

Fourthwrite



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DEVOLUTION OF POMP

Peter Mandelson's suspension of the Assembly until Sinn Fein was able to persuade the Provisional IRA to open its arms dumps for external inspection, gave a clear indication of how little autonomy is held by the new Stormont parliament. Any lingering doubts about the new ministers' restricted influence were dispelled last July when Bairbre de Brun was humiliatingly forced to issue an order to close acute facilities in the South Tyrone hospital.

Limited as the powers of the Assembly are, there is a further constriction on the institution's remit. The devolution of even limited power, is moreover, conditional on a sufficiency of consensus among the members of the 'Big House'. Evidence to date suggests that consensus is in short supply. An interminable and predictable wrangle over flags and emblems will eventually be resolved by an edict from the Secretary of State. A similar form of conflict resolution will see London decide how to deliver the recommendations of the Patten Report. The list of important decisions made in Downing Street will increase.

Whether there will ever be sufficient agreement to make the Assembly (or indeed the Six-County state) work is open to serious question. Two current examples of contention within the unionist family indicate that a substantial section of that community shall not be easily

reconciled to consensus under any circumstances.

In one instance there is the election for the traditional unionist seat of South Antrim. The contest was effectively one between William McCrea of the DUP and David Burnside of the UUP. To see any measurable difference between the politics of the pair was in itself a minor conundrum. They are both right-wing, reactionary unionists who have been uncomfortably close to armed loyalism in the past. In a constituency where even a three way split in the unionist vote would not have returned a republican, the unionist electorate opted to make a choice between an ultra right-wing hick and a right-wing slick - and elected the former. This is not evidence of a desire for consensus government.

The other intra-unionist conflict is bloodier but no less indicative of certain unionist feelings. The loyalist feud is more than a struggle for control of drugs and territory. It is a battle for hegemony within that particular unionist constituency which believed in and conducted the unofficial war to preserve the Union.

In brief, the PUP/UUV leadership believes that with the Good Friday Agreement securing the Union and a Provo cease-fire, it is wise to afford some place to republicans and nationalists within the Six-county

state. On the other hand, influential elements within the UDA/LVF feel that a secured Union and Provo surrender should be the signal for a restoration of the status quo ante bellum.

A significant aspect of the feud is why the PUP leadership feels it is necessary to side with the UVF. Given its support for the state, could the party not have demanded that the state deal with their UDA opponents? This is precisely what the UUP or DUP would have done if attacked by Adair et al. Consequently, there remains the very frightening spectre that more enlightened loyalists are reconciled to the reality that too many working-class unionists are still attracted to the mind-set that produced Lenny Murphy and the Dublin/Monaghan bombers. If this constituency was numerically irrelevant the PUP could ignore it.

These tendencies within unionism will prevent any meaningful and long-term accommodation in the North of Ireland. The question is whether this will lead to the collapse of the northern state or whether all meaningful decisions will be made in London while Stormont remains a purely ceremonial structure. In the short term it appears that the more likely outcome is the latter.

Something best described perhaps as devolution of pomp rather than of power.

Editorial

F*ourthwrite* is edited and published by the Irish Republican Writers Group as a contribution to freedom of expression and debate.

The collective is defined by two positions shared by all its members. Firstly, we are all anti-imperialists and Irish republicans. Secondly we share a belief that at present there is, at best, insufficient discussion and debate from a republican perspective on current political analysis and direction and its implications for republicans and republicanism. At worst there is a conscious determination to stifle that debate.

In this context, we are gladdened by the new publication of *Left Republican*, following as it does in the wake of our own success - one more vehicle for voices to be heard, ideas to be expressed and debate encouraged. We are aware of the reticence of some Sinn Fein party members to engage in critical analysis outside their own organisational systems and encourage them to participate in debate through this new publication. *Fourthwrite* remains open to all contributors within the parameters of republican debate and debate on republicanism.

There has been some expression of concern that we do not exclude from this open policy those who are diametrically opposed to republicanism. An argument is made that we are providing a vehicle of expression for the 'pro-British' lobby. There has even been veiled hints that in so doing we prove ourselves to be sinister covert pro-British elements, or more benevolently expressed, leave ourselves vulnerable to the charge.

It is not our policy or practice to tour the vast lobby of anti-republican opinion begging for articulation of its position through our small publication; nor is anti-republicanism dependent upon us for a voice. It owns the means of mass production and distribution of information. It is, and will remain our policy to engage in debate with our opponents, and we cannot do that and deny them their voice at the table - popular though that philosophy has become.

Fourthwrite will continue to be open to those who wish to submit their opinions on republicanism, even to argue that anti-imperialism and republicanism are 'non-viable' propositions in the 21st century. If you don't like their argument challenge it with one of your own. As our readership and contributors continue to grow, we will begin to organise contributions around key areas of debate, and may return to this subject in that context. For now, we are confident that if you didn't buy the Good Friday Agreement the Framework Document or the Downing Street Declaration you will not be seduced into Unionism by reading Stephen King. And if you did buy...? It doesn't mean you have lost the ability to think for yourself. Does it?

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The Irish Republican Writers Group is a body open to any republican thinker who believes in the unfettered expression of republican ideas.

The purpose is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question 'what is to be done?'

However, this paper is open to all republican ideas and related contributions, regardless of the field - political, cultural, social or economic.

To acquire a radical constitution

by Tommy McKearney

Should a proper constitution prevent excessive accumulation of wealth?

In a parliamentary democracy it is undoubtedly the case that the people's assembly must have authority to make decisions. There are certain matters that require urgent attention and others that are a question of maintaining a contemporaneous legislature and legislation.

There is, nevertheless, a fundamental requirement that the elected representative must act at all times in accordance with the decreed wishes of the electorate. This is often best done by reference to a written and observed constitution. It is the constitution that identifies the people's priorities and ethos. In the case of a republic, it is the content of the constitution that makes one state democratic and another republic less than such.

We see, however, a tendency some-

"in spite of widespread opposition, the board of Eircom will go ahead and award itself a minor fortune"

times to view democracy as simply the right to vote and nothing else. It is a perception that many elected representatives allow survive. It tends to make for a situation where once elected, the same representatives feel free to organise affairs as they see fit. This may not always lead to the best of outcomes.

Take the recent debacle in the Republic of Ireland as a result of the privatisation of the Irish telecommunications firm, *Eircom*. The state owned firm was auctioned off to the people at a price that was unrealistically high. One year later and its shares are selling at about 60% of their issue cost. In spite of this, the CEO of the firm Alfie Kane, is to earn about Ir£1,000,000 as a "bonus" for his work last year and other members of the board will also receive handsome payments.

There is a good case to be made that nobody should be entitled to remuneration of that scale no matter what they do in a year. However, the fact that the company has underperformed in the past twelve months would surely dictate that a more modest reward would be in order. It was not to be though.

The annual general meeting of shareholders was well attended and a clear majority of those present voted to deny the CEO and his board their handsome dividend. It mattered little because the company is structured in such a way that a small number of powerful individuals with hefty political connections hold a decisive say in the company. So it now appears that in spite of widespread opposition, the board of Eircom will go ahead and award itself a minor fortune.

Mr Kane and his colleagues are apparently unabashed by the furore. They claim that such rewards are necessary in order to maintain a reasonable incentive to retain their services. They point to the fact that this is the logic of a free market society and they earn what the market estimates to be their worth.

The awful thing about it is that there is a certain truth in what Kane and his friends are saying. An unrestricted culture of enterprise does make huge payments to some people. It may be argued that Kane did not perform adequately and thus did not merit his reward. He would counter this by saying that the share price is a temporary phenomenon beyond his control and that in reality he is responsible for the day to day performance of a large hi-tec business.

In reality, if Eircom share prices had not slumped so dramatically there is little doubt that this case would not have come in for such public scrutiny or widespread condemnation. The board of the company is operating within the law whatever we might think of the morality of their behaviour. So too are all the other directors and board members who have drawn their fat fees without any fuss in this company and many others in Ireland.

The constitution is designed in such a way in the Republic that it protects this type of dealing. There is no point taking these events on a case by case basis. To make an improvement it is necessary to acquire a very different constitution. One that protects ordinary people and prevents excessive profit grabbing.

Fantasy and reality in contemporary republicanism

by Arthur Aughey

It has become quite common now for commentators on Northern Ireland politics to make the Sicilian connection. The unsubtle implication is that a Mafia-style, paramilitary-dominated sub-culture now infects the official processes of government.

This may well be true. There is, however, a more relevant Sicilian analogy. It can be found in the work of that island's most celebrated writer, Luigi Pirandello. In his short story *Signora Frola* and her Son-in-law, Signor Ponza, Pirandello presents us with the classic situation of the absurd.

The citizens of the town of Valdana are called upon to decide which of these two characters is mad. Both claim to be sane, both claim that the other is mad. Both appear to engage in rational discourse and yet the mutually exclusive tales they tell suggest an insane state of affairs in which language has lost its integrity. The inability of the citizens to come to any judgement is a bewildering agony for them. They can no longer distinguish between fantasy and reality. What Pirandello suggests is that, in reality, there is often no clear distinction.

We have to make the best of it.

This could be taken as a parable for the state of contemporary republicanism. This journal has set itself the task of unmasking the truth. This is an admirable exercise even if it may be ultimately futile. Henry Patterson has defined republicanism as the politics of illusion, a truth which needs to be qualified by the acknowledgement that all politics is to some degree the politics of illusion. There is no exclusive possession. However, there is a particular irony for republicans because their leaders think of themselves as the masters of *realpolitik*.

It is peculiarly difficult to distinguish between fantasy and reality in contemporary republicanism because, like politics in the old people's democracies of Eastern Europe, contradictions are not permitted to exist. Not permitting contradictions to exist does not mean that they don't exist. The republican leadership solves all contradictions by speaking a language of slogans. The slogans of the peace process have become so automatic that it has become almost impossible to distinguish between rhetoric and strategic purpose. Sinn Fein

members even seem to speak intimately to one another in the language of official resolutions.

The greatest irony of all is this. Having demonised republicans unionists have ended up investing them with demonic powers. They are the ones who sustain the illusion that there is a Machiavellian gap between what republicans have now committed themselves to and what their politics must be about.

My judgement is that this is misconceived. I would share the view of this journal that it is now almost irrelevant what remains the ultimate objective of Sinn Fein. The fact of the Agreement condemns it, rather like the practice of Czeslaw Milosz called *Ketmanism*, to fulfill the requirements of governance irrespective of its most precious, fundamental beliefs.

I differ from the view of this journal in so far as I think this is a good and necessary thing.

Arthur Aughey is Senior Lecturer in Politics at The University of Ulster and author of several works on unionism

Deportation and debarment

In 1980, it was Margaret Thatcher who considered John Nixon, then one of the first hunger strikers to protest against the prison regime, a criminal. Now, in 2000, it is the US State Department who classifies him as such.

Due to the 'special relationship' the United States has with Britain, which has resulted in the H-Block 3 still living in a limbo land, the US State Department will not change its outlook on Irish republicans who want to enter the country. The British do not consider the last 30 odd years a war, nor do they consider—despite the changes won by the protesters in the prisons, such as hunger-striker John Nixon, those who served at Her Majesty's Pleasure to be political prisoners.

What this means to Irish republicans desiring to go to the States on holiday or to perhaps make a life there is that they are, once again, denied. The plight of

the deportees has been going on years now, as has that of the H-Block 3. What gains even less notice than those cases are the ex-prisoners who get turned away at the gates, having their scanned passports set off the alarms and immigration officials sending them home with paid tickets in their hands.

Where are the benefits of the peace process for the veterans of the war? The American government has played a large part in the creation of and continuing momentum of the peace process—however, when it comes to the one area they can justifiably do something about, they have done nothing. What kind of message of confidence does that send, when Americans are willing to stick their noses into the affairs of other nations but not willing to open their doors to the inhabitants of those same nations? And why are not Irish American voices howling in protest at this? Here are laws they *can* be effective in

by Ciara Ni Tuama

changing, as they are the laws of their own country. However welcome their pressure is on issues such as the implementation of the Patten report, at the end of the day, their voices would carry more weight with their own representatives on their own laws.

Another question this raises is in relation to the material benefits of the GFA. If those nations such as the United States who played such a large part in giving birth to the GFA cannot or will not go the extra mile to reflect their role in changing Ireland by addressing their immigration laws, then how can we expect the major players of injustice in the north to go even half a foot? Why should they? As well, with the GFA entailing the loss of the political status men and women like John Nixon fought for, what is there that makes Irish republicans any less criminal today than what they were considered in 1980?

Ciara Ni Tuama is an IRWG member

Lasting Revisionism

Rewriting the 'Politics of Irish Freedom'

by Liam O'Ruairc

A spectre is haunting republican publications: the spectre of revisionism. Gerry Adams's most important book was published in 1986 under the title "The Politics of Irish Freedom". A revised and updated edition of this book was published in 1995 under the title "Free Ireland - Towards a Lasting Peace". A close reading of the text will reveal a number of important modifications. The most striking is probably that Chapter 7 of the first edition, entitled "The SDLP, Loyalists and Republicans", has entirely disappeared. In this chapter, Gerry Adams criticised the "collaborationist" SDLP, and illustrated his argument by pointing out various reactionary stances of the SDLP; like its opposition to the rent and rates strike or the struggle of the hunger strikers. It is remarkable that in the second edition of the book, such criticism of the SDLP was nowhere to be found. Gone are the characterisations of the SDLP as "a fully fledged Catholic partitionist party" and as a bunch of "Uncle Tom" type individuals (1986, pp.110-111). And also gone are the days where the main republican newspaper could still denounce John Hume as "a dangerous collaborator...not to be trusted" ("An Phoblacht/Republican News", 26 August 1982, p.2).

What could justify such textual modifications? How could John Hume suddenly be trusted? Was it because the SDLP had undergone a radical conversion? Or was it, to use the words of Francie Molloy, because Sinn Fein had since declared that it was "prepared to administer British rule in Ireland for the foreseeable future"? The publisher, Brandon Books, did not make those changes. Gerry Adams did. The SDLP is no longer to be presented as the collaborationist "Stoop Down Low Party", and its opposition to the hunger strikers or the rent and rates strike is now to be forgotten. Such rewriting is worrying. Now history is rewritten with the SDLP not being "collaborators". And parallel to this, in many republican quarters, individuals such as Anthony McIntyre are being branded as the "new Vincent McKenna", or "pro-Unionist" in the case of Tommy Gorman (for dialoguing with Malachi O'Doherty)

Cont. across

Brendan Hughes' View

Does anyone care? That was a question so often shouted in desperation by cold, hungry, naked men behind closed doors in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. Silence can often be a comforting, peaceful and reflective period, but the silence of the H-Blocks was a deadly frightening experience often shattered by the sound of baton wielding, sectarian screws bursting into some kid's cell, leaving him battered and bloodied. The occupying forces had taken their revenge on one more dissident republican who dared defy and disagree with the rules and regulations laid down by the British Government.

An Irish republican is a dissident first and foremost. It is dissent from British occupation that leads the republican to the battlefield, jail or the cemetery. Part of the republican's struggle is against a strategy of labelling which depicts republicans as something other than the norm - the British did it as far back as the Punch cartoons of the ape like Irish figure. In the seventies we were called God-fathers, gangsters, Al Capones and criminals. Unfortunately, the British have had no monopoly on labelling. In 1975, myself and other republicans in the cages of Long Kesh were labelled by the IRA's jail leadership as 'pro-British elements' and 'anti-IRA' for questioning the strategy of the then republican leadership. Again today, some republicans have

eagerly jumped on the bandwagon and are now labelling fellow republicans who dissent from the present political process. The only way to avoid being labelled a dissident it seems is to accept the status quo - but then that would leave us in a position of no longer being republicans. Just what the British would love.

For years, indeed generations, republicans have had to fight for everything won within the prisons. Many republicans, against the advice of the leadership, disagreed with some of the tactics used to try and secure our demands during the blanket protest. Some republican prisoners dissented by refusing to come out of their cells at any time even to go on visits or attend mass even though the vast majority of prisoners did so. Others dissented by refusing to go on the blanket because they believed it to be degrading to the cause. That was their right. It is quite legitimate for a republican to dissent from the leadership. Now some dissident republicans find themselves back in prison. And again they are being labelled and criminalised. People like myself need not support the activities of those now in prison but we must acknowledge that they are political prisoners. Are we to be party to their brutalisation? Are we to prompt those prisoners to ask as we did:

'does any one care?'

rather than genuine republicans who just happen to have some strategic differences with the Sinn Fein leadership.

What are we to expect now? Histories of the 1980 hunger strike where Tommy McKearney and Brendan Hughes did not play any part? That Tommy Gorman never escaped from *The Maidstone*?

This seems a bit incredible. But 15 years ago, no one would have believed that one day Sinn Fein policy would be to "administer British rule in Ireland for the foreseeable future"...

Liam O'Ruairc is a student and a member of the Irish Republican Writers Group

The same indifference

by Eoghan Roe O'Neill

E.R. O'Neill, a native of Cappagh, Co. Tyrone, believes that the new Stormont will be little improvement on the old version

When Bairbre de Brun announced the closure of acute facilities in the South Tyrone Hospital in July of this year, she was proclaiming a great era of hardship for the people of the area.

The catchment area served by the hospital is mostly rural and only the lucky live close to decent roads. It takes time to travel to where the acute facilities are now located in Portadown and the point is that acute or emergency facilities are for those who, generally speaking, need treatment in a hurry.

There is another factor worrying many people in this area of Tyrone. Put simply, this is the very location of the complex. Situated as it is in Portadown (and close to the hard-line loyalist area of Seago) many people have a real fear of being attacked either while attending or visiting the hospital.

A friend has told me that she was in the Craigavon hospital recently and asked her neighbour not to visit her. The reason she declined the visit was that her neighbour is a well known and widely recognised republican. She thought that it

would be prudent not to draw attention to herself in the strained atmosphere that is currently Portadown. Moreover, a decent hospital in Dungannon has meant more than ease of access. It has also been a small reassurance for those of us living in this area that life continues west as well as east of the river Bann.

In the end of the day it seems that this new version of Stormont rule is not a lot better than the old style one. There might be different faces but the same indifference to concerns in Tyrone remains.

Defending the National Health Service

by David Carlin

The closure of beds, wards and units; the cutbacks of doctors, nurses and specialists; the deep felt demoralisation amongst NHS staff; the introduction of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI). No wonder there is a growing discontent with New Labour and their policies for the NHS. However, New Labour are not the only ones who are introducing such measures. Northern Ireland Minister for Health, Bairbre de Brun is following and promoting the exact same policies.

The closures of South Tyrone Hospital, the closure of the Jubilee Maternity, the introduction of PFI in the RVH which will in effect hand it over to private business whose only interest is to make profit out of people's misery. What will this PFI mean for patients and workers at the RVH? In Britain for example recent figures show that of the first fifteen PFI hospital schemes a total of six hundred beds have been lost, and in some cases lives have been put at risk due to cutbacks and the continuous pressure to meet business targets. It has also been shown that

the private companies response under pressure to maintain profits has been to cut staff and wages.

One such attack is happening at the Dudley Group of Hospitals in the West Midlands where workers went on strike for four days against the introduction of PFI. The reality of the Scheme in Dudley will mean the closure of two hospitals, the loss of a further seventy beds, the loss of one hundred and seventy jobs and the contracting out of other jobs to low paying private companies. This is what Bairbre de Brun is embracing. She may deny such losses will happen but even in the summer edition of the corporate magazine *Stitches* advice is given to staff on how to claim benefits if they are made redundant.

The communal politics over whether it should be the Jubilee or the RVH closing produced much heated debate and argument and yet not one of these was the argument to close neither, but to fight to keep both open. Similarly the debate over PFI, with no call for a fully funded publicly run NHS.

To challenge the current vision for the NHS, Bairbre de Brun would have to challenge the financial and political orthodoxy of those who hold the purse strings. To do this she would have to follow through 'radical labour policies'. If she does not do this then she can do little more than follow in the shadow and spin of New Labour.

The real strength in the fight against PFI is to be found in the inspiring Dudley action where the six hundred workers, mainly women, struck for the first time. It is people like these that inspire support and solidarity. There are those who talk of 'radical labour politics' and there are those such as the Dudley workers who practice it. In the North this means not only workers in the RVH fighting against PFI or workers in the City Hospital fighting against closure, but both sets of workers fighting against all attacks on the Health Service. The fight should not be one of sectarian division but of and for class interests, unity and strength.

David Carlin is a member of the Socialist Workers Party

Author's choice

Constitutional politics and Irish Republicans

Does the former inevitably lead to the persecution of the latter?

by Bob White

Social scientists like Robert Michels (1962) and Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977) argue that organization leads to conservatism. For them, when radical social activists become organized their leaders become more concerned with their own position than with the original goals of their activism. Inevitably, the once radical goals of the movement or organization are muted and former social activists become part of the system. At the extreme, once they are part of the system former radicals work to bring former comrades into line. A key point is that involvement in the system leads to compromise, rather than individual character flaws.

Among many Irish Republicans there is a subtle twist to this argument; it is argued that participation in constitutional politics leads to conservatism, co-optation, and ultimately the persecution of former comrades. Republican history is loaded with evidence to support this view. Joe McGarrity, a native of Tyrone living in the United States and a key figure in Clan-na-Gail, once wrote to Eamonn de Valera, suggesting that Fianna Fail work with the IRA to achieve political goals in Ireland. McGarrity's suggestion:

To be frank, it is apparent that an agreement between your forces and the forces of the IRA is a national necessity... You both profess the same goal. Why in god's name do you hesitate to sit down and try to find a working agreement?...

De Valera replied that, "I do not think I ever got a letter which required such patience to read through...." He continued:

How can you imagine for one moment that I don't realise what division in the Republican ranks means at a time like this. But is this need and desire for unity to be used as a means of trying to blackmail us into adopting a policy which we know could only lead our people to disaster? It has taken us ten long years of patient effort to get the Irish nation on the march again after a devastating Civil War. Are we to abandon all this in or-

der to satisfy a group who have not given the slightest ability to lead our people anywhere except back into the morass? (See Cronin, pp. 156-58).

If you replace the reference to the Civil War with a reference to the 1975 IRA-British bilateral truce, McGarrity's letter might have been written any time after 1994 by someone in Irish Northern Aid, and de Valera's response might have come from Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness. At the time of the exchange, October 1933 and January 1934, it is doubtful that either McGarrity or de Valera envisioned a Fianna Fail government allowing IRA prisoners to die on hunger-strike, or executing such prisoners.

'Time will tell if MacBride was simply an exceptional individual, or if this generation of Republican leaders can be true to Republican ideals'

In 1986, at the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, Martin McGuinness stated, "First of all, I would like to give a commitment on behalf of the leadership that we have absolutely no intention of going into Westminster or Stormont... Our position is clear and will never change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved...."

When he said this, McGuinness did not know that he would one day sit as a Minister in a Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. He also could not have known that former internee Michael Donnelly, of Derry, would be assaulted by Republicans because he opposed Sinn Fein's participation in the election that led to McGuinness becoming a Minister.

Given the evidence, it's tempting to conclude that the above is proof that, at least for Irish Republicans, parliamentary, constitutional politics are indeed corrupting, and that it is inevitable. Yet, there is an excep-

tion.

Consider Sean MacBride, former IRA Chief of Staff, and founder of Clann na Poblachta. He served as Minister for External Affairs in the 1948-51 Coalition Government, and throughout the 1950s he was a T.D. in Leinster House/Dail Eireann. Was he corrupted by participation in parliamentary, constitutional, politics? The answer to this probably depends on one's perspective. However, a case can be made that the answer is "no," in that both in government and out MacBride did not condemn those who employed physical force methods to bring about a united Ireland. Indeed, he defended Republicans in court both before and after he entered Leinster House.

Currently there are comments on large houses and new suits for leading members of Sinn Fein, and that socialism has been dropped from Sinn Fein's program. These are presented as evidence that the Provisionals' leaders have become reform minded, rather than revolutionary. This evidence may be valid. However, although MacBride did not return to the IRA and Sinn Fein, his post-Republican activities suggest that a "sell-out" by those who become involved in constitutional politics is not inevitable. Time will tell if MacBride was simply an exceptional individual, or if this generation of Republican leaders can be true to Republican ideals and also be involved in constitutional politics.

Bob White is a lecturer in politics and author of, Provisional Irish Republicanism: An Oral And Interpretive History. Published by Greenwood.

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Tony Benn Talks

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He has often scorned the British Establishment and describes himself as a republican and a socialist. Tony Benn talks to Fourthwrite about the enduring relevance of radical politics

SOCIALISM

MH: Can you identify what you believe to be the core values of socialism?

TB: Partly of course it is about fairness and justice. Take for example a strike. You start off thinking about why the managing director has the right to cut wages or lay people off and then you begin examining the power structures. Remember it was only when trade unionism came along that the 'mob' became 'the movement'. For hundreds of years the working classes were referred to as the mob, but demands became expressed through the movement, the right to vote, representation through a political party and so on. So it is about justice, and it leads to a very basic question: are we a jungle or are we a community? Until you get that straight you can't make sense of anything. Socialism corresponds to peoples' real interests and has an international appeal. Socialism has a moral basis, an analytical base and a practical contribution to make. It is about bringing private capital under democratic control.

MH: Given the fact that the New Right has dominated the political agenda for the last two decades, taking into account the context of global capitalist development, the collapse of Communism in the east and so on, do you not think that this has invalidated socialist ideas?

TB: No. There have been two experiments in socialism if you look at the twentieth century. The Soviet Union, because of historical circumstances, never had a democratic base, no basis of consent. On the other hand the Social Democrats have abandoned

socialism and have adopted capitalism. But look at the NHS for instance, it is the most socialist and most popular policy that Labour ever introduced, to take health care away from market forces and provide on the basis of need and not wealth. People love it. You can't just wash socialism away, and you cannot repress an idea.

MH: There has been a tendency to conflate Marxism with Soviet style Communism, but do you believe that Marxism still has anything to offer in terms of analysis?

TB: Of course. Marx identified a conflict of economic interest between those who slog their guts out creating the wealth, and those who own it. Like Galileo or Freud or Darwin, Marx was one of the great teachers. And interestingly, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is now becoming fashionable for some academics to discuss Marxism.

MH: Do you think there was anything of value in the Soviet experience?

TB: Yes but I feel the collapse of Stalinism liberated socialist ideas, it separated socialism from the gulag and the KGB. However, although I never supported Joe Stalin, the existence of an anti-capitalist super-power changed history. Without it the western states would never have given up their colonies, and the Establishment would never have conceded the welfare state. The fear of precipitating Communism was a powerful factor here, and the Communist experience developed a range of ideas of permanent value. Now the Soviet Union has gone, capitalism and imperialism are back again.

MH: You mentioned Social Democracy earlier, can I ask you what you make of

the New Labour project?

TB: In 1997 the people wanted change but the Establishment didn't want change so they saw in Blair the continuation of the Thatcher project. Major was weak and the Tories were divided, but Blair could carry forward the dismantling of the welfare state. Blair wanted to eliminate Clause IV in order to get the support of the City of London and it was of immense symbolic significance. Blair is the most passionate advocate of global capitalism, and the project is to administer capitalism under American supervision. Blair would like to break the link with the unions and eliminate the socialist tradition.

MH: What about the ideas which apparently animate New Labour, Anthony Giddens, the 'Third Way', market socialism and so on?

TB: Well Giddens is like the Millenium Dome, a vast space covering nothing! The 'Third Way' is just a phrase to cover a vacuum. There is nothing there to argue with. As far as 'market socialism' is concerned, well no-one is in favour of nationalising every corner shop but the so-called 'commanding heights' of the economy should be publicly owned. The democratic process should control the vast companies, bankers and speculators. What's wrong with securing for workers the full fruits of their industry? And common ownership is not necessarily about top-down nationalisation, it's about municipal co-operatives, trade union veto on the excesses of the free market and so on.

MH: But if the New Labour has rejected socialism and introduced an ideological change which may well prove to be irreversible, why stay?

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TB: Yes, but look at Scargill. I love him dearly, and he is one of the very finest trade unionists. But he is absolutely on his own, in a tiny party. The trouble is that there are too many socialist parties and not enough socialists! It's like religious sectarianism, engaging in disputes over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. That is not the way forward, and I am in the Labour movement - I am not New Labour. New Labour took over after an entryist coup.

MH: There is no doubt that New Labour has disappointed its core constituency, and may well not be able to sustain its electoral success. In this context there is always the threat from the extreme right posing as the 'radical' alternative. How do you see this situation developing?

TB: That is the real danger if people get despondent, despairing and cynical. That's when the Hitler, Mussolini or Haider come along and offer to solve the problems. I can remember Mosely and the Fascists marching through East London and it was very frightening. I read Mein Kampf again recently and you can see the appeal of blaming it all on the Jews, and how attractive it was to unemployed German workers. At the back of my mind I can't help thinking that this 'Third Way' spin-doctor politics might pave the way for something like that. Were that to happen, of course, the only force able to stop it would be the labour and trade union movement, which is itself being dismantled. That worries me. New Labour could be the mid-wife of a sort of hard-right government by destroying the very movement that could prevent it happening.

MH: One of the key principles of your political perspective has always been your internationalism. Can you comment on how that corresponds to your persistent opposition to the European Union?

TB: I am a European, and I am not a nationalist, but I'm not going to be governed by bureaucrats and bankers. I'm not a Euro-sceptic in the same sense as Hague, who believes that money should run the world and sees the Commission as an interference. Mine is a democratic argument. There should be no over-riding political power by unelected bureaucrats.

MH: Your arguments might be very powerful, and may even resonate amongst large sections of the working class, but in the absence of any political

vehicle to articulate your objectives, you are facing an uphill struggle.

TB: Yes, but I am not a pessimist. We have to start at the bottom again and build things up from below. Underneath things are moving, and the audience for common sense socialist ideas is enormous. Political parties make all sorts of promises but we should make demands. Trade Union rights, decent wages, full employment and so on. We need to give electoral politics some substance. Nothing is inevitable, but look at apartheid fifty years ago, the whole thing crumbled. When the demand is strong enough Parliament will come into line. So we need to be optimistic, if I wasn't I would jump off the top of Big Ben, if I had the energy to climb it.

'New Labour could be the mid-wife of a sort of hard-right government by destroying the very movement that could prevent it happening'

IRELAND'S BRITISH PROBLEM

In the second part of the interview by Mark Hayes, Tony Benn considers the politics of Northern Ireland

MH: As I understand it, you have always maintained a principled commitment to a united Ireland. Am I right?

TB: Yes, well the right of the Irish people to determine their own future. The problem is not an 'Irish problem' in the United Kingdom, but a British problem in Ireland. Once you get that straight you can see it quite differently. I'm not a nationalist, but I support the right of people to control their own affairs, and to that extent I am really strongly in favour of getting the British out of Northern Ireland.

MH: In light of your position, can I ask you what your attitude was to the armed campaign waged by Republicans to

achieve that objective?

TB: It's a difficult one that. My instinct is towards Gandhian non-violence, because violence destroys both sides in an argument. On the other hand we fought a war against Hitler, and Mandela was denounced as a terrorist because he was engaged in armed struggle. Armed struggles occur when there is no political solution, but I am a supporter of the peace movement. Yet in some cases without pressure, without violence you cannot make progress - that's not endorsing it, it is just a historical fact, that is what happens. Anyway armed violence can lead to dictatorship.

MH: What about the idea that in order to achieve peace Sinn Fein has accepted a deal which falls far short of traditional Republican objectives?

TB: I have known Gerry Adams for many years now, in fact I met him through Ken Livingstone, and I have kept in touch. Now that there is some political progress Gerry Adams is obviously very much against the continuation of the armed struggle, and I think that's right. You will always get those who will continue to fight, but without the popular support it won't work. Beforehand many Nationalist homes were 'safe houses', but now that won't be the case....

MH: But hasn't Adams, in effect, accepted that there will not be a united Ireland in the immediate future? Bernadette McAliskey has made some very insightful comments about the diminution of Republican expectations....

TB: There will be a united Ireland, demographic changes will ensure that. But I think Adams' line at the moment, which is to be the advocate of the peace process against the 'rejectionists', is absolutely right. When there is another election they will do very well. Bernadette, I think, didn't want to be associated with 'green Tories' and I can understand what she means because nationalism without an ideological analysis can become very crude, like the 'tartan Tories' in Scotland. You have to be a democrat and an internationalist. There is nothing shameful about being practical in politics, I had to do it all the time when I was a minister, dealing with peoples immediate needs and problems.

MH: Yes, but some Republicans will argue that the Good Friday Agreement isn't anywhere near enough, that it

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doesn't justify the years of struggle.

TB: They didn't do too badly did they? Northern Ireland is now governed as part of a condominium between Dublin and London. That's a huge change. Sinn Fein is representing Nationalists in government. You have to take a moving picture of the political changes, you cannot take a snap-shot, and the momentum is very strong towards a united Ireland. There needs to be a basis upon which the two communities in the North can live in peace, and then you can get the British out. It seems to me that this process is well underway. What we have is an interim transitional stage prior to the withdrawal of the British. I think it will happen and I have been advocating it.

'The Protestant working class needs to liberate itself from Unionism, which has manipulated them for its own purposes.....there needs to be a class analysis and a socialist agenda'

MH: What about de-commissioning? Do you think that it could be the issue that might allow the 'rejectionists' to destroy the Agreement?

TB: Mandelson suspending the structures over de-commissioning was ridiculous and did a lot of damage to the credibility of the Agreement. The real issue is de-militarisation. Of course the ban on hand-guns never applied to Northern Ireland, there are thousands of licensed weapons, and on top of that you have the RUC, the Army, paramilitaries and so on. They are not killing each

other at the moment so we need to build on the culture of peace to keep the political process going.

MH: What did you make of the Patten Report?

TB: Well they have tried to by-pass that of course. They are making concessions and many people are unhappy, but I don't know what the result will be. At least Patten addressed the problem, which was that the RUC was seen as a Unionist force. Obviously something has got to be done.

MH: Can you comment upon British strategy with regard to Ireland, and particularly Labour Party policy? Why have the British stayed?

TB: Well it is no longer profitable of course, and there is no interest in funding the war. At the same time the Republic is getting richer, with subsidies from Europe and so on. For its part the Labour Party effectively abandoned Ireland. But one of the things that interested me was the strategic dimension and the position of the USA in all this. Kennedy and Reagan, who both claimed Irish ancestry, endorsed British strategy because they were fearful of an independent neutral Ireland during the Cold War. When the Cold War ended the Americans completely lost interest in endorsing the British line, and Clinton has put pressure on the British government to bring about a settlement. This is, as far as I can see, the only positive thing he has done.

MH: Is there any scope for progressive elements within the Loyalist/Unionist community to develop now in the new political context?

TB: Yes. The Republic is changing and the Catholic Church is weaker, so Pope-bashing does not have quite the same effect, although Paisley is the authentic voice of some elements in Unionism. Of course it is interesting that on issues like homosexuality and abortion he adopts the same position as the Pope! A point which I have made to him a number of times in the House of Commons. The Protestant working class needs to liberate itself from Unionism, which has manipulated them for its own purposes. There is certainly no future for Ireland on the basis of religion, whether you are Protestant or Catholic. If Ian Paisley and the Pope issued a joint manifesto it wouldn't solve anything. There needs to be a class analysis and a socialist agenda.

Heatbreak After Years of Struggle

by Patricia Campbell

"I like tens of thousands more struggle daily with an unfathomable depth of pain, loss and sorrow, as the legacy of this war. I will carry to my grave the burden of that sorrow and the marks of their pain, our children's children. We will, as we get on with life because life leaves no choice but to be got on with, in every quiet moment on every lonely hill, in every crowded, chattering hall, at the going down of every sun, hear the sound of our hearts breaking"
Bernadette McAliskey

I was curious to get my hands on a copy of *Fourthwrite* having read an Irish News headline;

"SF leadership leave republican hearts behind" which highlighted an extract from an interview by Brendan Hughes (one of the first hunger strikers). The poignant headline caught my attention and the launch of the magazine by republicans to debate the peace process is the most positive development and long overdue.

A very active republican since the 70's, I started campaigning for justice and freedom as a teenager in the Relatives Action Committee, moving to the H Block/Armagh committees, the hunger strike campaign and elections on both sides of the border, anti-extradition campaigns and the recent Saoirse campaign. I did not endure imprisonment but like many other women, the length of time I spent in prison queues, prison waiting rooms, prison minibuses and public transport to get there and back amounts to a lot of time.

The price of being an active republican

has been high in terms of constant persecution and harassment, house-raids, detentions and the constant threat of loyalist death squads. I think of those people who didn't survive and coming from Tyrone, where we walked behind more coffins in one week than most people would walk behind in their whole lives, it leaves me extremely disappointed with the route the Sinn Fein leadership took. My belief is that the endless sacrifice of the republican community was too high for a power-sharing executive. Something which was on offer many years ago. Brendan Hughes is correct in his plea to republicans to:

"examine your consciences, take a good look at what is going on, if they agree - ok, if not then speak out"

Debate within the republican movement was and still is completely stifled. Many have great reservations about the peace process but do not speak out because they are afraid. Many have experienced the process of character assassination. Some may accuse me of advocating war because I'm opposed to the current process. Nothing could be further from the truth. I wouldn't like to see anyone risk his or her life. One would need to be sure who their leaders were talking to and what they were talking about before going out to battle.

The article by Sean Hayes in *Forthwrite No.2*, "The Nomenclature of Groups" highlighted for me this thinking where the author focused more on attacking the writers rather than debating the issues. If he is so sure of the direction Sinn Fein is taking, why be so defensive? He describes the writers as darlings of the media, taking up airtime and column inches while claiming that Sinn Fein still have such major problems being heard. Any one who follows political developments will know that Sinn Fein gets more airtime now than ever. It's a pity they don't use it more effectively.

I don't for example, hear Sinn Fein calling for RUC disbandment anymore. They tell us that they don't accept the Patten Report but they want it implemented in full anyway. Otherwise "history will judge Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson very very badly indeed". I'm not joking - that's what Martin McGuinness said. Surely this must be one of the weakest responses anybody could make to British deceit. Nor is this the only area where Sinn Fein has

diluted its programme. Notice how silent Sinn Fein is in relation to the issue that ex-prisoners be given freedom of passage when travelling abroad, especially to the USA. Numerous republican ex-prisoners have been deported from the United States. Why is the US Government allowed to continue treating republicans as criminals without a word of protest if the White House is supposed to support the Good Friday Agreement? Incidentally, why isn't there a word of protest about continuing harassment and detention of republicans travelling through Heathrow Airport (three members of my own family have been subject to this, more recently my sister and her husband).

Of course Sinn Fein is now a growing parliamentary force. Didn't the SDLP push the Nationalist party out of the way and guess who is pushing the boring old SDLP out of the wayright! But as Sinn Fein's Tony Catney points out,

"riding the two horses of working class resistance and Catholic new money - carries with it an inherent contradiction"

That is a good quote. Its not just new money because everything is new now, New Labour, New Britain, New Future, New Sinn Fein, New Ireland, new Anti-terror Laws and now, a New RUC. Sinn Fein has moved to the position of electoralism and in so doing will ad-

'My belief is that the endless sacrifice of the republican community was too high a price for a power-sharing executive'

vance in their electoral ambition because after compromising their republican principles that is the only thing they have left. They have subverted their ideals for political power. There are new people in Sinn Fein who were nowhere to be seen when it was necessary to picket a RUC barracks.

Sinn Fein claims, that it has refused to allow the process to be hijacked or diluted by the unionists and that the process belongs to the people, are open to question. The party fails to point out that the process belongs to David Trimble. To say that it belongs to the people and not the politicians is, as Henry Patterson points out in issue 1 of *Forthwrite* a subtle way of transferring the blame for failure from the politicians to the people. How can the process belong to the people (especially the Nationalist electorate) when Trimble & Co can pull down the executive any time they don't get their way? This was demonstrated a few months ago and the threat is taken seriously by Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly. He rightly pointed out in the *Irish News* (20.07.00).

"The difficulty with that kind of threat, particularly coming from Unionism, is that it has been used to effect in the past.....In other words, the institutions were pulled down and people have to take that seriously"

In the same breath he'd say the process belongs to the people. There are those spin-doctors who actually suggest that it was the sacrifices of republicans that brought us here. How dare anyone insult my intelligence or integrity by telling me that my part in a very powerful struggle was meant to restore a Stormont regime. It is amazing what we have lived to see. Who'd ever believe we'd live to see ex-IRA men being encouraged to join a Reformed RUC. A force that will use lead and plastic bullets, Diplock Courts and special powers to curb republicanism.

Who'd ever believe we'd live to see republicans begging to have a Stormont executive built up? This is the same movement that once fought to abolish such establishments. Who'd ever believe that republicans would adopt the same language we've heard the SDLP speak for years? Who'd believe we'd live to see Sinn Fein agree to partition and coalition with Fianna Fail? Perhaps it is because everybody did not live to see it.

Patricia Campbell is a republican from County Tyrone

Which IRA is Authentic?

by Liam O Comain

A Derry man asks which IRA is authentic

Today, as over the decades, the initials 'IRA' have been prefaced with other terms i.e.- Official, Provisional, Continuity, and Real... which raises the question: who is the authentic IRA?

Apparently the media believes that the paramilitary group associated with Provisional Sinn Fein is the authentic IRA... but can this be sustained due to the fact that this particular body has clearly abandoned the Republic proclaimed in 1916, by supporting those who want to administer the northern state on behalf of the British? Likewise, it is the ambition of Provisional Sinn Fein to seek and hold the balance of power in the Dublin Parliament. A parliament equally anathema to authentic republicanism.

The participation in any of the aforementioned political structures are anathema to Fenian or traditional republicanism. In fact a past IRA statement condemned the latter structures:

"Is the twenty-six county state or the six county sectarian statelet the type of society you want in the future? Is the twenty-six county state the Republic declared in 1916 and defined in the Proclamation and the Democratic Programme of the First Dail? Is this an Ireland run for the people? Now is the time to join with us... to bring change to Ireland"

The change they had in mind I assume was the restoration of the 1916 Republic via revolutionary means. In that same statement, while referring to the Hillsborough Agreement of 1985, the IRA stated that the British regime was

attempting:

"to re-establish a strategy last used successfully by them in 1921 to subvert the course and direction of the republican struggle initiated in 1916"

That reaction to the so-called Hillsborough Agreement is the response one would expect from authentic republicans. It is sad, however, to see the British implementing with some success the same

'The Belfast Agreement is based upon the strategy used by the British administration in 1921'

strategy 15 years later...especially when a close study of the Belfast Agreement and that emanating from Hillsborough sees no benefit for the republican position. The Belfast Agreement like the Hillsborough Agreement is based upon the strategy used by the British administration in 1921, as referred to in the above IRA Easter statement.

Which leads one to conclude that the military wing of the Provisionals can not claim the status of being the authentic IRA. As a paramilitary body, however, they are to be congratulated for their refusal to surrender their armoury. Knowing that decommissioning would be enjoyed as an act of surrender by the Brits; also, it would be seen as an opportunity to confirm that those

who resorted to military means over the centuries in the struggle for national freedom were merely 'criminals'. The so-called 'Official IRA', before their silence, came also to accept partition, thus it cannot bear, if it still exists, the mantle of 'the authentic IRA'. Which leaves us with the so-called 'Real IRA' and the 'Continuity IRA'.

Of the two bodies I believe, as a non-aligned republican, that the one who can justifiably claim to be the authentic IRA is that prefaced as the 'Continuity'. I hold this to be true for they have not diverted from the path of the authentic republican tradition. Their allegiance is still to the Republic driven underground by the Brits and their supporters in Ireland. They are also aware that the political reformist path is an act of suicide for revolutionary republicanism. As for the so-called 'Real IRA', persons close to them appear to be confused about the legitimacy of the Leinster House Government; that is, their position relating to the southern Constitution, especially the now abandoned Articles 2 and 3. A constitution traditional republicanism considers irrelevant.

The calling of a cease-fire in response to the aftermath of the Omagh tragedy leaves a question mark amongst republicans over this body's claim to be the authentic IRA. Some view their cease-fire as a capitulation to the threats emanating from the Dublin Government at the time. It may have been justified in order to survive but later events i.e. the number of those arrested and imprisoned in the short period of its existence raises questions about its continuing survival. However, it has become more active as recent events tend to confirm.

Relating to it and others I put the question: is the appearance of so many republican groups not a hindrance... resulting in the weakening of the republican position? Is it not time for unity and a thorough reassessment of our position as we tread a new millenium?

The current fad for joint platforms with loyalism - often misnamed as debate, although no one ever responds to the loyalist's statements or answers any of their points - is a serious error which will have to be corrected if either socialism or republicanism are to rebuild themselves.

Not only is there no genuine debate, there is no possibility of such a debate, because when we analyse loyalism we find we have nothing to say to the loyalists. What could one say to a movement that is totally sectarian? To a thuggish, murderous movement on the far right of the political spectrum, basing itself on a pro-imperialist populism, with many outright fascists in its ranks? A movement whose main weapon is terror based on a random killing of people because of their religion.

A popular defense for the loyalist platforms is to argue that the loyalists are the voice of the Protestant working class which must be engaged. From a socialist perspective this is a totally mistaken argument. It is true that some loyalists describe themselves as socialist, but only when they're allowed to define what socialism is. Their definitions never have anything to do with the independence of the working class. They argue that working in the community is socialist, supporting the Good Friday Agreement is socialist, that having a working-class background is socialist or imagining that you would vote for Tony Blair if you lived in England is socialist.

'Loyalists have always found themselves defending their bosses while at the same time being exploited by them'

None of the loyalist claptrap is in any way new. Loyalists have always found themselves defending their bosses while at the same time being exploited by them. Their attempts to win support for themselves always end up as right-wing populism. They rail at the "fur coat brigade" for exploiting them and for being less fervent in their sectarianism, but this class envy never allows them to break free. A good example is the UVF. They are full of hatred of Ian Paisley for riding to power on their backs, they talk about the

the framework of support for the Good Friday Agreement. The UVF and UDA were quite clear about why they suspended their sectarian terror campaign - "the union was safe" - they had won. They have made it equally clear what the consequences would be of this "victory" being threatened.

What we have to recognise is that, no matter how relieved we may be about the diminution of the terror, the political shift is from one form of reac-

A PLATFORM FOR LOYALISM?

by Joe Craig

need to be independent, but in practice they simply switch over to becoming enforcers for the unionists supporting the Good Friday agreement. Woe betide any socialist who takes seriously their talk about the working class. The whole history of Orangeism and Loyalism is one of twin functions. On the one hand they were to keep the Catholics in their place. On the other hand they remind the Protestant workers of their own place and savagely repress any Lundy who thinks of working-class independence or unity with Catholic workers.

But they've changed, is the slightly more sophisticated cry of the loyalist platform supporter. Evidence for change is hard to come by. The silent war of loyalists over territory and drugs passes unnoticed. Alongside this runs a political "war of the flags"

Of course it is obvious that there is some difference between the traditional programme of the UVF, which was simply the use of terror to bring back the traditional Stormont, and the programme of the UVF/PUP today, which is to try and build a political base for themselves within

tion to another. The Good Friday Agreement is Brains not Brawn - accepting some sectarian crumbs for Catholics in order to retain the majority of the old sectarian privileges and above all to keep the old divisions in place.

As with many other aspects of the current process, the lead was given by Sinn Fein. The untouchable label was removed from loyalism when they interviewed Billy Hutchinson in *An Phoblacht* at an early point in the peace process. The interviewer asked why the UVF killed innocent Catholics. Billy replied that, because they had not known whom the IRA members were, they had had to kill Catholics at random. The interviewer moved onto another question.

We shouldn't move on. We should face the reality of loyalism. The only real grounds for debate is to confront the loyalists and those offering them support and credibility. The real debate is between socialists and republicans - a debate that has hardly started.

Joe Craig is a member of Socialist Democracy

The Republican Roots of the Good Friday Agreement

by Sandy Boyer

Now that Sinn Fein is administering British rule in Ireland and the IRA has effectively decommissioned, the republican debate on the Good Friday Agreement should be settled. With Martin McGuinness condemning attacks on the RUC and Bairbre de Brun closing hospitals on orders from Tony Blair, Sinn Fein is clearly no longer a republican organisation whatever else it may be. All the courage and sacrifice has led not to a free Ireland but republican consent to partition.

This leaves the all important question of why the republican movement abandoned their principles? One answer, epitomized perhaps by Republican Sinn Fein, is that they simply gave up traditional republicanism. If this is accurate, the only thing that needs to be done is to re-establish the true republicanism.

Unfortunately a whole pantheon of republican leaders have left core republican principles behind stretching from Collins to de Valera to MacBride to Goulding to Adams. Either they all just happened to fall off the wagon or there are elements of republican politics that need to be re-examined.

At least two central elements of republican practice and ideology help explain the defection of these key leaders and especially the current leadership's success in collaborating with British rule in Ireland. One is the top down, conspiratorial attitude that comes from running a guerrilla army. The other is an almost complete lack of any class analysis.

Secrecy and obedience to orders were essential to the IRA. But the same conspiratorial habits and the blind allegiance to the leadership allowed Gerry Adams and company to pull off a massive accommodation with constitutional nationalism behind the backs of the republican movement.

The famous Hume-Adams document has never been published. No Sinn Fein Ard Fheis and almost undoubtedly no IRA Army Convention or Army Council has ever seen it. This central document of the peace process was never debated, never reviewed, never approved. Even the fact that Adams and Hume

were continuing to meet after the break up of the initial Sinn Fein/SDLP talks was hidden from the republican rank and file.

Earlier, according to Tim Pat Coogan, Adams sent Fr. Alex Reid of the Clonard Monastery in Belfast to enter secret talks with Charles Haughey. To this day we don't know what commitments were made and who besides Adams was even aware of Reid's mission.

This secrecy and obedience enabled the republican leadership to pull off the amazing U-turns on decommissioning and policing. They help to account for the deafening silence from the rank and file as the movement went from "Not one rusty bullet" to opening arms dumps and from "Abolish the RUC" to "Implement the Patten Report." At each

'Mass movements are not a luxury for any organisation that is serious about breaking the British connection'

stage republicans were told to trust the leadership who had some grand plan or were just executing a brilliant tactical manoeuvre to outwit the Unionists.

The tradition of conspiratorial militarism makes the republican leadership profoundly distrustful of any independent mass movement. The Officials worked with the Communist Party to keep the civil rights movement as safe and conservative as possible. The Provisionals, after their formation in 1969, largely ignored the movement to focus on the military campaign.

The Provisionals came to the campaign for the prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh as an absolute last resort. From 1976, when political status was abolished, until 1980, they said that no one who didn't support the war could be allowed to support the prisoners. When Bernadette McAliskey ran for the European Parliament in 1979 to demand political status, she was bitterly attacked by the Provisional leadership. Only the desperation of the prisoners and the growing pressure from the community

expressed by McAliskey's 36,000 votes, forced Sinn Fein to agree to an inclusive, public campaign for political status.

Once what became the National H-Block/Armagh Committee was formed, the Provisional leadership kept it firmly under their control. In the 1981 southern election they vetoed a proposal to spread the movement throughout the 26 counties by running candidates in as many constituencies as possible. Instead prisoners were run in a handful of districts. When the election produced a hung parliament the prisoners had no leverage and Fianna Fail saw no need to make concessions in their direction. An opportunity was lost to increase support in the south, the best prospect for victory for the hunger strikers.

Mass movements are not a luxury for any organisation that is serious about breaking the British connection. The civil rights movement forced sweeping changes in the North of Ireland precisely because it put thousands of people on the streets. For a few brief years nationalists, not the British government, held the political initiative. All that changed with the collapse of the movement in the wake of Bloody Sunday and direct rule. The H-Block/Armagh Committee, although it ultimately failed, mobilised hundreds of thousands of people throughout Ireland to support the prisoners. The British and Irish governments have found it much easier to contain an armed struggle than thousands of ordinary people actively demanding justice.

Sinn Fein never had a successful strategy for dealing with the southern government because they never developed a class analysis. Successive governments were judged largely by the nationalism of their rhetoric. The reality was and is that the southern government and the business class they represent are permanently tied to Britain, their largest market and partner in the E.C.

Sinn Fein's lack of a class analysis opened the way for Adams and company to sell the strategy of a partnership with the southern government against Britain. The reality of the peace process is that the two governments have worked an elaborate good

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 cop/bad cop routine. The minor differences were on timing and details. They agreed in advance on the essentials of a settlement including a permanent IRA cease fire and entrenching the Unionist veto. Even the Sinn Fein proposal that Britain should attempt to persuade the Unionists to support Irish unity was firmly rejected.

Later the supposed "socialists" of Sinn Fein exported this partnership to the U.S. When Gerry Adams was finally allowed to shake Bill Clinton's hand it was hailed as a triumph for republicanism. No one stopped to ask why an Irish republican would want to meet the leader of world imperialism. Soon there were \$1,000 a head receptions for Wall Street traders and a private breakfast with George Soros, the currency speculator who has destabilised third world economies. The people who had supported the republican movement for years were rapidly marginalised, even if they fully supported the Good Friday Agreement.

As Gerry Adams stood on the steps of Leinster House, dined at the White House and entertained American billionaires, there was virtually nothing but praise from within Sinn Fein. As long as it could be dressed as a republican triumph no one wanted to face the fact that neither the southern government nor American capitalism had any interest in a British withdrawal. For both, the relationship with Britain was infinitely more important than any minor favours they might do for Irish nationalists.

If we want a free and independent Ireland we must learn from the mistakes of republicanism not repeat them. At a very minimum this will mean a thoroughgoing commitment to democracy and open political debate. Otherwise a new leadership will dictate still another "settlement" that falls far short of British withdrawal. A class analysis that distinguishes allies from enemies is equally vital.

Fourthwrite has begun a vital political dialogue. It is time to deepen and extend that dialogue to tackle the many political issues thrown up by the collapse of Provisional republicanism. The point of this debate, however, isn't debate for its own sake but a preparation for action.

Sandy Boyer a long-time political activist in New York. He co-hosts "Radio Free Eireann", available on the internet at "iradio.com."

Letter to the Editor

George McLaughlin
 Irish Freedom Committee,
 New England, U.S.A.

Dear Editor

"...and supported by her exiled children in America..."

The above words from the the Proclamation of 1916 are often not emphasised and sometimes forgotten by republicans when discussion moves toward the reason for our movement's existence and guidelines for principles and behaviour. Since the Good Friday Treaty, we are living in such a time, a gruelling time of ambiguity and uncertainty, a time when one's validity as a republican is constantly called into question. While we are trying to voice our views, there is one thing worse than being an Irish republican, and that is being an Irish-American one.

Irish-American republicans opposed to the treaty have become accustomed to being verbally attacked or ignored: the unionists say we're still naive deep-pockets who want more of their blood spilled; the English warn of our continued romantic and antiquated commitment to militancy; the Free State, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the SDLP discredit us by making us invisible; and Sinn Fein, now having used us up, discard us as "dinosaurs" and part of their historical rubbish. Ironically, we have seldom been sought out for our views by those republicans in Ireland who oppose the treaty.

There seems to be an underlying prejudice towards us in all these camps. When we can be of service to the current political line, we are listened to, even applauded, but when we have our own ideas, we are ignored. And why is this? Could it be that there is no understanding or appreciation of the immense historical links between republicans and the value of their discourse for two hundred years on both sides of the Atlantic? I think so. For, after all is said and done, it is the strongest revolutionary political link in the vast world of the Irish diaspora. This is not random or coincidental. It is firmly built on two centuries of camaraderie, sacrifice and struggle together. The lives of Larkin, Connolly, Boyle-O'Reilly, O'Donovan-Rossa, Mitchel, Meagher, the Emmets and Tone head the list of countless lives that attest to it. A one-dimensional pop notion of Irish-America has been carefully nurtured and fed to the masses in Ireland by the thought police of television and the Free State's tourism godfathers, and this stereotype has generally been accepted tongue-in-cheek by most. We are not Irish-Americans after all, just Yanks. Sadly, many Irish republicans have also accepted this notion, being ignorant of or forgetting that in Irish-America there has always been a huge historical heart attached to anti-imperialism in Ireland.

We are your cousins. Why else did we not forget you? Why else did so many of us work to support the civil rights movement, the political status campaign for prisoners and armed resistance? We are your long lost cousins, indeed, and we won't go away. So, shouldn't we be part of discussions which journals like this one are fostering?

As for me, I am against the Good Friday Treaty, about which, like so many of you on the ground at home, Irish-American republicans were never consulted, just "informed." I am against it because it negates the basic principles which give the republican movement its identity and undermines any chance of an unfettered, united Ireland outside the framework which England has erected, and it brings us back to accepting a revised perception of the struggle as "ethnic," "religious" and "a conflict of traditions."

I am for any republican who is against it. I am for any republican prisoner who sits in a cell because of his opposition to it. But I am worried, worried about our commitment to discourse, a discourse which will liberate us from past forms which led some of our comrades to accept the unthinkable. We must have this discourse, but it must produce action, not talking heads. We need both— talk and action— for England is still the problem, not us. So let us clear the path as we go down it, and let us move together, republican brothers and sisters. And, oh yes, cousins.

Yours sincerely, George McLaughlin

Much media coverage of late has been devoted to the UFF leader Johnny Adair. As the *Sunday Times* put it after his release from prison he is no ordinary Johnny. Nor does this absence of ordinariness come from any sophistication in the manner which he verbalises his political philosophy. By general consensus he lacks both the charisma and intellect of the late LVF leader Billy Wright. The latter appeared to conceptualise Catholics as strategic pawns rather than their sole purpose on

celebrities of the British underworld, *Hard Bastards*. What did amaze was her assertion that 'Johnny spoke with great intellect'. It is difficult to reconcile such an insight with the following words selected by Roisin Ingle for her *Irish Times* piece on Adair. 'I am a peaceful man. That was nothing absolutely to do with me whatsoever. . . The crowd that I was with applauded them ones, and I was part of that crowd so I applauded them also.'

Whatever the limitations of his vo-

name for fear of upsetting those republicans who either believe or spin that the IRA settled the war on decent terms. If indeed the outcome of the Loyalists' onslaught against nationalists was in fact the intention from the outset what then prompted it? Apart from selective targeting of key republicans during the H-Block campaign loyalism had been relatively quiescent for a decade, failing even to respond to the IRA attack on La Mon House in which twelve innocent Protestants lost their lives.

Mr. Articulate

by ANTHONY MCINTYRE

earth being to sate a particular sectarian blood lust as appears the case with Adair.

Recently, Martin Bashir interviewed Adair. By coincidence the previous slot on the Trevor MacDonald show featured a number of prominent English criminals who had mined celebrity status as a result of putting into print the story of their wayward lives. The camera teams made a point of contrasting the flashy suits with amateurish tattoos on the hands protruding from the arms of the most expensive cloth. Adair did not seem out of place on the tail end of such notorious company even if his clothing did. But he can hardly be faulted for not wearing a suit.

The comparison was not lost on Kate Kray, at one time married to the late gangster Ronnie Kray, when she included Adair in her book on the

cabulary, Adair is clearly more intelligent than articulate. That he has managed to inflict so much yet survive as long as he has despite annoying virtually everyone suggests a cunning others more articulate clearly did not possess. In a July interview with the Shankill loyalist, Liam Clarke of the *Sunday Times* claimed that he resorted to flattery in order to open Adair up. It succeeded for the RUC so why not try? Clarke's opening gambit was: 'A lot of people would say that you were the man who brought about the IRA cease-fire by raising the level of violence to the point where they couldn't stand it'.

Clarke could, as he claimed, have been flattering his interviewee. Alternatively or dually, he may also have been raising a very significant strategic matter which for now dare not speak its

Why did elements in the British state arm the Loyalists and supply them with information at a particular time? Quite bluntly did the British behave as they did in order to facilitate a peace lobby within republicanism by strengthening the yearning for peace: a peace longed for deep within the nationalist community out of fear rather than because it was honourable? Did the loyalist campaign form an integral part of the process which is now lauded as 'peace'? Was the lamp containing the murderous loyalist genie unintentionally rubbed by people in the republican camp in the ostensible pursuit of peace?

If so what did the British know about a peace lobby, when did they know and who told them? Let us hope that the answers to such questions are more articulate than Mr. Adair's.

Irish Republican Writers Group

To contact the IRWG or submit an article,
please write to

webmaster@rwg.phoblacht.net

or Fourthwrite @ PO BOX 31, Belfast BT12 7EE

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