

**left** republican review

**changing times**

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# LRR 1: Deepening the Debate

**W**elcome to the first edition of *Left Republican Review*. As we go to press, the conflict resolution process in Ireland continues at a slow but steady pace. Despite recent crises, Unionists have re-entered the power sharing political institutions, and the British government has made a start to its process of demilitarisation. While neither of these issues has been fully resolved, there is at least some momentum. Not so, however, on the question of policing. Unionist and securocrat pressure has prevented any progress on this front. Whatever the outcome of the present debate on the British government's policing bill, nothing short of disbandment of the RUC will provide the new beginning to policing demanded by nationalists and other progressive forces across Ireland. There is much work to be done before the causes of conflict in Ireland are resolved. And it is the view of LRR that the only guarantee that such a resolution can take place, are republicans themselves. We have a heavy responsibility and a great work load in the months ahead, but we are confident that our objectives will be achieved.

While those of us working on *Left Republican Review* have been developing this project since November of last year, the publication of this first edition couldn't be more timely. There is a demand for greater discussion within republican circles and a growing appetite for debate and dialogue. *Left Republican Review* believes that there is a need for those of us interested in achieving independence and socialism in Ireland to deepen the debate within our own ranks both to assess the present state and future of our struggle.

The primary purpose of *Left Republican Review* will be to act as a platform for that debate and provide republicans with a radical, constructively critical space within which to build and strengthen our movement. We want to encourage a genuine spirit of critical thinking, which will enable us collectively to identify weaknesses, problems or failures and find effective solutions for the short and long term.

We also want to create a forum within which the broad republican political, economic and social vision can be addressed. That this project is alive and well is not in question. But in the every day reality that is the struggle, we as activists often do not get the time or opportunity to take a step back and examine how that broad republican vision is progressing.

At the end of the day the success or failure of *Left Republican Review* depends on the participation of republicans. We urge all those interested in writing to contact us and get involved in the debate. We want articles, ideas, criticisms and responses. We the editorial board are no different from you the reader, we are activists who want to create and participate in debate and to have real ownership of the politics and direction of our movement. We are republicans who want to see an end to the British political, economic and military occupation of our country. We are socialists who want to see a society founded on principles of political and cultural equality, and economic and social justice.

*Left Republican Review* belongs to those who take the decision to participate. So don't just sit back and complain, get involved and be active, have your say and play your part in the struggle for justice and freedom in Ireland.

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# I SAY WHAT I LIKE



*Danny*



*Morrison*



Being stuck in the house as a writer I look forward to my late afternoons of escape to the local shopping centre. The back of a Falls Road Black Taxi is a mecca of gossip, where you can fairly accurately gauge the political temperature among working class people.

Not being an activist in Sinn Féin I can't claim infallible knowledge of the mood in its ranks. But from republican friends and my fraternity of garrulous shoppers I believe I'm in as good a position as any activist to judge how West Belfast people feel about the present situation. These views probably apply to many other urban areas across the North with similar problems, although obviously not to the different body politic of the South.

The primary topic of conversation in my shopping centre - out-polling the opening line, 'Well, what's happening in the peace process?' - is the issue of 'the hoods'. And yet the two subjects are interlocked in more ways than one. Leaving aside a very large wanton element, much of the crime committed by young people is social and economic related - boredom, alienation, no future, no job prospects. Unfortunately, the creation of real jobs is unlikely in the absence of peace, stability and a demonstrable political process. Nor, seemingly, are these young people interested in commuting to work in the South. The result is that they rob and harass their own community, and operate within a sub-culture of their own creation, not dissimilar to that of Alex and the Droogs in 'A Clockwork Orange'.

The gun having to be taken out of Irish politics, police having to catch the car thieves and burglars, and proper judges having to make decisions about just punishment, are all laudable objectives. But

the transition to that proffered state has proved to be complicated and tortuous.

As long as there is no proper policing service republicans are going to come under pressure to deal with 'the hoods'. If they deal with the hoods and if the IRA refuses to decommission then, according to the unionists, republicans are in breach of the cease-fire and the Good Friday Agreement and there can be no Executive. The British government when it suspended the institutions certainly went along with the second part of that argument.

The cease-fire, despite all the verbal sniping from former comrades, is probably the most popular and ongoing IRA operation (there's an oxymoron) since the big escape from the H-Blocks in 1983.

Certainly, republicans are frustrated and exasperated with David Trimble's handling of the situation. He and his party's eighteen month hesitancy in accepting the good faith of Sinn Féin aroused suspicion that unionists were aiming to undermine the Sinn Féin leadership and provoke a republican split. Trimble's persistent, ultimately doomed, demand for decommissioning, (IRA surrender), slowed down momentum and, ironically, allowed his internal opponents to gain the initiative.

Certainly, republicans were angry at the way Peter Mandelson unilaterally suspended the institutions that Irish people, North and South, had voted for. But at no time did this frustration or anger crystallise into a popular demand for a return to armed struggle.

I think that people are more patient than Sinn Féin allows. People sensed that traditional unionism is broken and that if Trimble had refused to reestablish the Executive another deal would eventually be brokered - even if half of the unionist

elected representatives are against the present Agreement. And if not another deal brokered then supporters would have been prepared to sit it out while Sinn Féin representatives press for the substance of the Agreement to be implemented, in the absence of the institutions. Supporters sense that things are irreversibly changing and that even the siege of Garvaghy Road is a pathetic (albeit highly threatening) last ditch bid to recover lost ground.

And if I am right about supporters wanting the Republican Movement not to return to armed struggle then what is the message, only more bleak, for those trying to organise armed struggle, those who have contemptuously rejected the views of overwhelming numbers of former comrades?

Republicans entered the Northern Assembly because they were prepared to set aside the sectarianism of successive unionist governments and the bitterness created by partition. It was a great act of conciliation, to join unionists on their home ground, to recognise their sensibilities. But look at unionism today - it is bitterly divided as it resists equality for nationalists.

Change, however, cuts both ways, and change is also going to make big demands on the republican psyche. The primacy of politics, it must be clearly understood, means just that - if you don't get your own way you needn't think that calling in the IRA cavalry becomes an option.

A new political culture is growing in the North which will create peace for all and opportunities for prosperity and gains for the working class people who carried the republican struggle. For these dynamic changes and for its calm leadership in the face of great difficulties and choices, Sinn Féin will be given credit, with political rewards throughout the entire island. ✕

# Changing Times

Eoin O'Broin

*The last five years have been both productive and challenging for Irish republicans. There is little doubt that the struggle for independence and socialism in our country has been advanced since the beginning of the 1990's. Sinn Féin is both politically and electorally stronger than at any other time since partition, and looks set to make even further gains over the coming years. On the domestic and international fronts the republican agenda has set the parameters and direction of current political developments in Ireland. And despite recent crises within the peace process, we are closer to a lasting resolution of Britain's conflict in Ireland than at any other point in the last three decades.*

But there continues to be huge risks involved in all of this which have had and will continue to have an unsettling effect on both our activist and support bases. The gains which have been made do not necessarily translate into real and tangible change in the nature and quality of people's lives. Partition remains, although in a weakened form. The British political administration and military machine have yet to be dismantled. The RUC have not been disbanded. And the equality agenda not only has not been implemented, it has not even been specifically and clearly defined. While there has been political progress and movement at a macro level, it is the more immediate level of local everyday life that has yet to experience any real change.

This fact has led some republicans to question the validity and viability of our present political strategy. Such questions, often seen as a weakness within our own ranks or the result of confusion or misunderstanding, are in fact a healthy sign of activists wanting to examine and debate the performance and direction of our struggle. Questioning should never be a problem, but failing to address peoples questions, or to provide adequate spaces for them to do so does create difficulties.

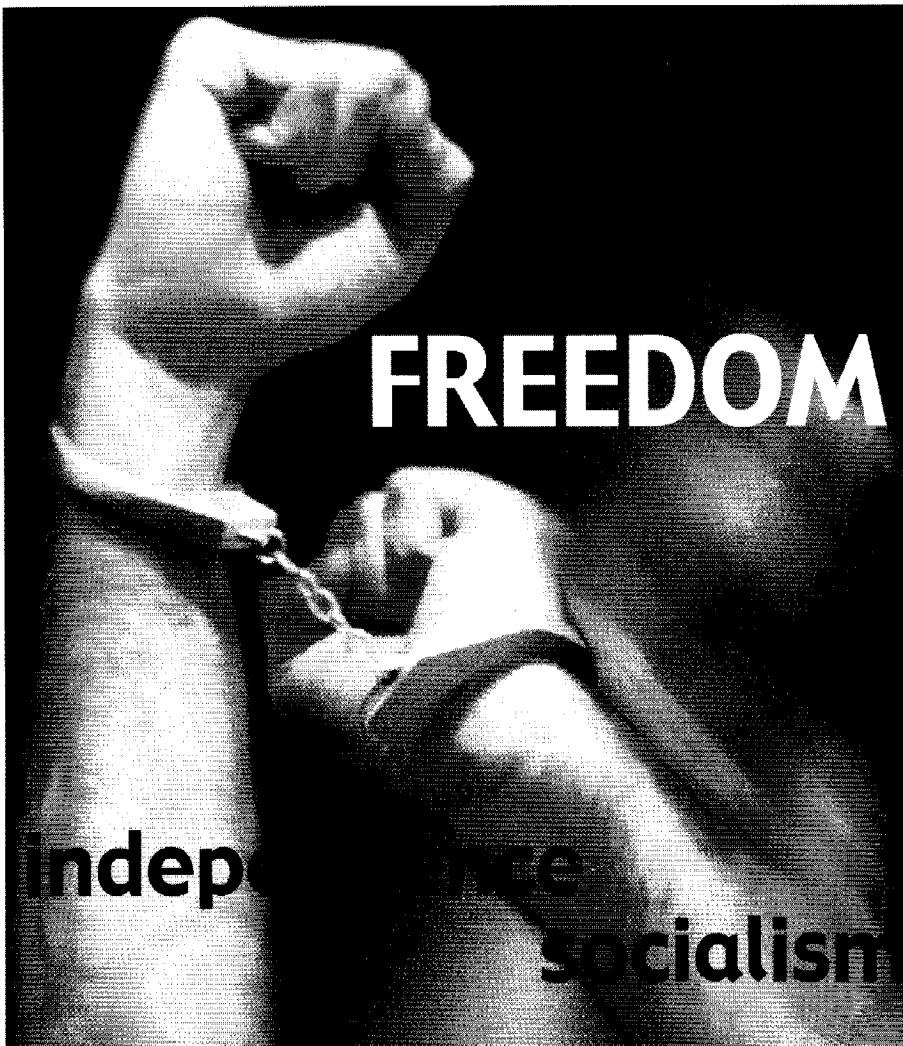
The political reality behind such questions highlights one fact, that in the absence of concrete change in the quality of peoples lives how do we gauge if we are making progress. Clearly the gains of the past five years can only be measured in terms of whether or not they are moving us closer to achieving that more tangible form of change in our society. And again, a

positive assessment is strongly supported by the facts. A cursory look at the position and weakness of our opponents, their degree of fragmentation and concern at our republican strength is a clear sign that politically we are on course.

Nonetheless we must constantly review and rethink this progress and where necessary change tactics or indeed strategy if we are to achieve our goals of independence and socialism.

But there is a debate which has yet to properly take hold within Irish republicanism. It concerns the changing nature of the political context within which we find ourselves and how we adapt and fit that context. The process of conflict resolution has fundamentally changed much of the political environment which surrounds us. Levels of repression, both military and political have reduced dramatically from 10 years ago. Censorship and political exclusion, while still existing, do not operate in the same way or with the same intensity as they did prior to 1995. And at a local, national and international level relations between republicans and our allies, opponents and enemies have changed substantially.

All of this has very real implications for how we as republicans conduct our struggle. Ways of organising and making politics which suited us a decade ago need to be revised and rethought. As we continue to grow politically and organisationally our ability to build alliances with others, and the policies and positions upon which we make such alliances need to be discussed and developed. We need to reconnect with the liberation movements from



around the world, to learn from their strengths and weaknesses, their achievements and failures. And probably most fundamentally we need to collectively take stock of our recent performance, where we have come from and where we want to go.

All of this is a collective task, which needs to be carried out throughout all sections of the republican movement. No one section can be tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that it happens. From the grassroots, through middle management and into our national leadership, we need to discuss, debate, and renew the struggle and our understanding of and commitment to it.

As we move into the coming period, all of the risks and challenges which have faced us since 1995 will take on a more acute form. We need to consolidate our gains while preparing for future battles and obstacles whatever they may be.

#### *Decentralising the Movement*

30 years of conflict, repression and censorship required republicans to build a highly centralised, disciplined, leadership led movement. We needed a strong, tight

and effective machine, which could withstand the continual attacks of our enemies which retaining the ability to fight back with determination and strength. Our party structures, our campaign profile, our internal management all reflect this centralised and vertical reality.

As we move out of this reality, we need to recognise that such an organisational form does not suit the changing context in which we find ourselves. We must adapt and reformulate how we operate. This requires a number of significant changes. We must no longer allow ourselves to be overly centralised. Particularly in the context of all Ireland political growth, our party needs to be flexible in order to respond to the local needs and requirements of any given moment or location.

More importantly, the question of popular ownership of the political process - whether that be the peace process or politics more generally- requires a grass roots up approach where activists and supporters have both the opportunity, mechanisms and resources to actively participate and shape that process. This requires the party as a whole to explore and develop

spaces for such ownership. But spaces are not enough on their own. Several decades of centralism have stunted our potential for both taking and allowing others to take the initiative. We must actively build mechanisms for participation which enable people to play their full part in the struggle.

Often our centralist tendencies are blamed on one section of the party. The reality however is that our activist culture itself is centralist, we are all implicated either actively or tacitly in this culture. Our ways of acting as activists is part of the problem. If we open spaces for participation and popular ownership but fail to change our activist culture then such initiatives will fail to produce the desired result. Our activist culture must also reflect the changing times. We must create a real equality within our own ranks, and shift the forms of management from vertical to horizontal. We must shift the focus away from national leadership and in the direction of collective leadership. Again this is a challenge for all of us. As James Larkin said; 'the great only appear great because we are on our knees', and often those in leadership positions are there because others were unwilling to take the risks and responsibilities involved.

In concrete terms, decentralising our organisation and creating real grass roots ownership of the political process requires a range of changes. We need to improve the level of communication throughout the party. We need to develop a culture of self analysis and self criticism. We need to make initiative, creativity and change key modes of operating at all levels.

#### *Creating a Culture of Critical Debate*

Part and parcel of our centralised and vertical organisational and activist culture has been the closing off of constructive critical debate within the movement. While debate continues informally at a number of levels, it is without doubt that activists often feel restrained from openly discussing and debating issues, especially in public. While such a culture was undoubtedly necessary and valuable in the context of a full scale conflict, the changing context requires us to rethink how, why, when and where we discuss and debate. As our political environment becomes less repressive and our party draws more supporters and activists we need to open and invigorate our ability to discuss, debate and constructively criticise where and when necessary.

This requires developing and facilitating debate at the deepest level within the movement. From local cumainn, through Comhairlí Ceantair, Cúigí and nationally. We need more fora and conferences, both for general discussion and task specific debates. We need a greater output of written material, magazines, pamphlets, polemics and books. We need to encourage as many positions and points of view as possible, in order that the decisions we make collectively coming out of a debate are made in the full knowledge of all of the possible alternatives.

A truly open and critical culture of debate produces better educated activists, more secure in our decisions, and more motivated in our daily work. To close off debate or indeed to fail to encourage it, creates confused, apathetic and demotivated activists.

### *Building political strength*

Republicans are acutely aware of the fact that we are the only vehicle for achieving independence and socialism in Ireland. While we may build alliances in the context of resolving the conflict, the reality is that at some point, our ability to move forward is dependent on our political strength, and that strength alone. Thus an ongoing priority is to continually consolidate and expand that strength.

But what exactly do we mean by political strength and how do we build it effectively? The most obvious expression of any political movement's strength is through the ballot box. Therefore increasing our electoral representation is a fundamental element of our struggle. However to limit our task to this alone is to reduce the struggle to mere electoralism. Throughout history republicans have made this mistake and paid dearly. While Sinn Féin must expand electorally, both in terms of demonstrating our strength and bringing our radical left republican agenda to bear on the political institutions on this island, we must also realise that political strength is a much broader and radical task.

At a political level political strength is determined by ones ability to shape events, to determine the course and outcome of the political process. Achieving such an end is rarely achieved by any one movement or party on their own, but requires alliances, cooperation, and solidarity. Sinn Féin must recognise that it holds an enormous potential to become a reference for people throughout Ireland, on



a range of issues. Our broad political project and all of its local manifestations has a power to mobilise and motivate people far beyond our electoral and activist base. The positions we take, the way in which we organise, and our ability to campaign can have a decisive effect on all of the progressive sectors across the country within political parties, community organisations, the trade union movement, single issue campaigns and public opinion makers.

### *A Campaigning Movement*

The key to successfully enhancing this potential lies in our understanding of political campaigns and alliance building. Sinn Féin have developed high profiles in certain regions and on specific issues such as property speculation and heroin, the RUC and community led economic regeneration. However, these localised campaigns need to become mainstreamed throughout Sinn Féin. Campaigning must become as an important area of work as that of elections. In order to do this, national campaigns need to be developed which compliment local campaigning activity. Such campaigns should be centred around the broad range of Sinn Féin's national pro-

gramme, covering where necessary social, political, economic and cultural issues.

Such campaigns must also be focused on the need to implicate a broader section of public opinion than our own base. Sinn Féin's policies on most issues are attractive to a broad range of progressive opinion. By fighting for public opinion in a more open way, such people can be brought on board issue by issue, without ever committing themselves to Sinn Féin electorally.

Key to winning the hearts and minds of public opinion nationally is the slow, day to day business of alliance building. Again this is a practice which Sinn Féin practices in a localised and ad-hoc fashion. This also needs to be main-streamed. As accusations of being a republican fellow traveller are shifting from stigma to status, we need to consciously build links and alliances with community organisations, non governmental agencies and especially special or single interest constituencies.

It also needs to be recognised that as the political context becomes less overtly repressive, our methods of motivating and mobilising activists and supporters need to adapt to the new situation. The emotional response which is brought into play as a result of state violence or discrimination

will no longer continue to be the dominant motivator. We need to become more proactive, and more political in terms of developing and carrying out campaigns.

This also requires expanding our campaign techniques and the variety of roles open to activists and supporters in those campaigns. As Sinn Féin is renowned for our media and electoral machinery, so too must we develop an efficient, effective and powerful campaign machine, which addresses itself to both the national and the local with equal vigour.

#### *Foregrounding our Republican Project*

At the heart of all the issues discussed is the republican project, a comprehensive social, political, economic and

cultural vision for the future of Ireland. Building our political strength, increasing internal debate and discussion, remoulding the organisational culture of our activists, increasing electoral representation, building effective grass roots campaigns and forming alliances with other political and social sectors is all part of a single process, and that is realising our republican vision.

However, the reality of the past 5 years is that the majority of the movements political and organisational energy has been channelled into the conflict resolution process. There is no doubt that such an emphasis was both necessary and of benefit to the broader republican objectives of independence and socialism.

However, now is the time for republicans to refocus on that broader project, and make clear both internally and publicly exactly what that project means in terms of activists daily work and our medium and long term objectives. This process has already begun, but needs to be given additional energy and resources. Our increasing strength means that we have a growing number of resources both human and material. These all need to be channelled into building not just our party, but our country. From the most local initiative right

through to our national campaigning and institutional activity we must foreground our republican vision.

This also requires the strengthening of two additional internal elements of our movement, namely education and policy development. If republicans are to become the main reference around which all progressive forces in Ireland are to rally, then we need to ensure that every single activist is equipped with the necessary political skills and policy positions which such a job requires. Ongoing activists education must be a priority in terms of building political strength and is the most valuable form of investment in both the future of our movement and our country.

Equally, we need to continually assess our policy positions on the broad range of social, political, cultural and economic issues which are relevant to the life of our country. While the repressive climate of the conflict placed many constraints on developing a detailed and diverse programme, the new political climate has opened many possibilities. In fact Sinn Féin has greatly expanded our policy base during the last five years. However in an increasingly globalising world these realities are both more complex and more open to change than ever before. Our ability to position ourselves within this ever changing context must be one of the most challenging tasks which faces our struggle. But if our radical republican vision is to have a continued relevance to people in this country then it must be adapted to suit its environment.

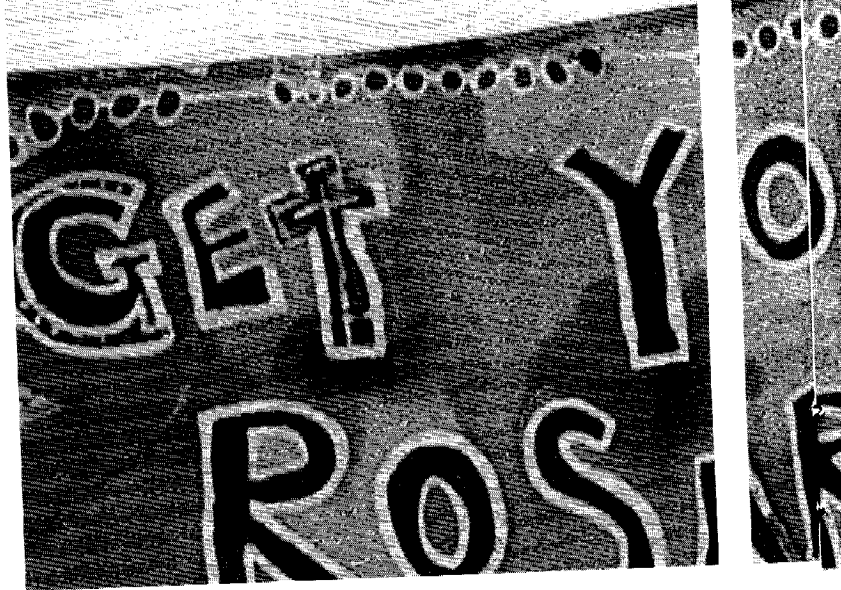
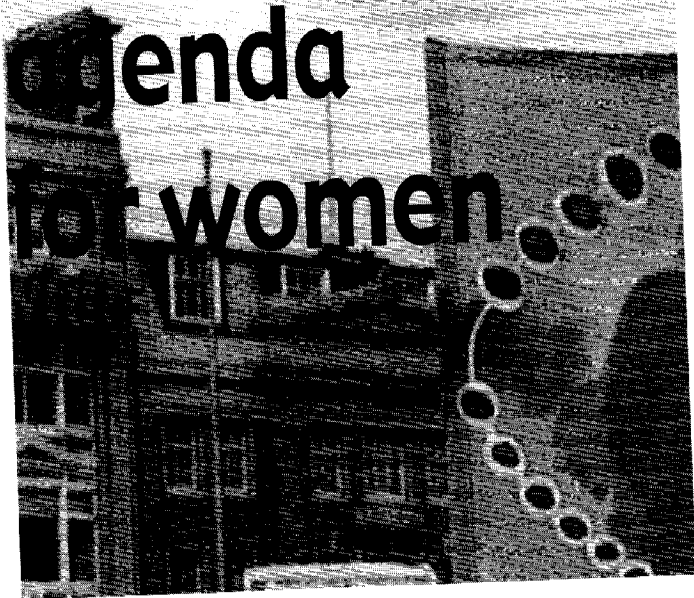
#### *Rising to the challenge*

It is with little doubt that this is the most exciting and challenging time for Irish republicans since partition. We are on the verge of major changes both in terms of our political strength and in the political life of our country. We have come this far, in spite of the great efforts of our enemies. However, we are no longer an anti-repressive movement responding to the day to day realities of conflict. We are a political movement with a radical programme for change. The time has come for us to implement that programme and what better place to start but from within our own ranks. We must begin to build our nation, day by day, street by street, institution by institution, issue by issue. The time is right, the conditions are right, it is time we rose to the challenge. ✕

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# An equality agenda for women



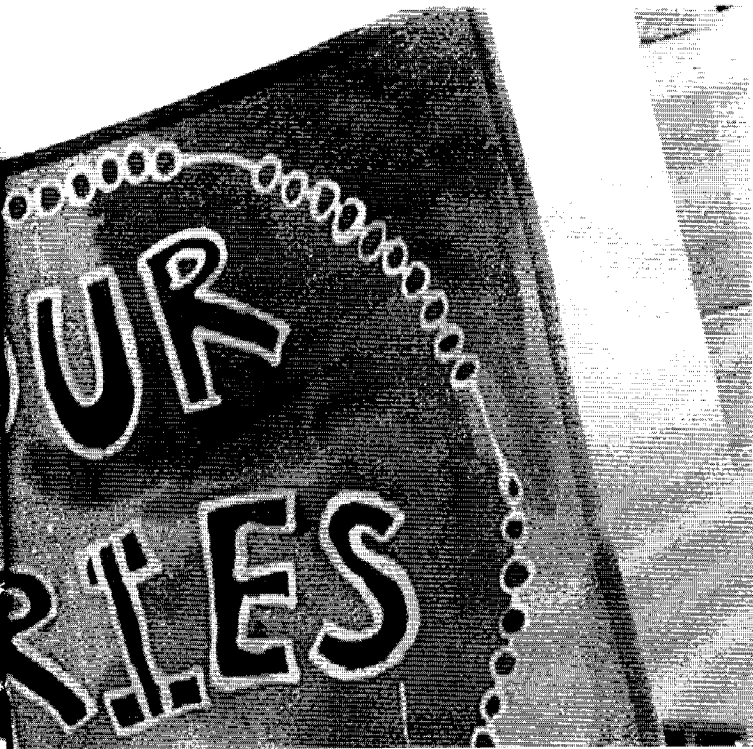
## Ruth Tallion

When I was asked to write about the equality agenda for women, I felt that it was necessary to first step back a bit and think again about the Equality Agenda in general; particularly in the context of the recent developments in the peace process. However positively or negatively some of us may feel about the Good Friday Agreement, I think that we have to accept that the shutting down of the institutions was a victory for the unionists and a setback for nationalists. However, I think we started losing ground much further back, and I would like to try and rethink the

discussion about the Equality Agenda -and then equality and women- within a broader framework.

At the time of the United Nations conference on women held in Beijing a few years ago, there was a slogan, 'Women's rights are human rights', which caught the imagination of many women. I didn't get to Beijing, but I was able to attend one of the European preparatory conferences. It was pretty awful. I participated in a workshop with women from the former Yugoslavia, and Palestine on women in areas of conflict. There were many women there





from war zones elsewhere, some of which I have to admit, I have no idea where they were. Nevertheless, the discourse was dominated by women from North America, and they controlled how the discussion was eventually written up and how the resolutions were worded. As a result, nationalism was defined in exclusively negative terms as a reactionary, violent and anti-women ideology. It was impossible to get them to accept the concept of oppressed nationalities or the progressive nature of national liberation movements.

How has that general trend been manifest here? When we were

living under the boot of Thatcherism, things were much clearer. Everybody knew which side of the fence they were on, and who was the enemy. Within these islands, Thatcher laid the ground with the defeat of the British trade union movement and the intensification of the war in Ireland. The moribund Conservative government however, would have not been capable of driving forward the realignment of class forces required by the globalisation of international capital. So, we have had the reincarnation of the British Labour party under Tony Blair. The Labour party has been transformed from the right-wing Social Democratic party of Neil Kinnock to the vanguard party of Neo-Liberalism. Tony Blair's project is the modernisation of Britain, which in his terms may or may not include the North of Ireland. Blair is essentially and instinctively unionist. While there is no doubt that he would jettison the Six Counties if the long term stability of British capital requires it, his sympathies and allegiances are with the Unionists. Unfortunately, his political background in the British Labour party has not equipped him to have an appreciation of the national question.

Similarly, the discourse on human rights over the past couple of decades -in the English speaking world at least- has been focussed on the rights of individuals and with an emphasis on political rights rather than social, economic or cultural rights. There has been a lot of concern about individual's personal freedoms while collective rights of whole societies or particularly oppressed groups or communities remain virtually unrecognised. We've seen a lot of attention placed on electoral systems, while thousands of children die for want of medicines withheld by the over-developed world for political reasons; such as the impact of the sanctions against Iraq.

Under both Thatcher and Blair, we have tended to look to Europe for the implementation of a relatively progressive social agenda. This has helped to obscure the fundamentally imperialist nature of the drive for ever greater European political and economic integration. The capitalist globalisation process is being shaped by the domination of Social Democracy in the European Union. This has meant that the more enlightened of European politicians have leavened the drive for economic measures to alleviate the worst impacts of European centralisation. They have understood that what has become known as 'social cohesion' is essential to long term political and economic stability. It is not cost effective to have the working -or unemployed- masses become too angry and disruptive. Thus while Thatcher's inclination was towards repression of the workers at home and abroad -as exemplified by her close friendship with Augusto Pinochet- the Blair government has cloaked its offensive on the rights and living standards of working people with the ideology of social partnership.

Of course, it is not a bad thing that the forces of capitalist expansionism should feel obliged to meet the basic needs of the people. A government which at least gives lip service to concepts such as equality and social inclusion is one which can be called to account to deliver on its promises; although it will only be required to deliver to the extent that the balance of forces means it has to do so.

The reality of Britain's war in Ireland has been a critical problem for the British state's modernisation project. On Balance, it has been a drain on resources and a political embarrassment. It could never entirely be contained; it always threatened and increasingly did spill over to disrupt political and economic life within Britain

itself. Eventually the economic and political imperatives for a realignment of political institutions on the island of Ireland has forced them to deal politically with Irish republicans as well as the Irish government. Of course, there was never any intention to concede anything more than absolutely necessary.

The British government represents the interests of British capital, specifically, above and beyond all else, English capital. It has been very much in its interests to create a situation where the political resources of Irish Republicanism have been channelled overwhelmingly into dealing with the demands of political negotiations in the back rooms of Stormont. At the same time, the ideological agenda which accompanies the project of political containment has also been adjusted. This has happened to such an extent that we can often ourselves lose sight of just how far things have drifted. The discourse of democracy, including the human rights and equality agendas, has been appropriated and perverted and is being used as a weapon against us. Politics has been reduced to an empty electoralism and the majority of people have been consigned to the sidelines as spectators.

Those who have attempted to continue to address social and economic issues have similarly been diverted into a never-ending cycle of pseudo-consultation and so-called participation, while continuing to have minimal influence and almost never being in a position to grasp even a modicum of real power.

What has this neo-liberal, neo-imperial agenda meant for women? It has brought us 'girl power' in place of women's liberation. This is the so called 'post-feminist' era where supposedly women have achieved equality and indeed are said to now be the dominant sex. What's the difference between 'girl power' and 'women's liberation'? Perhaps the first could be summed up as being able to deliver gender balance in the RUC, while women's liberation would mean that any young woman could aspire to following in the footsteps of Rosemary Nelson and Gareth Pierce. Girl power is summed up by the idea that individual determined and talented women can 'make it' in a vastly unequal society; without ever questioning the fundamental organising principles of society. Women's liberation strives to change the way society is organised to allow everyone, regardless of sex or sexuality, to a dignified, secure and fulfilled life.

Alongside so-called 'girl power', we've been experiencing an ideological backlash against women. Examples of this backlash can be seen in the debate about women in education, the work force and the family. The advances that women have made in the past two decades are under attack, despite the fact that women still have very little economic or political power. The fact that girls are doing better than boys in some aspects of secondary school has led to new measures which favour boys; because women are attending Further Education courses in greater numbers than men, it is deemed that special measures to support women returning to education are unnecessary.

In recent years, we have seen the 'feminisation' of certain sectors of the labour market, alongside an attack on the trade unions and changes to the way work is organised. So while there have been increasing numbers of women coming into the work force, many of these women have found themselves in part-time, low-paid, low-skilled jobs, unsupported by adequate child care provision. Often it is these working class women whose partners are the men who are being pushed out of the work force as traditional industries have declined. The social tensions and pressures on families and the loss of traditional social supports have contributed



political institutions and in the family. While a  
the overwhelming majority of women are st



to a situation in which the most reactionary, anti-women and anti-family measures can be advocated in the same traditional family values. Increasingly, women are taking the blame for all of societies ills: alienated youth, male unemployment and 'problem' children.

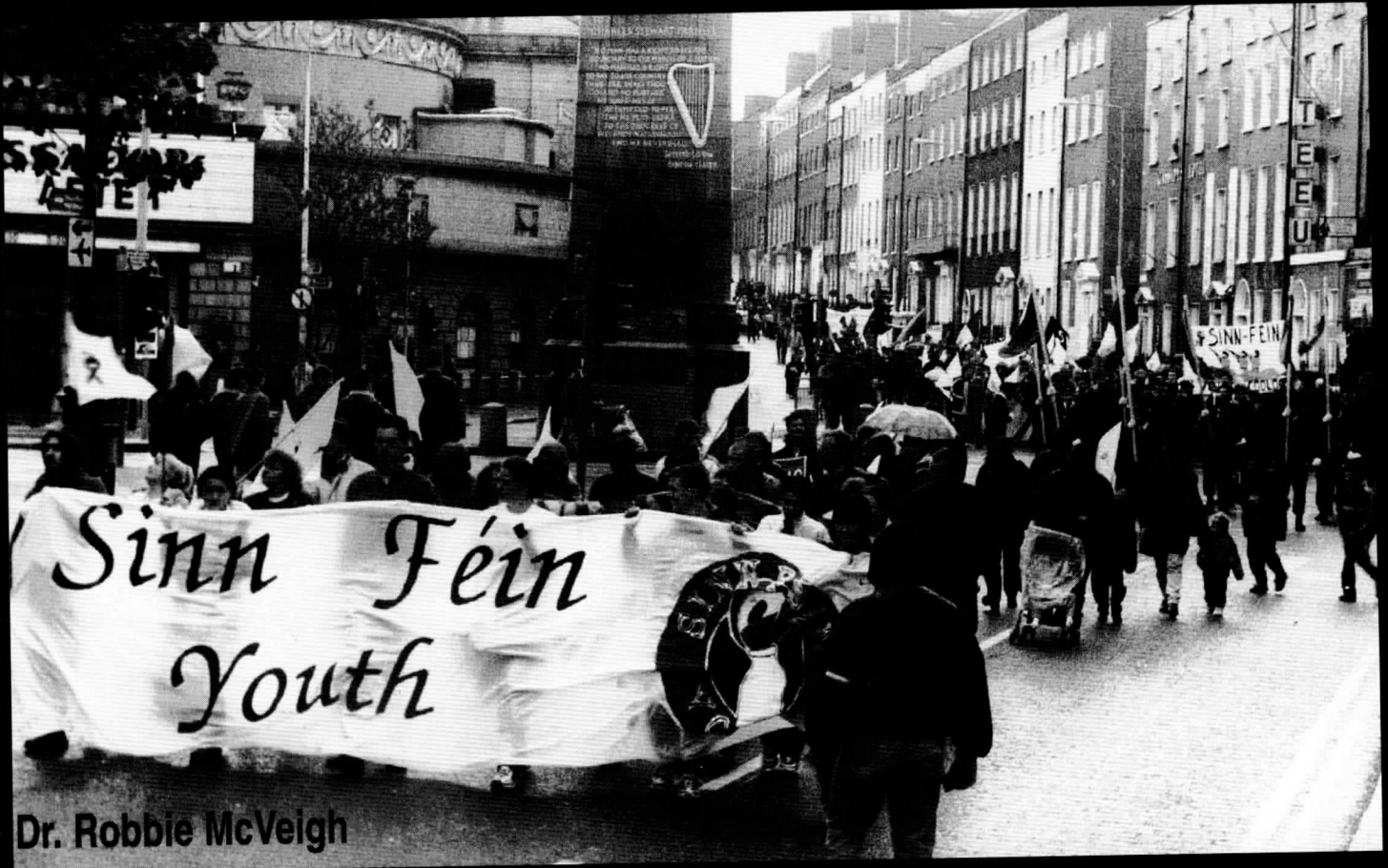
Yet, on any objective assessment, women are still disadvantaged as a group in the work force, in political institutions and in the family. While a few women have been able to succeed in politics or economically, the overwhelming majority of women are still struggling to survive. Unfortunately, also, we still live in a society in which women are treated with disdain by many of their male counterparts. One proof of this is that -even among supposedly enlightened, republican men- the worst term of abuse that can be directed at another man, aside from homophobic abuse, is the appellation of female genitalia.

So, what does the Equality Agenda entail for women? First and foremost, I think we need to reassert a politics of liberation; restoring a sense of collective struggle and collective responsibility. A politics of positive social change based on recognising the human rights and dignity of every individual; and recognising that to protect the rights of individuals means that the rights of particular groups in society have different or additional needs. We are a long way from a 'level playing field' between men and women or among women in this society.

We should be looking to remobilise around the Equality Agenda for women (as well as other equality issues). This remobilisation process should be designed to bring together the broadest possible range of forces, not just in 'street politics', but in a variety of collective political and social action. Thus, the actual process of organising around whatever issues which arise, must also reflect this liberationist approach. Structures should be as participative and democratic as possible and positive action be taken to include the most marginalised individuals and social groups.

The issues are all there. Unfortunately, they have not really changed over the years. We should be fighting for good quality, secure employment; adequate social infrastructures such as quality child care and public transport, particularly for rural women. We need reproductive choice -that includes contraception and the option of abortion and the right to choices about maternity care for those who decide to become mothers. It means protecting the rights -in particular the right to be different- of minority women whether they are lesbians, Travellers, immigrants or refugees. We need to fight for access to education, including the necessary financial and other supports for low-income women and women returners. We need to fight for more social housing and to recognise that women and families in districts like the Lower Ormeau are threatened not just by the Loyal Orders, but by Dublin based property speculators. And we still need to recognise that women have in the past and continue to shoulder much of the burden of holding families together in the context of still unresolved political and sectarian conflict. So perhaps the first place we could start in remobilising around the Equality Agenda for women, is to make the ongoing siege of the Garvaghey Road a 'feminist issue'. ✕

**'Women are still disadvantaged as a group in the work force, in a few women have been able to succeed in politics or economically, still struggling to survive.'**



Dr. Robbie McVeigh

# CHERISHING THE CHILDREN OF THE NA

## Developing the Equality Agenda in the context of the Peace Process.

There was an illuminating discussion on one specific equality issue last year after the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) launched a new initiative aimed at helping boys to achieve equality in education. It seems boys were underachieving. The Irish News on May 20th 1999 carried an editorial which argued that, 'no matter what the reason for it, the news that there is a clear disparity in the levels of academic attainment reached by boys and girls in our schools is worrying'. What was striking about this policy intervention was it was a fine example of positive discrimination. Moreover, it was an example of basing policy on equality of outcome - no messing

about here with talk of equity, since the boys already have equal access to education or even equality of opportunity, since, once again, the boys are competing and failing in the same classrooms and on the same terms as girls. Uniquely enough, there was no outcry about reverse discrimination, no rhetoric from the Right about political correctness gone mad.

There was another strange dimension to this debate. Education in the north of Ireland fails a whole range of groups - whether these are measured in terms of ethnicity or class or sectarian identity or gender. The education system in the Six Counties delivers almost nothing to Travellers; it results in huge class dispari-

ties between grammar and secondary schools; it systematically under provides grammar school places for Catholics. The 1991 census revealed that 73% of people aged 16 and over in West Belfast had no formal academic qualifications - the corresponding figure for South Belfast was 54%. When you look at these differentials, the choice of positive discrimination for boys seems at least questionable. Travellers, and Catholic working class boys and girls, and students from West Belfast are all much more unequal than boys as boys vis-a-vis girls as girls in the north of Ireland.

Moreover, with these groups there is no later compensatory advantage. Boys may

do worse in education than girls in the north of Ireland at secondary level. But they still do better at university level. And when you look at teachers in universities there is still a massive under-representation of women - you are hard-pushed to find a woman professor in Queen's or the University of Ulster. And boys, when they become men, still earn, on average, nearly one and half times what women do, even when they do the same jobs. So, from this perspective, if special educational intervention were needed, it seems odd to begin with boys at the only level at which they appear to be disadvantaged. If you look at almost any other level of educational experience or, indeed, almost any other life experience, it is women rather than men who require positive intervention.

Of course, there is nothing new in this. You find that positive discrimination or unintended advantage is rarely a problem when it advantages people and groups who are already empowered. So there's nothing wrong with the northern statelet subsidising primary school students who go to preparatory departments and there's nothing wrong with Protestant Grammar

out a whisper when it no longer serves the interest of the empowered. But raise similar issues for the disempowered and you will be subjected to an apoplectic series of demands for equity and equality of opportunity and meritocracy and natural selection and every other oppressive rhetorical device concocted by the privileged to defend their privilege. And, this is not misguided on their part. This is because equality is still at its heart a revolutionary concept. It carries with it the promise of genuine, participatory democracy in which all citizens, regardless of their background, are cherished on an equal basis. It is something which continues to promise fair treatment for a majority of citizens for the first time.

This is important since one of the striking things about equality is that it is often assumed to be something which minorities demand. In reality, the vast majority of people in Ireland as a whole, and in the Six Counties in particular, have a selfish and strategic interest in equality. If you are a woman or working class or Catholic, you do not have equality and you have a vested interest in getting it. Once you factor in other unequal people - minority ethnic

ect. Equality has always been a central issue for Irish Republicans. This is most powerfully summed up by the 1916 Proclamation commitment to 'cherish the children of the nation equally':

'The Republic guarantees civil and religious liberties, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally and oblivious to the differences carefully fostered by an alien government which has divided a minority from the majority in the past'

This commitment to equality for all citizens remains a core part of the Republican philosophy. This has immediate implications for the current peace process. The Belfast Agreement was important because it placed the equality issue at the very heart of current and future political developments in Ireland. Nationalists accepted the Agreement on that basis. This demand is not going to be dropped - we need equality and we need it quickly. The proof positive of change for the nationalist and Republican community will be the experience of equality and parity of esteem.

## ATION EQUALLY

schools getting three times as much per student as Catholic girls secondary schools. Indeed, until two years ago, there was nothing wrong with doctoring the results of the 11 plus exam to ensure that a 'fair' proportion of boys passed the exam and got into grammar schools. Boys, you see, were 'late developers' and needed this corrective intervention. This is fine until you ask where is the intervention for young women in university education - where is the evidence of changing teaching methods to accommodate their education? Is there any attempt to doctor the 11 plus to ensure that a fair proportion of Travellers get into grammar schools?

The answer to all this, of course, is no. This would be attacked and pilloried as 'reverse discrimination' or an attack on the merit principle or as an example of political correctness gone mad. This serves to expose the hypocrisy of those who pretend that we live in a meritocratic system. The insistence on meritocracy disappears with-

groups, disabled people, the young, the old, Lesbians and Gays and so on - you begin to realise that the vast majority of us want equality.

Inequality advantages a small minority in our society and disadvantages the rest of us. Ireland is a profoundly unequal place - north and south. Moreover, this inequality benefits a small minority of all people in Ireland. The need for equality is not the issue - how to build alliances across all these different groups in order to get it is the key question.

This is, of course, easier said than done. Negotiating alliances across different constituencies will be a difficult project. There must be input from all the key equality constituencies - women, nationalists, minority ethnic groups, disability groups, Lesbian and gay groups, youth and older people's groups, ex-prisoner and Irish language groups. It bears emphasis that Republicans should regard this negotiation as a core part of their overall political proj-

Sadly, this reality has yet to be recognised by unionists. In 1998, John Taylor said, 'Of course, there must be equal opportunity for everyone, but not equality. You cannot expect the Irish minority in Northern Ireland to be equal to the majority'. Now the British Government appears to be following the unionist lead and running away from its equality commitments as quickly as it can. Equality is the key component in achieving "peace stability and prosperity" in the north of Ireland according to the Belfast Agreement. But, targeting need requires focused spending with goals and timetables, monitoring and evaluation, - not some nebulous commitment to economic development. There has been little evidence of any commitment by the Labour Government to pro actively redistribute power and wealth in this way. In any democratic society, targeting of these areas to achieve equality of outcome should be the norm.

There has to be a sea-change in British

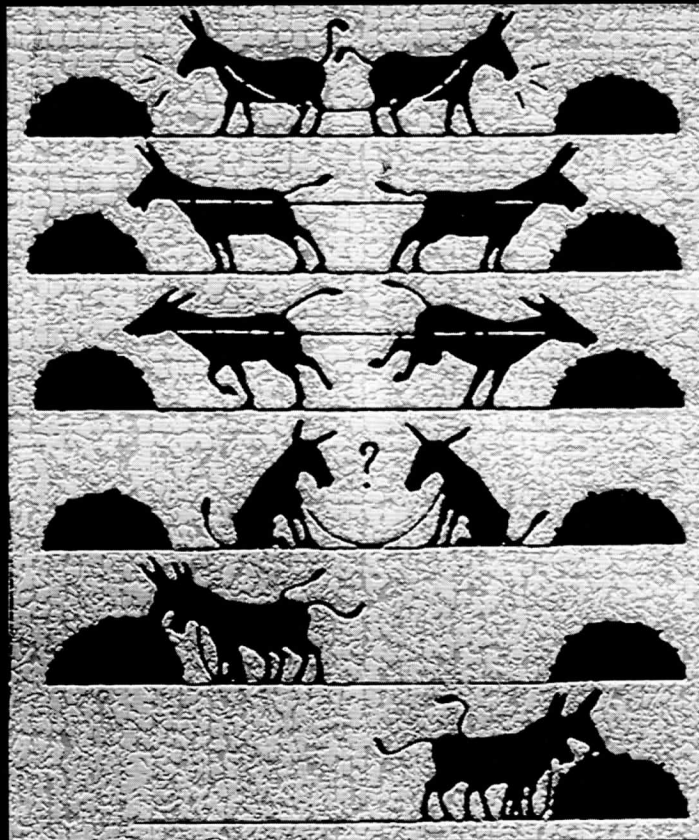
Government attitudes to equality. More specifically there has to be a sea-change within Irish political institutions and their associated infrastructure of inequality. Stormont of course represents the very seat of "the Protestant state for a Protestant people" for most nationalists. In truth, however, the Stormont statelet was even less inclusive than that - it was a domain of white, middle and upper class Protestant men. It was shocking therefore to hear the First Minister, David Trimble, argue at a unionist party conference that the Agreement gave unionists, 'a real chance to do what Craig and Carson wanted to do'.

We all need to get used to the idea that this model has, thankfully, gone for good - government in the north of Ireland must belong to everybody. And of course it is the fear of this practice that moved unionists to collapse the political institutions and throw the entire process into freefall. Now that the institutions have been reestablished there is an urgent need to debate what they must do, how and in the interests of who. Politicians, governmental structures, ministerial departments, the civil service and the policies developed in these places should reflect a new reality. Not only do they need to accept that there are going to be Catholics about the place but nationalists and Republicans and disabled people and ethnic minorities and women and Lesbians and Gays.

Republicans must continue to insist that equality is central to the whole process of government including, crucially, decisions around government expenditure. Government also needs to be made accessible to all the equality constituencies who have been excluded by discrimination from government in the past. There is a need here to build new alliances across old divisions. There needs to be a process whereby space is created for all those interested in equality to share experiences and develop a common agenda.

There are already some basic demands which should be supported by all the different equality constituencies. These are equally relevant north and south of the bor-

der. First, equality must be measured in terms of equality of outcome - neither equity nor equality of opportunity will deliver equality for any of our disadvantaged groups. Second, the equality agenda must be proactive rather than reactive - every government policy must be equality-proofed before it is implemented. This is specifically relevant in terms of the political institutions - every new structure needs to be rigorously proofed for equality from its inception. Third, equality must be put on a legislative basis for all our equality constituencies. Fourth, we must have a dedicated Department of Equality. We have to



put equality at the centre of government in the Six Counties and this is one way of beginning to do that. Finally, the equality agenda must be developed on an all-island basis. Equality is a right for all our people - north and south, Protestant and Catholic, men and women, black and white - recognising this truth is the first step towards genuinely 'cherishing all the children of the nation equally'.

On the one hand this basic commitment to 'cherishing all the children of the nation equally' remains the most powerful and beautiful aspiration in the Proclamation. It cuts through all the rhetoric about the difficulties of equity and equality of opportuni-

ty, economic necessity and reality. It insists we will cherish the children of the nation equally - period. It was and remains a truly revolutionary aspiration.

Things, however, do not remain static. The 'nation' which the Proclamation spoke to is profoundly different in a range of different ways. The fundamental change of course is that the children of nation that were addressed in this powerful aspiration were Protestants/Unionists and Catholics/Nationalists. We now have a nation which is much more explicitly diverse - it is multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-racial. The children of the nation include Catholics and Protestants. But they also include Jews and Muslims and agnostics and atheists; they also include Travellers and refugees and Chinese Irish and African Irish and Asian Irish. They include women and men.

They include people of different sexualities. The nation has also been distorted by 70 years of partition. In short, therefore, it is a more complex social and political formation within which to obtain equality. Nevertheless, the aspiration is no less important nor less admirable than it was in 1916. It promises a fundamental transition of Irish society away from past inequalities and towards equality.

The equality agenda, therefore, should not be about reform. Anything approaching equality of outcome on the island of Ireland would involve a transformation of political structures and political power. In this sense equality is not about minor changes to the status quo, it is about instituting genuine democracy and genuine human rights for everyone on the island of Ireland for the first time in our history. We need to start from two basic propositions.

There is no possibility of a genuinely democratic politics in Ireland which aspires to equality without the participation of Republicans. They must be part of the overall project. With this in mind, there is a need for a refocussing of participative politics which can build and lead an alliance of different equality constituencies north and south of the border.

**'There needs to be a process whereby space is created for all those interested in equality to share experiences and develop a common agenda.'**

The reality is that there is no possibility of such an alliance involving Republicans with ambiguity on the use of political violence. Armed struggle had the consequence of alienating other equality constituencies. Any new alliance for equality is tied to the ongoing peace process. Moreover, it is a key part of making the peace process work as a peace process.

If we begin this analysis we can begin to move beyond an equality agenda which is essentially reformist. For example, if you look at most of the equality agenda demands in the Six Counties, they suggest that the state is reformable. This may actually be the case if all we want is equality of misery in housing, unemployment, social deprivation and so on. From this perspective equality is less concerned with providing a decent standard of living and quality of life for everybody, than ensuring that Protestants and Catholics are treated equally badly. From a Republican perspective, there is a need to move beyond these reformist demands and look towards building a political dynamic that can transform the whole island. The key to doing this is to look at the all-Ireland dimensions of the Agreement on equality. It is especially important to develop an analysis of the equality implications of the Agreement in the context of the 26 counties - what are

these implications? Who is doing any work on them? How do we force the southern Government to take these responsibilities seriously?

These all-Ireland commitments on equality provide the basis for a new equality agenda. It is important for grass roots activists to build and lead alliances across equality constituencies in the Six Counties. It is equally important, however, to build and lead similar alliances in the 26 Counties. There must also be a parallel process, obviously, of linking these two projects - of making sure that both equality dynamics are constantly learning from and linking with each other. Thus the equality agenda must become an organic, 32 county process.

We need to encourage activists to work to this broad agenda. Many Republicans are wary of other constituencies and many other constituencies are wary of Republicans. This is made slightly easier in the north simply by political necessity. Other equality agendas - whether we are talking about women or the unemployed or minority ethnic groups - have been forced to work with Sinn Féin simply because they are the only potential government party who have a grounded interest in the issues. Other than the PUP and the Women's Coalition, Sinn Féin are the only party with a sustained commitment on these issues. In the 26 counties especially, it is crucial that we create an alliance of individuals who see the point of these alliances and are prepared to work on them. As all the major political parties get pulled into coalition government, there is a growing space for equality-focussed participative politics. This would move the equality agenda to the core of political debate. At one level, this is pretty basic stuff. We need to be asking how many political parties and NGOs have a spokesperson on equality in the 26 counties and encouraging those who do not to institute one very quickly. We need to identify groups of people working on equality in the 26 counties.

The key project is to move equality centre stage in political debate - to the point where it is seen as being at least as

important as economic development or crime.

The big advantage for Republicans is that there are already commitments on principle on most of these issues. For example, on paper at least, Sinn Féin has a sound pro-working class, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic strategy. There might be a gap between principle and practice but Sinn Féin already has moved to the position where it has adopted a broad pro-equality line on most of these issues. The challenge for Sinn Féin is building an activist base - grounded in the experience of working class, republican communities across Ireland but with political competency on the full range of equality issues.

The key question is how an open democratic participative alliance is built with mutual respect on all sides and without different constituencies feeling that they are being 'used' in this process. The start of this process must be dialogue across different equality constituencies. We need to create space in which women, the working class, Republicans, black and minority ethnic communities, Lesbians and Gays, disabled people, young people and other equality constituencies, talk to and more importantly listen to one another on a structured, 32-county basis.

It is time for a swift movement towards an Ireland which doesn't have huge differentials between the mortality and morbidity rates of Travellers and settled people; towards an Ireland which doesn't have a huge differential between the economic situation of Protestants and Catholics in the north of Ireland; which doesn't have a huge differential between the economic, social and political marginalisation of women across the island. We cherish the children of the nation equally by what we do not what we aspire to. Equality of outcome is the only metre of success. ✕

**'The equality agenda, should not be about reform. Anything approaching equality of outcome on the island of Ireland would involve a transformation of political structures and political power.'**

# Building the Basque Country

*During their recent visit to Ireland, Left Republican Review spoke to the three person delegation from the left nationalist Basque political party Euskal Herriarrok. The delegation included the Basque MEP Koldo Gorostiaga, EH international department worker Iratxe Renteria and member of the National Executive Eusebio Lasa. The interview took place shortly after the landslide victory of the right wing Spanish Popular Party in the general elections. The interview assesses the impact of the elections of the conflict in the Basque country, examines the strategy of the left nationalist movement in those elections and highlights the ongoing repression by the Spanish and French governments against the political representatives of the independence movement.*

**LRR - The first place to start is with the Spanish state general elections. Explain to me very briefly the break down of votes after the elections, which party won and which parties lost and also the implications of all this for the development of a political process for the Basque country.**

Koldo Gorostiaga - The only winner was the Popular Party, which is very conservative. I say conservative in a very specific sense because in Spain they are the extreme right party. Following the death of Franco, all those people who had supported the dictatorship moved in the the Popular Alliance, which then became the Popular Party. Thus the Popular Party represents the interests of all sections of the right including the extreme right.

**LRR - So what does that mean for the Basque country?**

Koldo Gorostiaga - Because the Popular Party won an absolute majority it means that our main enemy has full power to do what it wants. There will be more repression but there is also the possibility of some positive political movement.

**LRR - In terms of Euskal Herriarrok, you took an abstentionist position calling on people not to vote. This was a new departure for you. Eusebio, can**

**you explain the motivation behind the decision and give a brief evaluation of the success of the campaign?**

Eusebio Lasa - Our strategy at present is to work within the Basque country, to build our nation day by day. We are trying to encourage people to break all of their links with the Spanish and French state, politically, culturally, socially and economically. Refusing to vote in the Spanish elections is one way to do this, and so we chose an abstentionist position. It is also important to point out however, that as the Popular Party now has a majority in the Spanish parliament, those other nationalist party's who took seats in Madrid, and in the past were able to position themselves as coalition partners in order to gain concessions, will not be able to do so now. These parties, the Partido Nacionalista Vasco and Eusko Alkartasuna will suffer as a result of their refusal to abstain. Before the elections we called on both of these parties to boycott the elections, but they refused. But if they agree the next time, then Basque society as a whole will have won a great victory, and a real political break from the Spanish state.

**LRR - Can you explain to me in a little more detail the logic behind the abstention and what you were trying to achieve?**

Eusebio Lasa - We first discussed the idea of abstention four years ago. We had just developed a new strategy based on the idea of building the Basque country, which involved bringing all sections of Basque society together to develop the fundamental bases of our country, such as the economy, our language, our education etc. It was our view that we had enough strength to work directly with the rest of Europe and the rest of the world without going through Paris and Madrid. So in this context we were looking for as many ways as possible to break the connection with Spain, and obviously one very symbolic act would be a refusal to participate in Spanish elections.

However at this time we were not in a very strong position, there was a lot of repression from the state and we felt that the elections were necessary to demonstrate our continuing support within the Basque population. We decided to stand in the elections of that year but in a very special way. Our candidates were the relatives of political prisoners and the relatives of people who were killed or injured by state mercenaries such as GAL. Our successful candidates did not of course take their seats in the Madrid parliament.

Now, four years later we felt that we were strong enough to abstain fully and so we



called on people not to vote. Our decision is part of our general understanding of the changing nature of politics here in the Basque country. We are moving from a resistance position to a construction position, from a period when the majority of our energy and resources went into reacting to state repression, to a new period where we have more space and time to develop our project for the future of the Basque country. And part of this new emphasis requires us to convince Basque people that their future lies here in the Basque country and not in Madrid or Paris. We need to increase peoples awareness of and involvement in a political confrontation with the Spanish and French states. Abstention is one way of doing this, it reinforces the psychological break. We also need to develop this philosophy in different areas like the language, the economy, etc.

**LRR - Iratxe, you are a member of EH's international department and in the last number of months many of your colleagues have been arrested. Can you explain the chronology of what has happened, hand also your analysis of why the international department has been getting so much attention from the Spanish authorities?**

Iratxe Renteria - The operation started on January 28th. Eight people were arrested, including our delegate for America Mikel Corta who was travelling from Mexico with the lawyer Inigo Elkoro, the head of the Department Gorka Martinez and five other department staff. Five of them are still in prison. Then in February a senior and historic member of the Basque left nationalist movement was summoned before the Supreme Court judge Baltazar Garzon. Then in March in the middle of the Spanish election campaign a member of our national executive, Olarra, was arrested and after paying a large bail was released. In addition to these people, our

delegate for Europe, Elena Beloki was in exile in Brussels, where she appeared at a press conference denouncing an international order to arrest her. Since then she has returned to the Basque country and subsequently been arrested. And finally the present head of our department Esther Agirre who is a member of the Basque autonomous parliament has been accused by Garzon of being a member of ETA. So this is the police and judicial operation.



The reason for all of this is clear. The aim of the Spanish state through its most senior judge Baltazar Garzon and his judicial operation is to criminalise our organisation and then to stop our work abroad. Why? Because we present another reality which is very different from that which the Spanish state presents. We say that the conflict in the Basque country is a political conflict and needs a political solution. But what the Spanish government is trying to

do is to present the conflict in our country as one of 'terrorism' than needs a security solution. But nobody in the international community believes this because we are a very strong department so he needs to stop us from presenting this reality.

**LRR - And despite the aim of the Spanish government to stop your department from working, you have continued on. Can you tell me what you have been doing during the last number of weeks?**

Iratxe Renteria - Of course what Garzon cannot do is to imprison all of the members of the independentist movement and even if some of our department have been arrested, and we are arrested tomorrow there will always be people who continue with the work. So after the arrests our department was in a very weak position but we tried to maintain the relations and contacts which have been established for many years. Our main aim at the present is just to show the international community what has happened and continue transmitting our message. So we started in Ireland in Belfast and Dublin with different political organisations and then we will go to Italy and then on to Portugal.

**LRR - My next question is for you Eusebio, you spoke at the start about National Construction. For people in Ireland this is an idea we haven't**

**heard of before. Can you explain what National Construction means, and also how you think that the process of National Construction can lead to a resolution of the conflict in your country.**

Eusebio Lasa - First of all I think that it is very important to emphasise that neither the Spanish nor the French states want to negotiate a resolution to the Basque conflict. They are not willing to move from their security positions. Our last strategy



# GORA EUSKADI ASKATUTA!

involved campaigns, at home and internationally aimed at pushing the Spanish government into negotiations with the Basque National Liberation Movement. For a number of reasons this strategy did not work, and so after much debate we developed our current strategy, which we call the National Construction. Our objective is to create a dynamic within the Basque country, whereby all sections of our people are working together to build our country. Through campaigns, agreements and new political institutions we want to create the unity of the Basque people here and now, in the present. This means working on all of those issues relevant to Basque society, our language, our economy, our education system, our international relations and image.

The consequences of this are twofold. In the process of uniting the Basque people, we are demonstrating in a real way that the future of our country is here, not in Madrid or Paris. Secondly we are also bringing more and more people into a political confrontation with those states. For example, we have established with the other nationalist and progressive parties the first national political institution, the National Assembly of Municipal Councilors. Although this body is the most democratic body in our country, involves representatives from the majority of the the population, and is very popular, the Spanish state has attacked the assembly as illegal. So the Basque public can clearly see that the problem of the Basque country is the Spanish states refusal to respect the democratic wishes of the Basque people.

Eventually we believe, when enough work has been done in these fields, the Spanish and French governments will have no option but to negotiate a political solution to their conflict. So national Construction is all of the work involved in this process of uniting and building our country. It is work that takes place every day, in trade unions, town halls, regional parliaments, national assemblies, with language campaigns, environmental campaigns, student work inside schools and universities. It is everything that Basque people do in an attempt to build our country here and now.

**LRR - Koldo, a number of times you have mentioned the fact that the Lizarra Garazi agreement which was one of the key turning points in developing the process of national construction, emerged from an initiative called on Forum on Ireland. Explain what the Forum was and how it influenced the subsequent agreement?**

Koldo Gorostiaga - Well, Ireland has been a very important example for the nationalist movement in the Basque country. The very fact that our Aberri Eguna, or national day, is celebrated on Easter Sunday, after the Irish rising is more than a coincidence. The reference of the republican movement in Ireland, fighting for your own destiny, for your own self-determination has also been very important for us. So, when the talks started in Ireland after the Downing Street declaration, and the subsequent IRA cessation, to see if there was a possibility of finding a political solution to the conflict, from that moment we

were looking very closely at developments in Ireland. In the Basque country all political parties, even those opposed to the independence of our country were very interested in what was happening in Ireland. So when Herri Batasuna decided to put together a forum for debate around the developments in Ireland in order to seek a political solution for the Basque country, many people accepted that idea. That's the explanation of the forum.

After that, the result was the declaration of Lizarra-Garazi. This declaration states three very important points. Firstly that there is a political conflict in the Basque country. Secondly is that this conflict can only be solved through political means. And thirdly is that the Basque country must decide that solution, which means in the end we must have a democratic solution, we as Basque people must have the final say in our future. So, there must be a general acceptance of the word of the Basque people. These three points were signed by all the Basque nationalist political parties, by the most important trade unions representing more than 70% of the working class in the Basque country, by many social and cultural organisations. So it is clear that the great majority of the Basque country has accepted these points. The importance of this formulae is that it is based on consensus and is based on a democratic methodology. Finally, this option means that the only way we can finally settle the conflict is through the implementation of these means in a democratic way.

**LRR - From what Koldo is saying it is very clear that the majority of political party's, trade unions, social organisations within the Basque country want self determination. They have different ideas of how to use it, but there is a clear consensus from Lizarra-Garazi. But the response of the Spanish government and opposition parties has been to oppose it. Iratxe explain why you think the Spanish government and opposition is so against granting self-determination for the Basque people.**

Iratxe Renteria - We are a small country, but we are very proud of our language and our culture, the Spanish state is afraid of

us, they don't want to change the borders because they want to maintain the status quo. They want to retain the wealth that is contained in the Basque country, and keep the political stability of the Spanish State.

**LRR - And in terms of negotiations, do you see any possibility of the new Popular Party government engaging with Basque nationalist parties?**

Iratxe Renteria - Of course, maybe it won't be this year, but in two years time, or five years time they will end up realising that the aspirations of the Basque country cannot be silenced with their repressive means. Of course I don't know when, but they will come to realise that they have to find a political solution to the conflict, they will have to talk to people and respect our voice and our demands. It will have to happen because there is no other way

**LRR - Eusebio you spoke earlier about a new process which is about to take place within the Left Nationalism Movement, a debate possible leading to a new organisation or project. Can you give me some information regarding this project?**

Eusebio Lasa - There are many changes taking place within Basque and Spanish politics. While at the moment there are a number of political parties, we believe that in two years time there will only be two Spanish parties, the Popular Party on the right and the Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol on the centre left. And in the Basque country there will also be two party's, the Partido Nationalist Vasco and ourselves, a left progressive Basque party. The other smaller parties such as Eusko Alkartasuna and Izquierda Unida will disappear. So we think it is time to organise a left political party, which will be able to accommodate all those people who used to support these smaller parties. The base of this new project will be the experience we have been accumulating in Herri Batasuna, but we think there are different political parties, different people and different sensibilities around this space and what we want to do is to organise a big debate for a year in order to find a common vehicle for all of these people.

**LRR - During the weekend here in Ireland, Koldo you have been speaking about the European Union and the direction that project is taking. In terms of the Basque country and in the con-**

**text of both the conflict and the broader society, what are your views in terms of how all of this is developing?**

Koldo Gorostiaga - Well we think that it is very important, right now to be present in an international dimension such as the European parliament, which is the only elected institution in the European union. The lack of democracy within the union has been denounced many times. There is an international dimension to the process of national construction and the European Union is one vehicle for doing this work. So we must leave our own message directly with the international community. We want to speak directly to the international community, to say here we are and this is what we want. That is something which is absolutely necessary for our country.

Right now Europe is changing, in a few years European institutions are going to change. This is a coincidence, that right now we are in the European parliament, and we are going to follow that process. We are going to discuss with other nations without states, how to imagine a different Europe. We are also trying to be in some ways the voice of those nations without states, who can't have an MEP in the parliament, and we are also looking to speak on behalf of all of those other sectors that other nations are ignoring.

There are many possibilities. One could be to create a platform of a minimum consensus for how the nations which are not accepted now can be accepted in the future. Another possibility, why not in 2004, imagine the possibility of going together to the elections as nations without states. We represent 40 million people, and we could be a very powerful force within Europe.

**LRR - Finally Iratxe, there are many people in Ireland who have a very strong sense of solidarity with the Basque country. What would be your advice to Irish people who want to express their solidarity through action. What can people here do to help?**

Iratxe Renteria - I think that the best way to help would be to get to know the real facts of the Basque country., Try to spread them and tell people about them. And then contact us or come to the Basque country to see for yourselves. Write to embassies of the French or Spanish government, organise protests denouncing state violence and torture in prison.✕

““

*We were looking for as many ways as possible to break the connection with Spain.*

““

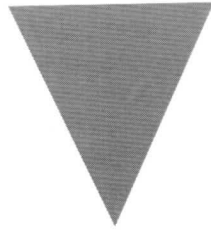
*Our objective is to create a dynamic within Euskal Herria whereby all sections of our people are working together to build our country.*

““

# READING

## PALESTINE

A review of books currently in print dealing with the politics of Palestine.



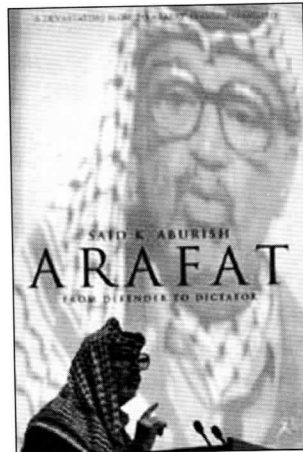
### ARAFAT FROM DEFENDER TO DICTATOR

Said K. Aburish

**Bloomsbury Paperbacks, £7.99 pb**  
**ISBN 0-7475-4430-1**

As the book's title suggests Said K. Aburish's biography of PLO leader Yasser Arafat traces the man's personal and political career from his days as a young guerrilla to the leader of the Palestine Authority. In keeping with the title, for Aburish, the Palestinian leader's trajectory begins with a courageous though inept defender of the rights of Palestine and its people, and ends with a tribal chief imposing in a dictatorial fashion, his arbitrary rule on a demoralised people.

In what is the first biography written by a fellow Palestinian, and one of the same generation as Arafat, Aburish presents a generous, often complimentary but ultimately damning portrait of the man who for four decades has represented the very idea of Palestine itself. Bringing together all previously published source material with an indigenous understanding of the culture and values of



Palestinian and Arab society, the author is able to shed new light on controversies which have puzzled earlier biographers.

Arafat is portrayed as a complex and contradictory figure, whose commitment and self sacrifice in the cause of national liberation would never compensate for his lack of political vision or organisational ability. His story is of a desire to control all which surrounds him, and by doing so undermined the great potential which existed within the PLO.

In the end, Aburish concludes that while Arafat has been defeated, Palestine has not. It's first task must be to abandon its present leadership and their failed strategies and institutions while building a new movement for freedom.

*Arafat From Defender to Dictator* is an intriguing study of one man and his influence on history. It is an essential book for anyone interested in understanding contemporary Palestinian politics.

# PEACE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

## Gaza-Jericho 1993 - 1995

Edward W. Said

Vintage, £6.99  
ISBN 0-09-959481-1

American academic and world renowned literary critic, Edward Said, is not well known in Ireland for his involvement in Palestinian politics. A member of the Palestinian National Council for almost two decades, he has been one of the most vocal and powerful advocates for Palestinian rights in the English speaking world. Having written a number of books on the history and political struggles of his country, it is his opposition to the Oslo Agreement signed in the early 1990s and his subsequent criticism of the policies of Arafat and the Palestinian National Authority, which has brought him once again into the public spotlight.

*Peace and its Discontents* brings together a series of essays written by Said from 1993 through to 1995 and published in both Arabic, English and French newspapers. Combined they represent a thoroughgoing and devastating critique of the political process in that part of the world.



Said focuses on the ambiguities within the Oslo accords and the litany of Israeli breaches of that and subsequent agreements, and paints a picture not of conflict resolution but defeat of Arafat through politics.

Said also examines the socio economic realities within which thousands of Palestinian nationals continue to live, in Gaza the West Bank and the refugee camps of neighbouring Arab countries. It is here the real defeat of Oslo is most clearly witnessed, believes Said, as people continue to live not only without rights but without homes, having spent decades without any official status and no idea what their future may hold.

Said's essays conclude in much the same way as Aburish's biography of Arafat although without the degree of politeness accorded by the latter. A new movement and leadership is required, returning to the inspiration of the Intifada and the traditional aims of the PLO, to create a secular and democratic Palestinian state, at peace with its neighbours but on the basis of equality.

## PALESTINE IN CRISIS

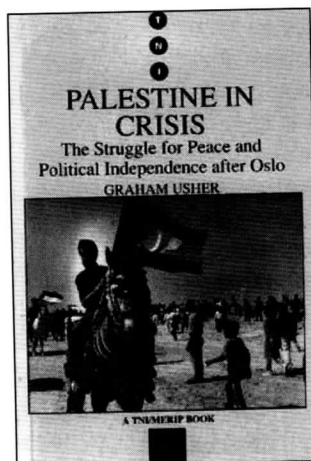
### The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence after Oslo

Graham Usher

Pluto in association with TNI/MERIP,  
£12.99  
ISBN 0-7453-0974-7

Graham Usher was the *Middle East International* correspondent in Gaza and the formerly occupied territories, and a frequent contributor to publications such as the *Financial Times*, *Middle East Report*, *The Nation* and the *New Statesman*. More than almost any other Western journalist, he has experienced first hand, the realities and consequences of the dispossession of the Palestinian people, and their subjugation by both the US and Israel.

From this experience comes a book which in both style and content provides the reader with a vivid and gripping portrait of political developments within Palestine and Israel since the signing of Oslo. Although published



in 1995 it remains a vital read for anyone looking to understand the present situation between these two countries.

He focuses on the political and economic weaknesses of the Oslo agreement, and the role the PLO have played since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. In addition to official and academic sources, Usher accesses the voices of ordinary Palestinians, in non-governmental organisations, human rights groups and civil society generally. Like many books on this subject, the resilience of ordinary Palestinians is contrasted with the failure of the leadership of the PLO to deliver on its historic objectives.

*Palestine in Crisis* is a succinct overview of a critical period in contemporary Middle Eastern politics.

## THROUGH SECRET CHANNELS

### The road to Oslo

Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen)

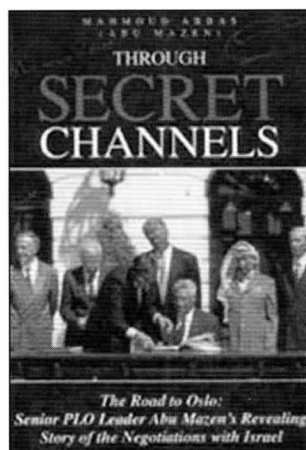
Garnet, £9.95

ISBN 1-85964-047-8

*Through Secret Channels* tells the story of the clandestine contacts between the Israeli government and the leadership of the PLO which culminated in the historic talks at Oslo. Abu Mazen, who was a key negotiator and confidant of Arafat, tells the story of how the negotiating team and their Israeli counterparts overcame their mutual suspicion and how, despite various setbacks, developed what became the Oslo Accord and the Israeli/Palestinian peace process.

The book takes the reader through the complex and confusing world of Arab, Israeli and US contacts from the 1970s through the Madrid Peace Conference in the 1980s and on to Washington and Oslo.

What is clear as you read through the intricate detail of Mazen's account is both the intransigence of the Israelis and the hypocrisy



of successive US administrations, both of whom insisted that the PLO end its armed struggle, while they colluded to inflict great suffering and violence on the Palestinian population.

Equally striking in Mazen's text is the absence of the Palestinian people as agents of their own change. This is a book about secret negotiations carried out without the knowledge or consent of the Palestinian people.

Whatever one's opinions of the Oslo Accords and subsequent developments, *Through Secret Channels* is a fascinating portrait of the three central protagonists to this conflict, and the ways in which their own prejudices and shortcomings produced an agreement. It is a valuable read for anyone interested in Palestinian and Israeli affairs or US foreign policy.

## REVOLUTION UNTIL VICTORY ?

### The politics and history of the PLO

Barry Rubin

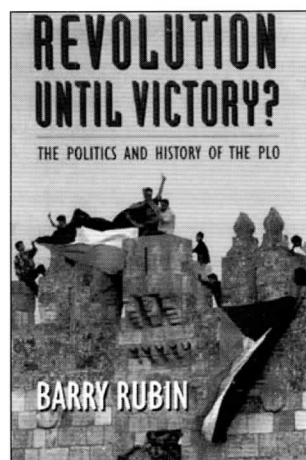
Harvard University Press, £16.50

ISBN 0-674-76803-5

Written in the aftermath of the historic image of Arafat and Rabin shaking hands on the White house lawn, *Revolution Until Victory?* is an attempt to come to terms with the new 'acceptability' of the PLO on the world stage. In this it fails, owing to the inconsistent and partisan nature of the authors approach.

Written from a clearly anti-PLO, indeed anti-Palestinian approach, Rubin allows his own prejudices to obscure the subject under study, and presents a partial and superficial analysis of the PLO. Equally his refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Palestinians right to self-determination, forces him into continual justifications of state violence as reactions to the 'terrorism' of Arafat and his supporters.

The constant turns and twists in the PLO's strategy over thirty years, rather than being explained as strategic choices made within



evolving political contexts (as for example does Aburish in his biography) are seen and contradictions and inconsistencies, allegedly proving the unacceptability of the PLO to Israel and their conception of peace and good government.

Moreover, Rubin's refusal to acknowledge the many offers made by the PLO to negotiate an end to the conflict, reduces *Revolution Until Victory?* into a bland piece of state propaganda which offers little to the understanding of either the PLO or the developments which produced Oslo.

Having said all of this, there is much interesting historical information in Rubin's book which is difficult to access elsewhere in English, or at least up until the publication of *Arafat, from Defender to Dictator*. Despite its flaws and biases, *Revolution Until Victory?* is nonetheless worth the read.

# FATEFUL TRIANGLE

## The United States, Israel and the Palestinians

### Updated Edition

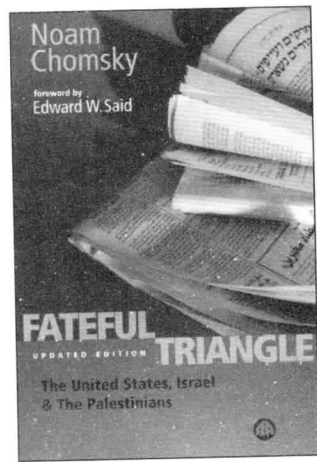
Noam Chomsky

Pluto Press, £18.05  
ISBN 0-7453-1530-5

First published in 1983, and subsequently updated and revised in 1999, *Fateful Triangle* is the book on the Palestinian conflict. With an intense eye for detail, and a compassion equal to none, Noam Chomsky tells the sordid tale of how US political and economic interests created an alliance with Zionist extremism to deny five generations of Palestinians their human, civil and national rights.

In his preface to the updated edition, Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said says the following; 'Fateful Triangle may be the most ambitious book ever attempted on the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians viewed as centrally involving the United States. It is a dogged exposé of human corruption, greed and intellectual dishonesty. It is also a great and important book, which must be read by anyone concerned with public affairs.'

Chomsky takes us from the origins of the special relationship between Israel and the



US, through the Intifada, the Lebanese war, the Washington led peace process and the Oslo and Wye accords. His central contention is that both the US and Israel are rejectionists opposed to peace, whereas Arabs including the PLO have for years been trying to reconcile themselves to the reality of Israel. Of course the reality, so graphically detailed in this book is that the intransigence of Washington and Tel Aviv has produced dividends, based on the continuing denial of Palestinian rights.

*Fateful Triangle* is a great, great book, packed with historical research and analytical comment. It is possibly the most essential read for anyone wishing to understand both the roots of the Israeli-Palestine conflict as well as current developments. In the words of the *Boston Globe*, *Fateful Triangle* is a 'prophetic' book and 'an awesome work of latter-day forensic scholarship by a radical critic of America and Israel'.

## FATAH PALESTINE NEWSLETTER

### Fatah Foreign Relations Department

alhasan@planet.com

*Fatah Newsletter* is the monthly news brief published by the party's Foreign Relations Department. Now in its second volume, it is one of the few current affairs publications which provides the reader with a run down on recent events. The bulletin provides a general overview of the political situation as well as a run down on current issues such as the occupation, the fate of refugees and the ongoing settlement by Zionists of Palestinian land.

Recent figures of Israeli violations against Palestinians for January of this year were published in February's edition makes for startling reading. 992 dunams of land were confiscated, 600 dunams of crops were destroyed, 980



dunams of trees were uprooted and 88 people were arrested. There are also updates on the censorship by Israel of progressive Jewish organisations, the international work of Fatah and Arafat, and historical information dealing with past atrocities.

*Fatah Newsletter* is ideal for those of you who don't have a lot of time on your hands, and want a brief account of what is going on. It is well presented, easily read and aimed at a foreign audience. To get on the mailing list just e.mail the Foreign Relations Department at the address above and request a copy.

# FATEFUL TRIANGLE

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### Updated Edition

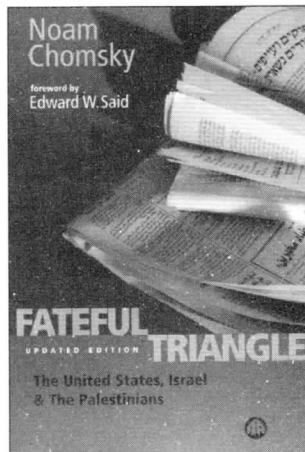
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Left Republican Review is an independent political platform bringing together left republican voices from across Ireland in a spirit of open debate. We aim to provoke discussion on political and organisational issues of concern to Irish republicans. We also aim to provide a platform for those forces and voices from across the globe who are struggling for independence and socialism. Our motto is 'those who have lost the ability to criticise themselves, have lost any idea of who they are' and in that light we hope to create a space for open, frank and constructive criticism, the aim of which is to strengthen republicanism and further our goals of Irish independence, political and cultural equality and economic and social justice.

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Articles are welcome for consideration. Length should be between 2/3000 words and written in a non-academic or non-technical manner. Offers will be given due consideration. We also welcome comments, criticisms or ideas for improvements you don't like what we are doing then let us know and help us improve. All articles are the opinions of the writers and do not reflect the editorial policy of Left Republican Review.

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Printing: Molotov Press



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MASS MEDIA

*don't be a sheep, read...*

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