Censorship Board of five members began their work of assessing publications. Sexual 'indecency' and references to birth control were to be their two major targets. Eamon de Valera was an early supporter of the Act and the Board. One of his biographers, Mary Bromage, has related his attitude

His strictures extended beyond the evils of drink to the evil of jazz, the evils of betting on the races, the dangers from indecent books, and he concurred in the Government's Bill to censor publications.

Apart from the official, legal censors, there were the other, freelance guardians of public morals. English newspapers and books were regularly burned, some of these publications being unceremoniously removed from public libraries and destroyed. Almost all of the leading international writers of the day were banned. Many films were also banned or heavily censored. Robert Graves, writing from Mallorca, described the Irish censorship as the 'fiercest literary censorship this side of the Iron Curtain — and I do not except Spain.'

And there were other hidden but even more vicious aspects of the censorship mentality. Frank O'Connor was among the writers who suffered most. Not only were his books banned, he was effectively blacklisted from employment, and he and his family were reduced to abject poverty. He was eventually forced to

write under the pseudonym 'Ben Mayo' to earn a living. Censorship reached such a fanatical pitch that Mervyn Wall recalls that even the nudes were removed from the Municipal Gallery, then Dublin's principal gallery of modern art!

Apart from the *Irish Times* and *The Bell* magazine, all the newspapers and magazines of the day acquiesced in the application of the censorship laws. In response to an *Irish Times* editorial of 12th July, 1954, which had praised Justice Stable who, during a case of obscene libel in London, had instructed the jury to go home and read the book as a whole and not to pick out highlights, the secretary of the Censorship Board wrote

We would have had nothing to say to this fresh display by the *Irish Times* of its slavish worship of everything English and its ill-conceived hatred of all things Irish if only it had confined itself to facts when pontificating on the subject of censorship of publications.

The *Irish Times* featured in many other censorship controversies, including some on the issue of birth control. One Protestant reader of the newspaper, on 3rd April, 1956, protested as follows on the whole birth control prohibition

It is characteristic of life for the religious minority of this democratic Republic that they are bruised into accepting an endless series of restrictions on their ... liberty — minor jabs of the needle into the skin so inured to such treatment that it no longer responds. One lives and works here; one accepts, for the most part, battered into resignation. One tries, almost subconsciously, to avoid becoming constantly aroused.

Although an Appeal Board was established in 1946, there were few beacons of light in the whole unhappy saga but there was one notable intervention. Fr. Peter Connolly, Professor of English Literature at Saint Patrick's College, Maynooth, wrote a closely argued and courageous article on the operation of the Irish censorship in the religious magazine *Christus Rex* in its summer 1959 edition. This article had a wide influence, but still change came slowly. In April 1967, Brian Lenihan, then Minister for Justice, introduced a Censorship of Publications Bill, which liberalised the existing legislation. In one fell swoop, more than 5,000 books were released from their limbo. Things and censorship were never to be the same again — and it behoves us all to ensure that we never return to that wasteland.

**Jim Kemmy**



**A V O I D**

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