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Ireland's political and cultural review

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## Changing Europe

THE THIRD direct elections to the European Parliament take place against a background of accelerating change in the European Community. Part of that change is reflected in the name of the community which was formerly the European Economic Community, and which in turn was popularly known as the Common Market.

While the *raison d'être* of the EC is still essentially economic, political considerations are assuming greater importance in the life of the community. The completion of the internal market without frontiers is but a part of a process with profound implications for all member states.

The implications for Ireland of current EC developments have not been seriously addressed by either the Irish government or by Ireland's MEP's. Irish interest in the EC has centred around agriculture and related issues to the exclusion of almost all other concerns. Consequently, while Ireland is a net beneficiary in cash terms and EC membership has been instrumental in attracting foreign investment, both agriculture and industry remain in an underdeveloped state. The resultant widespread unemployment and increasing emigration are an ominous prelude to 1992.

The Cecchini Report claims that the internal market will generate two to five million extra jobs and five to seven per cent economic growth. Ireland was not included in that particular report, and the NESC is carrying out a similar Irish study. However, there is every reason to be sceptical of exaggerated claims for the progressive influence of the free market on a peripheral economy such as ours.

The experience of unfettered free enterprise in the United States points to an inherent divergence between the interests of rich and poor, the victims of the system and the entrepreneurial 'success stories'. It is not in the nature of the free market to provide safeguards against unemployment, low pay, poverty, poor housing or deprivation.

The Thatcherite logic of promoting the free market by prohibiting all forms of state intervention in economic and social life, and simply maintaining the state as an instrument of class domination has considerable support in the Europe of the Eighties. That ideology has promoted individualism, competition, and market forces as the sole determinants of economic and social progress. The Right supports EC competition policy and the internal market, but rejects the essential regulatory measures necessary to make an internal market of 320 million people a viable proposition in democratic terms.

The battle lines are being drawn up on the issues of democracy, social regulation (regional and social funds), consumer protection, industrial democracy, and trade union rights. Already, the proposed Charter on Fundamental Social Rights has met with a hostile response from the European Right, and it is clear that any efforts to develop a meaningful social dimension in the EC will meet with strong resistance from the same quarter.

As 1992 draws closer, so too the debate on European union comes into sharper focus. The role of the European Parliament is central to this debate, and it is obvious that without increased powers the parliament will remain little more than a talking shop. An increase in powers will enhance both democracy and accountability within the community, and make it more amenable to progressive politics.

Progressive forces will have their work cut out in the years ahead. The completion of the internal market will cause serious problems in the more vulnerable EC regions, of which Ireland is one. The negative social consequences of monopoly capitalism will impact on all regions. And unemployment and poverty will continue to affect all member states. In these circumstances, the politics of the Left in Europe must evolve, as must the organisational capacity to respond to a rapidly changing situation.



## Food and health

In his interesting article on 'Making Agriculture Work' (*Making Sense*, March '89), Proinsias Breathnach outlined his plans for a Farm & Food Development Authority. (FFDA). The FFDA would be composed of farming, trade union and 'relevant government departments (Agriculture, Food, Industry, Trade and Tourism, Environment)'. Strangely there is no place at this table for the Department of Health.

'There are differences between social groups in the quantity and the nutritional quality of the food they eat... (with) the richest income group (continuing) to have a healthier diet than the poorest group.'\* Indeed there is some evidence to suggest that those on the lowest incomes cannot afford to have the basic 'good diet' recommended by government.\*\* In many of the poorest households, diet, especially amongst the parents, is one

# letters

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of the first things to suffer.

While diet, on its own, is no longer a major cause of death in Western society, it is implicated in the causation of many of the major illnesses which still afflict us. Consequently any caring or socialist agricultural policy must have a large public health perspective built into it. It is important that it should ensure that all citizens should have a proper, varied and healthy diet. Changes in social and budgetary policy to increase the access to good food for those in greatest need is the first step. But this is not enough if the 'healthiest' foods remain too expensive

expensive or are not readily available to the average shopper.

The types of foods available are determined by the food industry. The diets of the poor generally have too much sugar, salt and saturated fats while deficient in leaner meats, fish and fibre. A proper agricultural and food policy must iron out these inequalities.

It is therefore vital that any future food and agriculture regulatory body should have a strong input from health sources; in the context of Proinsias Breathnach's article, the Dept. of Health.

**BRIAN GIBBONS**  
**Blaengwynfi**  
**West Glamorgan**  
**Wales**

\*Whitehead M "The Health Divide"; Health Education Council; 1987.

\*\*Cole-Hamilton I. & Lang T. "Tightening Belts"; The London Food Commission; 1986.

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## REASSESSING SOCIALISM IN IRELAND TODAY

1989 could prove to be a watershed for The Workers' Party. In the past decade, a revolution of the political right has successfully challenged traditional left assumptions of the welfare state, collectivism, state interventionism, and full employment with notions of commercialisation, privatisation, deregulation, individualism and the market. It would be wrong to assume that the changes experienced in Ireland are mirror images of those which have occurred in either Britain under Thatcher or the USA under Reagan, but there are clear similarities, not least the manner in which key questions are being asked of the relevance of the socialist agenda.

In spite of the inability of the present economic strategy to get to grips with unemployment, emigration, poverty and tax reform, the over-all left vote recorded at 10% in 1987 was the lowest since 1957. This fact, alongside the popularity of market capitalism has exposed the impasse of social democratic, socialist, and working-class politics. There is nothing automatic about the development of a socialist consciousness when capitalism is not generating employment and material benefits. Only serious analysis and debate of these changes will lead to a resurgence of socialism in Ireland.

For The Workers' Party, the re-constructed popularity of both Fianna Fáil and, to a lesser extent, the Labour Party, presents par-

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**ELLEN HAZELKORN and PAUL SWEENEY respond to some of the issues raised by Proinsias de Rossa in his presidential address to this year's Workers' Party conference.**

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ticular difficulties. The symbiotic relationship between Labour and the WP stretches back to the early 1970s; the WP's electoral achievements in the early 1980s were undoubtedly linked to Labour's abandonment of a radical agenda and its coalition with Fine Gael. The circumstances of late capitalism present major challenges for socialists in general and the WP in particular, but they equally highlight fundamental questions which have long been ignored in Ireland.

In Proinsias De Rossa's presidential address to the 1989 Ard Fheis there are repeated calls for debate and analysis. He rightly targetted a number of key issues for public and WP debate: our definition of socialism, the relationship of socialism to the market, the relationship of socialism to democracy, the relation of our objectives to what 'the people' want, the role of Protestants in Northern Ireland in the present impasse, and the need for discussion of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, and 1916. There is a history of discussion on immediate

and tactical issues within the WP, but too little attention has been given to theoretical considerations. The danger is that having raised these issues now, during a period of heightened electoral anxiety, there will be little constructive debate or evolution of policy.

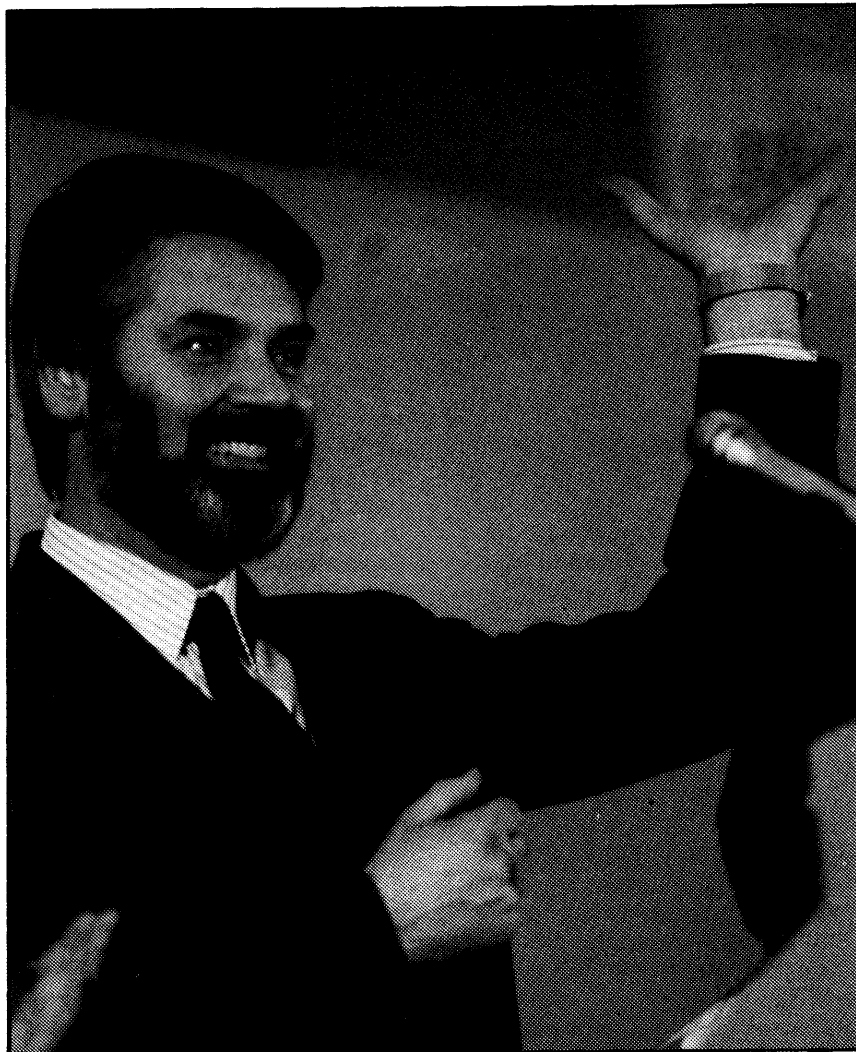
### **Socialism and the market**

It is not surprising that political commentators and letter writers have drawn attention to the significant revision of the WP's concept of socialism and the market contained within the speech. In it we are told that 'we define Socialism by letting the people tell us what they want from Socialism', people 'all over Europe... want socialism to be democratic' rather than economic and coercive.

While socialism can never be a 'dogma written on tablets of stone' nor can it grab the moral high ground with claims to 'scientific' reasoning, it is clear that socialism traditionally has meant the control of state power, and the means of production, distribution, and exchange by the working class. Popular assumptions both inside and outside the WP have understood socialism as public ownership and control of economic resources. It is more than a mere theory of 'political and social change.'

Moreover, socialism is not just about democracy — 'the political rule of the majority in society' — nor are they coterminous; many





*Proinsias de Rossa has set a broad agenda on fundamental socialist issues.*

and democracy. At one point, we were told that socialism should reclaim 'its classic place — in the vanguard of social democracy', while elsewhere the party strategy should aim to 'prepare the party... to be the premier party of socialist democracy'.

The absence of a vibrant social democratic party and tradition in Ireland — pursuing major reforms in Irish society at the political and economic level, leading in a broadly socialist direction — makes such a development progressive in the present context. If we are serious about the transition from capitalism to socialism, it is imperative that we build both mass popular support around a plan for social control of the means of production, and also transcend the limitations of capitalist democracy. Yet, in our haste to transcend the current impasse, to come to grips with the Right's allegations about socialism's irrelevancy, it is important that the socialist project should not be lost sight of.

#### **The market's popularity**

The current popularity of market ideas derives from several factors: (1) an objective necessity for the restructuring of capitalism due to declining rate of profits which demanded a shift in the balance of economic power; (2) an accompanying rise of a radical and committed Right in the USA, UK and Germany; (3) the failure of social democratic parties in Germany, France, Austria, Australia and New Zealand, where they were in power and having no coherent theoretical base were forced to restructure capitalism; (4) the acknowledged inefficiency, and undemocratic practices of public enterprises in western Europe which led to renewed interest in economic reforms with a role for market forces; (5) welfarism, (with the 'nanny state' carrying out its functions increasingly poorly because of its bureaucratic rather than democratic nature) had become less popular; (6) the failure of centralised-command economies of many socialist countries. Common property is too often seen as nobody's property.

Proinsias de Rossa's claim that 'socialism is not anti-market' however, over-simplifies this crucial debate on the economics of socialism. The reality of the market system is that it leads to sustained

democratic societies such as the USA and Britain are not socialist. There is an essential economic component in the socialist agenda, whether in its communist or social democratic variants which necessarily involves disruption of market relations. Nevertheless, democratic issues must remain on the agenda, to engage in examinations of the limitations, distortions, and manipulation of democracy, particularly in circumstances where the tendency towards authoritarianism is striking. A central element in extending democracy is to widen the arena for popular participation in decision-making, to overcome the restrictive institutions and practices of bourgeois democracy.

In contrast, social democracy has sought accommodations with capital, ably assisting the restructuring of capitalism through interventionist policies after the Second World War without challenging the distribution of resources within those societies. Disillusionment with

welfare statism — conceived by social democracy as the promise to eradicate poverty and mass unemployment — has been genuinely provoked by popular disenchantment with the 'caring society' philosophy with its emphasis on non-participative politics and bureaucratic regulations, and by its inability to defend gains against the bourgeois onslaught of the 1980s.

The speech however substitutes and confuses socialism, social democracy, democratic socialism,

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***'In our haste to transcend the current impasse, it is important that the socialist project should not be lost sight of'***

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*'To critically examine the popular culture of nationalism which gives rise to Provisionalism we must do more than denounce it'*

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concentration of capital, uneven development, and gross waste and inequality. Less and late-developed economies like Ireland do not even get on to the peaks of the economic cycle because capital continually moves to the centre, seeking higher profits.

While it is true that capitalism is capable of enduring major crises and restructuring and has outlived early assumptions of its demise, socialism has sought control of the 'commanding heights' of the economy through public ownership — not because of capitalism's longevity, but precisely because market mechanisms are incapable of distributing wealth equitably. Indeed, it may no longer be possible to nationalise areas of the economy which are now internationally mobile. The distinction between 'ownership and control' however fudges these distinctions in much the same way as it confuses socialism with democracy. Common sense and socialist theory have long associated the ownership of the means of production with political power. If the economic resources of a society are to a great extent privately controlled, surely this has implications for power relations even for a socialist government? It is the market which is based on and engenders political classes.

#### **Nationalism**

On Northern Ireland and nationalism, the speech was strong on the destructive role of the SDLP and the insidious nature of 'the political culture which sustains' Provo violence. It was weak on realism, avoided any recognition of the role of the British state in, and towards, Northern Ireland, and raised solutions that in the present context are unlikely to occur. Reference to 'democratic socialism(s)' ability to

forge a dialogue among the 'absolute majority of the working class across the divide' could be interpreted as a rhetorical overture to socialist traditionalism.

The appeal to Protestants, telling them to 'go back into politics', that they have 'won the moral war, they are winning the propaganda war' is less than convincing. In Ireland and internationally, one needs only compare the uncritical, almost reverential, praise of Hume and the underlying acceptance of the nationalist project, to the mixture of hostility and derision afforded to Molyneux, Paisley or unionist aspirations. In fact, the speech in its most specific suggestion implicitly admits the problem by asking Protestants to do what is practically impossible — to enter dialogue without any concession on the Hillsborough document.

In suggesting this, we undermine our previous position which stated that some movement from the British and Irish governments on the workings of the Agreement — e.g. temporary suspension — was a precondition for dialogue. To 'critically examine' the popular culture of nationalism which gives rise to Provisionalism, we need to do more than denounce it. The Provos do not exist in a vacuum; Proinsias de Rossa said we must exhaustively examine the history and culture which nurtures them; then, undermine their rhetoric, and expose what is not anti-imperialism but in essence is national socialism.

#### **Broad agenda**

Many of the issues and difficulties that confront The Workers' Party are part of the inevitable hidden agenda of parliamentarianism. In our eagerness to be seen as 'relevant' and 'modern', the pitfalls of electoralism and populism must be

studiously avoided. The lessons of the Labour Party and socialism's poor showing in Ireland has much to do with its political practice and theoretical commitment: abandonment of class in favour of national harmony and economic development, its eagerness to achieve electoral credibility and to package its policies and mobilise its supporters accordingly, its excessive concentration on parliamentary practice and debate, its approval of clientilism as the means to resolve conflict, and its acceptance of the bourgeois state. Although one cannot dismiss various achievements of Labour, the task of a socialist party is to exploit the contradictions of capitalism and expose the tendency towards authoritarian statism to the advantage of the working class.

Internationally, the popularity of the market, of business, of the yuppie, of greed, may have peaked. Here, the private wealth generated in the dynamic section of Ireland's dual economy is a hollow benefit when 'enjoyed' in the midst of public squalor as it is increasingly under the conservative coalition. The 'good economic indicators' of low inflation, booming profits, booming exports and trade surpluses do not reflect the real economy of mass unemployment, stagnant wages and high taxes. People are becoming increasingly aware of the dichotomy between the economists' economy and the real world where they live. In this process, new political directions born from the changed conditions of late capitalism are both inevitable and urgently required. Proinsias de Rossa has set a broad agenda on fundamental socialist issues. If it leads to a process of debate and analysis — as it should — it is to be welcomed.



## Matters of interest

THE British government has been maintaining a high rate of interest in order to 'keep inflation down'. What is the relevance of rates of interest, and how does this particular policy relate to the rest of the Thatcherite economics implemented over the last ten years or so?

It can be argued that interest rates are the payment by those who borrow money to those who save money. As richer people tend to have more money to save and those with less money tend to have to borrow, then, as a gross generalisation we could conclude that interest rates are payments by the less well-off to the more well-off people or institutions in society. If this generalisation is true, then it is clear that the British government's policy on interest rates, as with so many of its other policies, is designed to favour the rich, at the expense of the poor.

Another such policy is the trend to privatisation, where shares in sharpened-up and slimmed-down nationalised firms are sold off, usually at lower than market rates, to private and institutional investors. These gain, both from the increase in the value of the shares and from the dividends that will be paid by these now-successful companies. People who can afford to buy shares gain; those who are ordinary taxpayers, who might otherwise have expected to benefit from the accrual of these successes to the Exchequer, are the losers.

A more direct example of this type is fiscal policy. The Left in Ireland has consistently argued that in this country there is a disproportionate burden of taxation on the PAYE workers, with professionals, corporations and farmers being let off lightly. This is not the same as arguing that there should be a much lower marginal tax rate for those who are on PAYE. Indeed, it may be an argument for increasing marginal tax rates for high earners (while reducing it for the low-waged). In Britain there has been a sustained effort, with each Budget, to reduce the top marginal tax rate. This is spuriously based on the argument that people will work harder if they know that the extra money they get as a result will not be highly taxed. The effect of the reduction in top marginal tax rates is, of course, to reduce the redistribution of income from the rich to the poor. If everyone is on the same



*British Chancellor Nigel Lawson*

or similar (low) marginal tax rate, then the tax will actually be regressive, making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

Thatcherite and Reaganomic policies have both had this effect. US figures have revealed that with the reduction of tax revenues and the elimination of many social welfare programmes, the number and percentage of people that can be characterised as living in poverty have climbed steadily. Both British and American societies have become more and more unequal over the last decade.

Most conservative economists would admit that these policies have the effect of increasing inequality, but would argue that this is necessary to encourage enterprise among those who succeed. For each of the above policies there are a number of, sometimes conflicting, objectives. The long-term balance of class forces (in Britain in particular, but also internationally) may be a major determinant of the ethos within which the policies have become acceptable. There are also short-term perspectives within which it is sometimes difficult to refute the economic logic of a policy. Thus, while high interest rates militate against the less well-off private borrowers, they also clash with the objective of encouraging investment by firms in new plant and machinery. This policy may keep inflation down by

discouraging people (who may well need these things) from borrowing to buy washing machines, cars or houses, but it may also reduce the economy's capacity to produce these things.

This contradiction is highlighted in a recent article in the *Financial Times*. The article refers to a statement by John Major, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in which he admitted that the high level of interest rates 'was causing short-term discomfort to some in the community' but went on to justify it as necessary to reduce inflation. The high level of interest rates would also reduce Britain's high international trade deficit, he argued. The implication here is that reducing borrowing will reduce purchases of imports. However, he also argues that the deficit was a result of 'a surge last year in investment by companies'. The deficit is, therefore, a short-term effect, a 'precursor of long-term improvement in productive capacity and efficiency'. There is no mention of the long-term disimprovement resulting from this year's reduction in investment by companies put off by high interest rates, nor of the effect this will have on employment.

Is there a message for us in all this? Emphatically YES. It is impossible to control all the problems that arise in a complex, modern economy by generalised state intervention at the level of prices (interest rates are the price of loanable funds). As long as the perfect market economy of the text-books does not exist in real life, the state must intervene at the level of sectors, industries, sometimes even companies, to achieve simultaneously the goals of long-term industrial development, full employment and income redistribution, and short-term control over inflation. The ideological objection of the Right to this type of active, selective intervention is ironic in view of the Right's traditional objection to British Labour Party policies as being ideologically conservative. Socialists must adopt an approach to the economy informed by our antipathy to the social degradation and waste of poverty and unemployment, and enlightened by our understanding of the state. If this involves the implementation of policies not traditionally associated with the Left, combined with others that are, so be it.

# DOWN TO BASICS

*Rosheen Callender looks at the concept of Basic Income, its relevance for Ireland, and the questions it raises for socialists*

THE 'BASIC INCOME' CONCEPT is not a new one. It has existed, in one form or another, for about a century. But it tends to lie dormant for periods; reappearing every so often in new places, often in new forms, sometimes for new reasons.

In recent years the 'basic income' idea has enjoyed a minor resurgence across Europe. The purpose of this article is to look at what exactly the idea involves; where it came from; who is advocating it and why; what relevance it has for Ireland; and what ideological questions it raises for socialists.<sup>1</sup> Should it, for example, be seen as representing a step towards socialism; or as something that can only be achieved under socialism; or as something that is in fact anathema to socialism? And what would be the cost of its full or partial implementation?

## THE CONCEPT

The 'basic income' (BI) idea has been floated under a number of different labels, such as 'social dividend', 'universal grant', 'citizen's wage', and 'guaranteed minimum income'. In all cases, the term is intended to refer to an income that is provided, unconditionally, by the state, to all citizens, irrespective of their work, employment, income, sex, marital or other status in society.

However the exact extent to which the payment is 'unconditional' can vary, as can the mechanisms for paying it. These are the factors which distinguish one form of basic income from another and make it essential that we know from the outset which form we are talking about. In its fullest form, for example, the BI would be totally independent of people's work, (either in the past, or at present; or their willingness to work in the future); their income from any other source; their needs (as influenced by age, disability, or household situation); or their other personal characteristics — such as sex, race or citizenship.

Most proponents of BI see it as being completely 'un-

coupled' from work — unlike our present social welfare system, which insists that people must not be working at present, but must be willing and able to take up work in the immediate future, and must have a certain record of work in the past (if they are to qualify for the highest levels of payment). Most also agree that there should be no distinctions made on the basis of personal characteristics such as sex or race, but that there should be extra payments to people who are disabled or whose needs are above average for exceptional, physical reasons. There is some debate on whether people's household situations and living arrangements should enter into the calculation; and there are also two distinct views on how income from other sources should be treated under a BI system.

The two main ways of guaranteeing everyone a certain minimum income are:

either to simply give everyone the agreed amount, irrespective of income from other sources, and then charge tax on all income in excess of the minimum;

or: to assess everybody's income and ensure that nobody's falls below the agreed level by making up any shortfall.

The first is a 'universal grant' system; the second a 'Negative Income Tax' (NIT) arrangement. Financially, both are the same; but practically and psychologically they are very different indeed. In general, it is probably true to say that right-wing BI proponents support the use of NIT and the left-wingers strongly favour the universal grant system; although it is not always easy to classify the advocates of BI into 'right' and 'left', as they tend to criss-cross the political spectrum.

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(1) The original version of this paper was written in late 1986 and presented to a meeting of the Socialist Society of Social Scientists — the '4S Group'. It has now been substantially updated and costings have been added.





### ITS ORIGINS AND ADVOCATES

In Britain, the 'social dividend' idea had its origins in a 1943 paper by Lady Juliet Rhys-Williams,<sup>2</sup> but on the Continent there were a number of earlier advocates including the German writer J. Popper-Lynkeus who published a paper on it in 1912<sup>3</sup>, and a Frenchman, J. Duboin, who wrote on the subject during the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> The idea can also be traced back to the writings of Thomas Paine, the ideologue of the American Revolution; and to those of Charles Fourier, the French utopian socialist. Milton Friedman<sup>5</sup> developed the negative income tax idea in America in the mid-1960s; and there have been pockets of discussion about basic income in Italy, for example, since the late 1940s. This has been revived recently by the publication by the socialists there of a French book *Non-Conformists in the '30s* and the stimulation of debate among socialists and among a number of prominent communist economists.

At present, the 'state of the debate' across Europe gives an interesting insight into the diversity of political opinion and economic reasoning behind the BI idea.

In Austria, there was extensive debate on the subject at the start of the 20th century, but very little since; until, in 1984, a couple of Roman Catholic priests published a book on *Basic Income without Work*, which generated some interest. Now most of the discussion is taking place in the trade unions, especially among women workers. In Belgium, by contrast, where BI is a recent topic of debate, there is considerable hostility from the unions, the women's movement and even from some of the ecologists (who elsewhere are among its main proponents).

In Denmark, two political parties and one trade union (the largest one) support the idea in principle and the right is trying to undermine it. One of the authors of two books on the subject<sup>6</sup> later prepared costings for a 'Youth Basic Income' and a 'Sabbatical Basic Income', as he believed that a society with large unemployment and a high degree

of economic inequality, could not introduce a full BI system. However, in his view limited experiments could be carried out for selected groups (e.g. people aged 18—24 and people wanting time away from the labour market) as part of a gradual implementation of the idea.

In Finland, the conservative party has included the idea of a basic income guarantee in its programme for the year 2000, and there has been some research on the NIT idea which indicates that what they have in mind is a very low level of BI. In France, the debate has been dormant for a while but there is some renewed interest in the last couple of years, especially among women and the unemployed. A small new party called the 'New Democrats' have adopted BI as policy.

In Italy, as already mentioned, there has been some debate over the years, mainly on the left and among a particularly influential group of Catholic communists.

The situation in the Netherlands is probably the most interesting because there has been a lively debate on BI for some time. The proponents are two distinct groups: first, the 'social engineers' who are interested in humanising work and adapting it properly to modern-day needs — people like the Professor of Social Medicine in the Free University of Amsterdam, who has been concerned with such issues as the re-entry of disabled people to the labour process; and secondly, a small section of the left and the trade union movement. In 1981, the Food Workers' Union

(2) *Something to look forward to* (1943) McDonald

(3) Popper-Lynkeus, J (1912), *Die allgemeine Nahpflicht als Lösung der sozialen Frage*, Dresden

(4) Duboin, J (1932), *La Grande releve des hommes par la machine*, Paris

(5) Friedman, M (1966), *The case for a negative income tax: A View From the Right*

(6) Meyer, Petersen and Sorensen: *Revolt from the Center* (1978), and *Roar about the Uproar* (1982)

launched a campaign for BI which they saw as a key concept in the struggle of the working class for the alleviation of poverty and the redistribution of work between men and women. Their proposal was later endorsed by the Labour Party (by a very small margin) but rejected by the central congress of trade unions on the grounds that it wouldn't solve unemployment, would act to 'buy off the right to work' and would give an income to people who didn't need it.

Then in 1985 the Netherlands Scientific Council did an advisory report to the Government on the future of the social security system. This was a fairly far-sighted document, anticipating many social and economic changes in the future; and it concluded by recommending the introduction of a partial BI system, which led to considerable debate. The system which is proposed is seen not only as a way of simplifying social security and individualising the system so as to remove various sex-based anomalies, but also as a way of reducing both welfare and labour costs and increasing labour market flexibility.

In West Germany, by contrast, BI is hardly an issue at all. There has been discussion on the need for reforms in social security, but they are very particular reforms, in the areas of pensions, social assistance and the financing of the system. A few Greens and liberals have raised the question of BI, but there appears to be a widespread moral objection to the idea of people being helped by the state when they haven't necessarily contributed anything — except, of course, in cases of urgent or exceptional need.

In Norway, there is virtually no interest or debate at all, probably because neither of the two main mechanisms for distributing income — the labour market and the social security system — have come under any real pressure. Unemployment is only 2%, the labour participation rate is high and still rising; and in fact under a new social assistance scheme proposed recently, everyone will be guaranteed a minimum income equal to the basic old-age pension, which is about 50% of average income.

In Sweden it's a similar story: the social welfare system is seen as a perfect safety net through which nobody can fall. The UK debate has been different again. First there was discussion in the '40s around Lady Rhys-Williams' paper; then, more recently, Sir Brandon Rees-Williams, (a Conservative MP who died in 1988) raised the issue in a much more detailed and specific way, with fully costed proposals worked out by Hermione Parker. Professor Meade (who chaired a committee on tax reform and produced a major report on this in 1978) has also done some work in this area. Ms Parker is one of the leading members of an organisation called BIRG (Basic Income Research Group), which has carried out extensive research on how exactly BI systems could work in Britain. This material is probably the most precise and comprehensive that is currently available on the subject; and a new book by Ms Parker — *Instead of the Dole* — is to be published shortly.

In theory the British Conservative Party has been committed, since 1977, to the idea of convertible tax credits, which is a very limited form of BI; and the Liberal Party has its own version of a partial BI system. The SDP is also committed to the integration of taxes and benefits, but what they have in mind is nearer to NIT than a universal BI.

Entirely separate from all this, has been the development of the BI concept within Britain's claimants' movement — the people claiming insurance and assistance payments who during the 1960s began organising 'claimants' unions' in various parts of the country. In 1970 a National Federation of Claimants' Unions was formed by seven of those groups and they drew up a 'Claimants' Charter' whose first

demand was for 'the right to adequate income for all, without means testing'.<sup>8</sup> However, the focus of the claimants' movement has tended to remain one of resistance to the means-testing, unfairness and humiliation of the present system, in the face of Thatcher's threatened and actual cut-backs — rather than a major pressure for the long-term changes which BI would involve.

## THE IRISH DEBATE

So what about Ireland? Really our debate has been a miniature version of what has been happening elsewhere. BI has been advocated and debated on the right, the left and in the centre (if that's where one puts the Greens), each from very different perspectives and with their own particular slant.

Young Fine Gael put forward a BI proposal in 1985. Initially it was rejected by 'old Fine Gael', but was then adopted by the Party in 1988 — although they refused to give costings for it until "an appropriate time" (which still hasn't arrived).

Young Fine Gael's 1985 proposal saw BI as a way of simplifying and improving the social welfare system, of providing better support for certain disadvantaged groups, of removing the poverty trap and the incentive to join the black economy, and of encouraging low-paid employment. The proposal was for a minimum income of £30 per week for over-18s, and £10 per week for under-18s, which would cost about £4,000m and would involve partial replacement of the present social welfare system (saving just under £2,000m), plus increases in taxation to bridge the gap of over £2,000m. The issues of how to raise this additional taxation, or whether to reform the tax system fundamentally were not addressed either then, by YFG; or since by the Party as a whole.

BI has also been advocated by the Green Alliance, some of whose members — notably Maire Mullarney — have long been speaking and writing about the desirability of a 'social dividend'. However, to my knowledge no firm proposals or costings have been produced by them; and the key issues of tax reform, job creation, and the generation of more wealth in our society, are not addressed by them either. There is also, of course, the Ivor Browne/Paddy Walley school of thought, in which BI is seen in the context of 'the death of work' and the 'redefinition of unemployment. Again, as far as I know, the crucial issue of how to pay for all this, is avoided.

There has also been some discussion of the minimum income concept in socialist and trade union circles. The ITGWU has advocated integration of the tax and social welfare systems in its Submission both to the Commission on Taxation (in 1982) and the Commission on Social Welfare (in 1984).<sup>9</sup> It proposed the introduction of a guaranteed minimum income which would be related to average male industrial earnings (or any other indicator which would not reflect, and hence perpetuate, discrimination against women). It also reiterated its policy — which is also ICTU policy — in favour of a statutory, national minimum wage, seeing this as an essential accompaniment to any minimum income. Otherwise, the latter will simply be a subsidy to low-wage employers. (Incidentally, this linking of minimum incomes and statutory minimum wages causes major difficulties to right-wing proponents of the BI idea; for them, the whole point — or at least, a major one

(7) Parker, H — *Costing Basic Income UK*, July 1986.

(8) Bill Jordan, *Basic Incomes and the Claimants' Movement*, September 1986.

(9) Submission to Commission on Taxation, ITGWU, 1982.





— is precisely to subsidise employers in this way and drive certain wage-levels down).

The Workers' Party also advocates full replacement and integration of the existing tax and social welfare systems and the provision of a guaranteed minimum income for all, with taxation of all income in excess of this, whatever its source.<sup>10</sup>

However, it argues strongly that the successful introduction of a BI system is inextricably linked to the resolution of other major economic and political problems — namely, the need for comprehensive tax reform and the revitalisation of production. It points out that the gap between the cost of an acceptable BI and the savings derived from scrapping existing social welfare payments and tax expenditures, can only be bridged through massive economic development and expansion of the country's productive base.

As far as research work is concerned, the earliest publication to discuss BI was the 1977 NESC report,<sup>11</sup> written by Brendan Dowling in which he described our existing tax and transfer systems and discussed three possible variations and alternatives: a non-refundable tax credit system; a refundable tax credit system; and what was termed an 'individual grant and tax system' (which was akin to the BI system). It was an attempt to present a framework for debate on the relationship between taxation and social welfare, but unfortunately no such debate developed. What happened instead was that a major campaign and debate about tax reform developed — and out of that came the Commission on Taxation (and precious little else). A parallel debate on social welfare developed — although in my view 'debate' is too good a word because in reality it was more of a propaganda offensive against welfare recipients and a backlash from the tax campaign — and out of that came the Commission on Social Welfare. And for the most part, the two topics have continued to be discussed in parallel rather than in tandem, usually by very different groups of people. We have yet to integrate the debates on tax and social welfare — never mind the two systems!

The Commission on Taxation gave some cursory consideration to the BI idea, but rejected it as being too expensive. The Commission on Social Welfare gave it lengthier consideration, but also rejected it, instead favouring improvements in the existing social welfare system and "better co-ordination" between tax and social welfare.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, they reject NIT schemes as being too costly and too inflexible in their operation, and quite correctly point to the fact that such a high proportion of the labour force is self-employed as a major problem (because of the need to have weekly or monthly assessments of income; and because the 1985 Farm Tax Act put so many farmers outside the income tax net).

Social Dividend schemes are seen by the Commission on Social Welfare as having major attractions, but one fundamental problem: the trade-off between the level of the dividends and the tax rates required to finance them. They are also regarded as being ineffective in attaining what the Commission rightly sees as the primary objective of a social welfare system, namely adequacy of benefits in relation to needs; because unless the dividend was high enough there would be losses for some categories of recipients. For the same reasons, the Commission also viewed BI schemes as being inconsistent with the objective of redistribution on the basis of need.

Overall, therefore, the BI approach was rejected by the Commission as imposing unjustifiably high costs without significantly improving the levels of support to those most in need.

My own response to this is that while the Commission did indeed put forward serious objections to the BI approach in the context of present economic and social realities, it ignored a number of other crucial points. Both the ITGWU and the Workers' Party in their submissions to the Commission stressed that they were presenting the BI approach as an integral part of a much greater and more effective regulation of the economy, involving minimum wage legislation, comprehensive tax reform and major economic expansion — most of it deriving, inevitably, from

(10) *An End to Poverty* — Workers' Party 1986. (This is a summary of the Party's Submission to the Commission on Social Welfare, which was published in 1984.)

(11) *Integrated Approaches to Personal Taxes and Transfers*, Brendan Dowling (ESRI) NESC 1977.

(12) *Report of Commission on Social Welfare*. 1986 — Chapter 8.

state intervention and initiative, given the miserable failures of private 'enterprise' in this regard.

In other words, both were presenting the BI approach as desirable in the context of planned economic and social development, involving the more equitable regulation of incomes at all levels: both also saw it as a mechanism for the redistribution of both work (paid and unpaid) and income (earned and unearned).

What was wrong with the Commission's approach on this, in my view, was that it rested entirely on the short-term considerations of cost and administrative difficulty, with no attempt to look beyond the parameters of today's economic and social realities. Indeed, there seems to be an implicit acceptance that these will obtain for the foreseeable future — and perhaps for all time.

But hard as it is to imagine fundamental tax reform occurring in the near future, socialists certainly must not forget the whole idea! The Commission's Report was an admirable and, for the most part, well-argued attempt to bring very necessary reforms to the existing social welfare system. But it was not — nor indeed, did it pretend to be — a visionary document offering blueprints for the future. What I found disappointing was a certain confusion and blurring of what were essentially ideas for the future, with ideas for reforms which were immediately necessary and feasible. Thus its response to what were clearly stated as proposals for long-term changes in the system was to reject them as being inappropriate in the short-term. There is not even a hint that such changes, being of a longer-term nature than the Commission was willing or able to consider, might be worthy of future consideration in some other forum.

Without being in any way negative about the main thrust of the Commission's Report — and particularly the urgent need to rationalise and improve the basic level of social welfare payments — I believe that the main weakness of the approach taken was that it did not (and perhaps could not) start from an analysis of what is actually happening to the labour force and the labour market at present, and how the social welfare system affects, and is affected by the many changes which are occurring.

Much more analysis is needed of the many implications, both for tax and social welfare, of the ever-increasing incidence of part-time working, of sub-contracting and self-employment, of homeworking and contract working, and of course, working in the black economy. The social welfare system has been encouraging all these developments (and the 1986 'equality' changes encouraged them even further, especially for married women) and of course the tax system has long been feeling the effect. The BI idea offers a useful framework for analysis of these matters.

#### **COSTING A 'BASIC INCOME'**

The aspect of BI on which most economists focus is, of course, its cost. This is a difficult area because any costings must, of necessity, be done on a 'static' basis — whereas the whole point (to me at any rate) is that introducing BI, in full or even in part, would have important dynamic effects which are hard to predict accurately. Its effects on employment, for example, would be crucial; but would not be known for some time.

At present, ESRI researchers are working to develop a 'taxes and transfers model' capable of demonstrating the likely impact of various tax and social welfare changes on the populations concerned. When this is done it will be much easier to gauge the cost of any particular change, who exactly it will benefit, and what consequential effects, if any, are likely to flow from the change. And in the meantime, it seems a bit futile to attempt very exact calculations of one's own.

It is inconceivable, in my view, that a total BI system could be introduced 'in one fell swoop', with all tax reliefs being suddenly withdrawn and all social welfare expenditure channelled into a single, uniform payment for everyone. We have to work towards a situation in which such changes would be technically, administratively and politically possible. But if, for the sake of argument, everyone over 65 were to have £65 per week tomorrow, with £50 per week for those between 18 and 64; 70% of this (£35) for adult dependents; 55% (£27.50) for 15 to 18 year olds; and 40% (£20) for under 15s; the gross cost would probably be over £6,700,000 million. Social welfare expenditure in 1987 was £2,600,000 million, and tax reliefs in 1983-84 cost some £2,700,000 million. So the 'gap', on the basis of these figures, would be £1,400,000 million (but probably less, if current figures were known). Therefore, it would be necessary either to raise a lot more revenue in tax, or to prune down the income levels to the point where the system is self-financing. Clearly, the left would favour the former; the right the latter.

Apart from Young Fine Gael's 1986 costings (mentioned above), which estimated the net cost of a £30 per week BI system at over £2,000m; and Workers' Party costings in 1985 (for a £33 per week system, showing similar amounts); the only other work in this area has been by Patrick Honohan of UCD. In a 1987 paper<sup>13</sup>, Honohan does some costings for a BI scheme (based on 1985-86 prices) paying £35 per week to people aged 26—65, £50 to those over 65; £25 to those aged 18—24, and £13 to under 18s. This, he says, could be paid for with a standard income tax rate of 40.5% and a benefit withdrawal rate of 27% — or just a single tax rate of 64%. Such a scheme would be of major benefit to large families, but single people and middle-income groups with few dependents would lose out.

In considering the redistributive effects of such a system, Honohan does make the proviso that this 'takes no account of the dynamic effects through the responses to changed incentives' — and adds, significantly, that 'on balance these should be positive, with greater incentives to work at the poverty trap levels, not fully offset by the higher marginal tax rates.'

In my view, it is a politically irrelevant exercise at present (though academically fascinating) to attempt precise costings of a BI system — given that we have so far failed, utterly, to achieve a fair system of farmer taxation; or a minimum social welfare payment of £60 per week (as recommended by the Commission of Social Welfare); or even a minimum social welfare payment of £50 per week in 1989 (as sought by the Workers' Party this year) as a first step to achieving the Commission's £60 level — suitably updated — before 1992.

The arithmetic of a decent basic income in Ireland (given our huge unemployment problem and very high dependency ratio), combined with the seemingly intractable problem of securing a fair taxation system (an essential prerequisite of any BI system), put the immediate implementation of a full BI scheme alarmingly far down the road at present. However, there is scope for the development of partial BI schemes — and indeed this is already happening, in the form of various, limited, employment schemes which involve payment of social welfare while people are working. And there is also great scope for debate about the desirability of moving further in this direction, on a planned and purposeful basis.

(13) A Radical Reform of Social Welfare and Income Tax Evaluated, *Administration*, Vol. 35, No.1



### THE PROS AND CONS OF BI

Returning to more theoretical issues, therefore, I now wish to distil from all of this the fundamental arguments and issues — and look at them from a socialist perspective. The BI idea is being aired and advocated at present by socialists, claimants' groups, trade unionists, and feminists; by ecologists, moralists, liberals, and radical social scientists; and by conservatives and fairly extreme right-wing economists. It is also being opposed by people from within each of these groupings. The apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that they all have their own idea of BI and what it could achieve from their particular perspective! And of course, depending on what sort of BI one is talking about, it could indeed be used to achieve very different outcomes.

From a right-wing perspective, the advantages of providing a low BI — and what they have in mind is, of course, a payment level even below the levels of current welfare payments — would be to increase the so-called 'incentive to work' and 'labour market flexibility' by providing a subsistence payment so bare that people are driven to work for very low wages in any transitory, two-bit employment opportunity that may arise. It is seen, therefore, as a mechanism for 'de-regulation' of the labour market, to be accompanied, if possible, by the dismantling of protective labour legislation.

A high BI, on the other hand — that is, one which is at least equivalent to the highest current social welfare payment — is seen as a way of ending the poverty trap and indeed, poverty itself, by redistributing income from rich to poor. It is also seen as a mechanism for redistributing paid and unpaid work in society.

Under a 'universal grant' system, the poverty trap is removed because every pound which is earned, despite being subject to (probably high) taxation, adds to a person's disposable income. Decisions about the nature and hours of work can therefore be made on the basis of wider considerations than the fiscal and financial ones that currently determine whether a person can work full-time, part-time, or indeed at all. This is a particularly important consideration for women workers, especially those who are, or intend to become, parents (or the carers of other time-consuming dependents).

Equally important is the potential of BI for redistributing both paid and unpaid work between the sexes, because if both sexes are treated equally in terms of their basic income support, there is obviously much more

potential than at present for additional income to be earned on equal terms. Significantly, also, this would create the conditions in which many men would have the real option of reducing the number of hours spent in paid employment and increasing the time spent in unpaid work and leisure; and the major obstacles to women's equality in employment which their far greater involvement in unpaid work presents; such a redistribution would be an extremely progressive development.

The other major redistribution question posed by BI is of course between rich and poor. If in the Irish context, we are talking of a BI which even replaces social welfare payments at their present inadequate level, we are talking about (a) taxing all incomes in Ireland for the first time and (b) taxing them at rates which will be fairly high until such time as the tax base expands far beyond mere inclusion of the present non-taxpaying sectors — i.e. until productive economic activity itself expands.

In my mind, one of the crucial questions about BI and its relevance for Ireland is whether such a system would itself contribute to that expansion of economic activity. Essentially I believe that it could, although only at the margins of the economy — only in the area of relatively small-scale enterprise which may or may not have a lasting impact. For the large-scale economic development that's required to employ the entire labour force, or anywhere near it, most of the initiative will have to come from state-sponsored enterprise, since 'private enterprise' is so patently unworthy of the name. But I don't see any necessary conflict between both developments and I do see the type of income regulation that BI involved as being helpful to — and perhaps necessary for — both smaller scale private and community initiatives and larger-scale state-sponsored employment.

Most of the foregoing arguments for BI, whether from the right or the left, are pragmatic rather than moral. They are seen as realistic responses to crises in the labour market, in the social welfare system, in the economy generally. Whether BI is viewed as a way of de-regulating the labour market, or of regulating it more effectively, or of providing better social welfare support, or of reducing the cost of welfare, these are seen as the important issues; and the moral arguments tend to be quite secondary.

The moral arguments appear straightforward enough at first glance. You can start either from the premise that 'he who does not work, neither shall he eat'; or from the

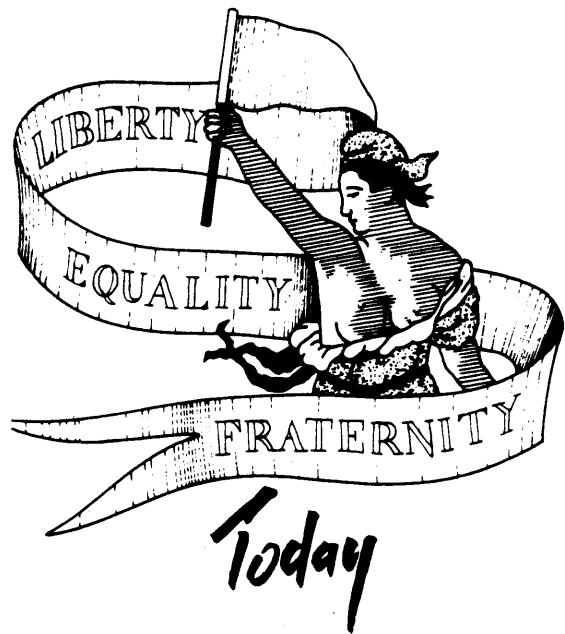
# LIBERTY, EQUALITY FRATERNITY TODAY

Two hundred years ago the French Revolution and the values it affirmed changed the history of the world. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity rallied men and women of many nations in their struggle for democracy. The 'French principles' for which Wolfe Tone and his comrades were attacked in their day are still worthy of celebration and re-affirmation.

Ireland in 1989 needs not only to recall the historic influence of these values, but to test and maintain them against the prevailing social philosophy which denies and is hostile to Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

LIBERTY is an ideal which challenges us to ask what is the true meaning of freedom. Do we see it as solely a question of national independence, or as something to be shared equally among all our citizens? How authentic is our concern for the freedoms and rights of individuals, of women, of minorities, or the disadvantaged and marginalised? These freedoms and rights are the true spirit of the French Revolution, in contrast to the 'freedoms' of the market place, economic individualism and exploitation. And as the Revolution also celebrated freedom of thought, through reason and imagination rejecting all authoritarianism and the abuse of power and privilege in church and state, so we today are challenged to set the human spirit free from the narrow bonds that cripple it.

EQUALITY, the great value on which the concept of citizen is based, calls for reassertion at a time when individualism is extolled: true citizenship demands the pursuit of equality in all aspects of life. A society of privilege that rejects and oppresses so many must be replaced by one that recognises the right of all citizens to develop to their full potential, and to participate in society on equal terms.



FRATERNITY, the great challenge to uphold peace at home and abroad, to invest in development rather than arms, to preserve and enhance the earth's environment, to restructure world trade and create a new economic order. This challenge proclaims the value of fraternity in, and for, our time. 'Faoi scath a cheile a mhairimid' is an Irish assertion of mutual interdependence. Recognition of this interdependence among the peoples of the earth requires not only a positive neutrality but a solidarity with all who struggle for liberty, equality and fraternity. Fraternity requires that our own economic needs must not deflect us from that solidarity.

The LEFT Committee invites all who share the values of the French Revolution to join, not only in celebration, but in making this year a new beginning for Irish democracy.

**LEFT**  
**154 Upper Leeson Street**  
**Dublin 4**



premise that every human being has a right to live and that this means providing some level of support wherever this right is in danger. Capitalism started, in effect, from the first position and found itself compromising with the other, to varying degrees: the result was the welfare state and relatively generous income support in the more social-democratic Western European countries; and a very limited, inaccessible and stigma-ridden form of income support in such countries as the US, where work is deemed to be available to all who want it.

There is therefore a strong 'moral' objection to the BI idea on the grounds that it would provide support and encouragement to the undeserving, lazy and indolent who should instead be forced out to work and make their contribution to society. This in turn rests on the 'people are basically lazy' assumption — which to me makes no sense at all, either of human history or today's realities. If people are fundamentally lazy and will only work in order to get money and survive, how do we explain the fact that thousands of workers in Ireland are in low-paid jobs giving them as little money (and sometimes less) as the social welfare system; and that women throughout the ages have worked in the home for no direct financial reward at all? (On the other hand, of course, there is a very real and relevant question of motivation to work — and to work efficiently — which must also be addressed.)

#### **BASIC INCOME AND SOCIALISM**

As far as I can ascertain — although I haven't seen much written on this subject by Marxists — one of the strongest reservations about BI, which is shared by both 'free market capitalists' and 'traditional Marxists', is that it erodes that most fundamental feature of capitalism — namely, what Marx called the obligation of the worker to sell his or her labour-power for subsistence. If everyone has an income, irrespective of whether or not they work, then we are in fact establishing the right not to work in place of the present compulsion to work.

As Marx saw it, capitalism created two classes: those with enough property or power to produce (or have produced for them) their own means of subsistence (and usually far more); and those without such property, who were therefore forced to sell their labour-power. An essential difference between the two classes was that the first had no obligation to work, while the second had no choice but to do so. The welfare state has blurred this distinction somewhat, but not fundamentally. However, a BI system would finally remove that coercive obligation on the working class to work wherever and whenever work is available. Our present social welfare system, despite many modifications and some interesting new exceptions (like the Social Employment Scheme, Enterprise Allowance Scheme and Family Income Supplement) still retains and reinforces this general obligation to be 'available for, willing to, and actively seeking, work'; as well as to be compulsorily idle if dependent upon a social welfare income. However, a full BI system would, quite simply, remove these obligations (and the need to police them). It would give everyone the same right as those with property incomes: the right not to work. So essentially, it creates a new type of freedom for wage earners and claimants alike, and indeed for men and women alike — a freedom from subordination to capital and a freedom from coercion by the state.

Under capitalism, the state is the ultimate guarantor of private property rights; although the political economy of capitalism argues, of course, that private property rights are the defence of the individual against the power of the state. But as Marx pointed out, only the select few have those property rights — the rest are necessarily subordinate

both to them and to the state (generally representing the same interests). And now, the inadequacies of capitalism have created a third grouping: those who have neither property, nor even the ability to sell their labour power; and are therefore dependent upon the state and in fact ultimately, to some extent, upon the taxpaying population (which in Ireland is almost exclusively the working class).

Marx's solution was for the state to take all property, and its accompanying rights, on behalf of the working class. And of course all socialists share the common goal of state power being exercised by, and in the interests of, the working class. So for socialists, the question about the BI concept is whether it takes us nearer to this goal, or further away from it.

In my opinion, BI is only a tool: it can do either, depending on who uses it and to what end. Capitalism could use it, in some countries, to reduce labour and social welfare costs, to undermine wages and the trade union movement, and to do away with protective labour legislation and other hard-won rights of workers. In Ireland, despite the best efforts of 'New Right' economists who are now beginning to articulate these views and objectives very clearly, I think it will prove difficult for a variety of reasons, and the idea will probably be quietly dropped.

But can socialists use the BI idea here? I think we usefully can — but need to develop some of the accompanying ideas and arguments much further. To my mind, that means dismissing the various arguments against BI which are worthless from a socialist perspective, and focussing on the points which provide food for thought and fruitful debate. And I would sum these up as follows:

#### **FEMINIST FEARS, TRADE UNION CONCERNS**

While most feminists, insofar as they have debated the idea, seem to welcome BI as a way of equalising women's employment opportunities and removing sex discrimination from social welfare, a small number in Ireland (and elsewhere) have reservations on the basis that providing women with an independent income unrelated to employment might militate still further against them taking up employment.

To me, this argument smacks of the more general anti-welfare arguments: that people won't bother to work if you give them too good an income for staying at home. However, some of the concern may be well-based in the sense that while women themselves might not be 'demotivated' by an independent income, the lobby that currently denigrates the idea of married women 'taking up good jobs' (i.e. jobs that 'should' be men's) might feel strengthened in their opposition to sex equality if there appeared to be less of a financial argument for women working outside the home.

But these are essentially short-term considerations, based on present-day preoccupations. Not that the opposition to women's equality is going to fade away in the very near future — far from it. Nevertheless, if the BI concept is pressed by socialists, as an instrument of social justice and progress, there should be no question of it backfiring against women in this way; indeed, advancing women's equality would be a major reason for socialists pushing it.

Among trade unions — again, insofar as it has been discussed at all — the main concern about BI systems is that they could be used to undermine trade union power by driving down wages and encouraging the type of small-scale, part-time, temporary employment that is notoriously difficult to organise. Also, at a wider and perhaps more fundamental level, there is the danger of absolving employers from the responsibility to employ — or, effectively, 'giving up on full employment' — and of reducing the dis-

tributional power that trade unions have developed. If income determination becomes primarily the function of the state, then the scope of the trade union movement for effecting major changes here may be narrowed considerably.

However, in my view, these are only convincing arguments and valid fears if we are talking about a low BI introduced by the Right in order to achieve precisely these objectives. As a socialist measure, a guaranteed 'floor' for all incomes would of course create some upsets in the trade union movement: it would disturb a number of differentials and provoke a number of changes — but these would not necessarily be changes for the worse! The trade union movement's 'distributional power' would only be adversely affected if the movement was allowing itself to be weakened anyway.

As for taking pressure off employers to employ, and 'giving up on full employment': that, too, has been happening for some time and not because of any commitment to a BI. It has been happening because of a lack of political will to direct the nation's resources into developing the kind of productive activity that will work, last, and expand in Ireland, to everyone's benefit — as opposed to the type that earns a quick buck for the multi-nationals and a few native capitalists.

The fact is that only a government totally committed to full employment could introduce a BI system in Ireland because full employment, or at least some major progress towards it, is almost a pre-condition for BI: the two need to go hand in hand.

### SOCIALIST RESERVATIONS

Socialists have had some or all of the above reservations about BI and I believe these to be misplaced once we are clear about the fact that, in contrast to both the right-wing, 'free market' advocates of BI, who see it as an aid to diseased capitalism, and the Green-liberal view of it as being some kind of happy alternative to both capitalism and socialism, we are seeing it as an instrument of social progress and perhaps socialism.

However, the main ideological question that it raises — the question of 'uncoupling income and work' — does not appear to have such definite left-right answers, because traditionally, both left and right have agreed on the necessity for everyone to work who possibly can. In the past, the only ideological disagreement — and it has been a subsidiary one — has been about the role of women. Capitalism assumed their dependence upon men and the earnings of men were supposed to reflect this; whereas socialism assumes an independent, earning role for women.

As a socialist — perhaps quite a traditional one in some respects! — I do not depart very far from the view that there is a necessity for everyone to work who is able to do so. But I do not see the 'coercion' argument as a major one, in the Irish context, because survey after survey has demonstrated that the over-riding concern of the vast majority of unemployed people is to find useful, satisfying and well-paid employment; and failing that, almost any job at all. Therefore the question of whether a BI would give people the right not to work is infinitely less important than the question of whether we can ever give the right to work to as many Irish people as want it. Most unemployed people in this country would be quick to point out that they already have the right not to work — and are not too impressed by it. They would opt, fairly unanimously, for the right to work, if suitable employment were available. All the efforts, over the years, to prove that social welfare benefits constitute a major 'disincentive to work' have failed to do so; indeed the various surveys have tended to

show, increasingly, that most people without jobs (and indeed, most people in very low-paid employment) are more interested in the indirect, long-term implications of employment (such as self-esteem, social status and approval, prospects for one's children as well as oneself) than in the direct, immediate financial gains it brings, which are often negligible or even negative.

In the Irish context, therefore, I cannot see the 'obligation to work' as being a major problem. The real dilemma is how to bring about any sense of obligation to provide work for those wanting it.

In the international context, too, I find the real issues to be more clear-cut than is generally believed. We are told we have the two extremes, in economic and ideological terms: Soviet-style socialism, which 'forces' everyone to work and 'therefore' has no unemployment problem, but various other problems (such as the absence of certain individual freedoms, including the freedom not to work); and on the other extreme, US-style capitalism which supposedly gives everyone the freedom to work or not to work (but also has other problems, like unemployment, poor social supports and services and extremes of poverty and wealth).

In between, supposedly, are the 'social welfare states' of Western Europe. Some of these — the Scandinavian ones, for example — have managed to provide admirably for their weaker and more vulnerable sections because their economies have remained strong and unemployment relatively low. Most, however, are in crisis because the 'surpluses' produced by those at work are no longer sufficient to sustain both the capitalist class and the growing numbers who have become dependent upon social welfare. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Ireland, where over one third of the population now depends on social welfare; only a third are actually at work; and only about a quarter are contributing anything significant to the state by way of income tax.

In America, this crisis is far less severe than in Ireland, yet already capitalism has reached the point of requiring unemployed people to work for their social welfare — to produce something, rather than remain in enforced idleness in order to qualify for a payment. This 'work-fare' approach is significant for a number of reasons. In the context of the BI debate, it is significant because now the very capitalist state which most loudly proclaims its commitment to 'free enterprise' and the 'freedom of the individual' — including the freedom to work or not to work — is starting to coerce people who are unwilling to work, or cannot find work, to perform some sort of state-sponsored work in order to secure some form of income support from the state. In other words, the supposed freedom of the individual, to work or not to work, is a myth and a sham in America, and fast becoming so elsewhere as well.

Does this development not expose right-wing and liberal nonsense about 'human freedom' in the West versus 'state coercion' in the Eastern European economies, as far as the right to work and to have a basic level of income support is concerned?

It is certainly true that in socialist economies, so far, there hasn't been much concern with 'the right not to work' — all efforts have gone into ensuring that there is work for everyone and that the opportunities are taken up. The result has been full employment and adequate basic incomes for everyone; with good and adequate social and income support for those who are old, infirm, ill, pregnant or disabled.

It seems obvious that this has all been possible precisely because every able-bodied person is employed. (Indeed, in the Soviet Union, not only is there no unemployment, but there are hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs at any

given time.) Financing a good level of income support and social services is not an impossible problem, because there is a relatively low level of dependency. Furthermore, there is no capitalist class creaming off the working class's surpluses, even though there are undoubtedly some inequalities.

But these would seem, to me, to arise mainly from the underdevelopment of consumerism and the absence of outlets, for most Eastern Europeans for example, to spend their money once their basic living costs (which are low) have been met. If your housing costs are only about 3% of your wages, as in the Soviet Union for example, and the whole emphasis in the economy has been to build the industrial base and provide the necessities of life for everyone, it is hardly surprising that many luxuries and consumer goods are hard to obtain and that certain inequalities may have developed in relation to people's access to these.

In a socialist economy, the problem of adequate basic incomes is solved, precisely because the state takes seriously its obligation to provide employment for everyone. One can argue that this involves a 'coercion to work' which is not compatible with human freedom or the idea of a basic income which is unconditional and uncoupled from the obligation to work, but I do not see this as a major difficulty, especially in the Irish context.

### REORGANISING AND HUMANISING WORK

More problematic, to my mind, is an issue which neither socialism nor capitalism have yet adequately addressed; and one which arises irrespective of the extent to which the system 'obliges' people to work. This is the issue of people's increasing alienation from the type of work which modern society expects them to do, which is displayed (both in the full-employment socialist economies and the high-unemployment capitalist and mixed ones), in low morale, motivation and productivity, high absenteeism and malingering, and a general lack of satisfaction from most jobs.

In theory, technological and other developments should be increasing the proportion of interesting and stimulating jobs in society by automating and diminishing the proportion of routine, boring ones; but in practice, this does not appear to be happening. The real challenge therefore lies not in removing the social obligation to work (because most people want to work and anyway there is a great deal of work requiring to be done), but in reforming the world of paid work so as to make it more stimulating, attractive and satisfying for people: by humanising many of the jobs that are positively unpalatable at present; by re-organising work and working hours to better suit human beings — both male and female — and fit in with the other demands and possibilities of life; by sharing out, as far as practicable, both the interesting and the routine or unpleasant tasks (be they paid or unpaid); and by generally breaking down existing demarcation lines between high and low-status work, 'male' and 'female' jobs, and so on.

If work is not 'humanised' and re-organised in these ways, both capitalism and socialism are going to be faced with an increased alienation of workers from work — not

because people are fundamentally averse to the idea of work, but because, for the most part (except in the service industries and the 'caring' professions and sometimes even in these) the reality is so utterly boring and lacking in creativity.

In my view, capitalism cannot solve this problem on any large scale because such reforms as worker participation, the reorganisation of working time and the general humanising of work by facilitating workers rather than machines, interfere too much with profits and the habits of the capitalist mode of production, even though isolated enterprises have managed to incorporate them relatively painlessly. But in a high-unemployment society like ours, for example, there is little or no pressure on it for reforms of this nature: people put up with low wages, poor working conditions and crazy working hours for the sake of holding onto jobs, the main forms of resistance being negative ones (such as the lowest productivity and highest absenteeism that they can get away with).

The problems of motivation, job satisfaction, etc. are quite different under socialism, because although there is not the same insecurity, or fear of unemployment, there is often a similar boredom with work, or a lack of motivation and satisfaction from it. The fact that this may be born of complacency, rather than insecurity, does not necessarily make it an easier problem to solve, but in theory at least, it should be easier to tackle in a society where people's basic needs are met than in one where this is still very much an issue.

### IMPROVING CAPITALISM OR BUILDING SOCIALISM

In conclusion, therefore, I should try to answer the question: is the BI idea associated with improving capitalism or building socialism? I hope I have shown that (a) it can be either of these; (b) in Ireland, it is unlikely to be pressed any further by the right, and (c) it is a concept which can, and in my view should, be used by socialists to advance the redistribution of work and income in society.

Whether we can have a full BI system in Ireland without socialism is something I have doubts about; but certainly there is scope for partial BI schemes and in that context some of the recommendations of the Commission on Social Welfare are very welcome indeed (such as the introduction of an improved, uniform, minimum income for all social welfare recipients and the easing of restrictions on the unemployed in relation to education and training courses).

On the question of 'breaking the historic link' between work and income, through a totally unconditional BI system: I have mixed views, perhaps because I see the issue as having more academic than real significance. Under capitalism, especially in Ireland where we have such a sickly specimen, it seems to me that the right to work is a far more pressing issue than the right not to work. And for those already at work, the quality of that work, and the conditions under which it is performed, are generally more important than the right to opt out. Similarly, in socialist societies, there is no widespread evidence of a desire to opt out of work — but rather, to improve the quality of people's lives, both as workers and as consumers.

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# THE EUROPEAN LEFT FACES THE FUTURE

*Gerard O'Quigley*

DESPITE the triumphalist pronouncements of the New Right, European socialism is far from terminal decline. Certainly the old models of Stalinism and managerial Social Democracy are dead and unlamented, except by a minority who have long since ceased to think. Everywhere in Europe socialists are engaged in a fundamental examination of the meaning and future of socialism. This article aims to examine the conditions that have given rise to this debate, and to survey the possible options open to the Left.

The mass-based parties of socialism have existed for a little more than a century. Overwhelmingly working class in character, these parties grew rapidly in the favourable conditions of the time. There was a clear link between these mass workers' parties and socialist ideology. During the Second International social democracy was Marxism. The conditions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were especially favourable to the appeal of working class consciousness. To millions of workers there was an obvious connection between one's identity as a worker, the party of the working class and the ideology of socialism. Even after the great schism in the labour movement following 1917, large sections of the working class continued to attach their fortunes to social democratic and communist parties. The socialist labour parties in all cases contained significant numbers of non working class members, particularly at leadership levels. In each nation particular circumstances differed as to the role non-propertied bourgeois intellectuals and white collar workers could adopt in the socialist movements. Such considerations are important for understanding the place of socialist ideas in different national cultures.<sup>1</sup>

The Russian Revolution led to a split in the workers' movements into two hostile camps. Communist Parties, adhering to the famous twenty-one conditions of the

Communist International regarded the older socialist parties as at best incurably reformist, or at worst 'social fascists'. Marxism had become thoroughly Bolshevised and later Stalinised. Meanwhile social democratic parties committed themselves firmly to parliamentarism, and in time were increasingly effective caretakers of the bourgeois state.

Following the Second World War a new class compromise was reached in capitalist societies, one which reconciled many of the pre-war goals of social democracy with capital's determined pursuit of a new accumulation strategy.<sup>2</sup> During this long period of post-war economic growth the dynamics of this compromise mutually modified the character of labour, capital, and the state. Social democratic parties clearly benefited electorally during this period, enjoying long spells in government and presiding over rising prosperity. But the long post-war boom eventually gave way to a period of prolonged crisis management which was to undo the political and electoral strength of social democratic parties.

Social democracy played a crucial role in stabilising the international capitalist order. The two fundamental props in the reconstruction of capitalism were (1) a remodelling of class conflict which was based on the expansion of the domestic market to enable workers to avail of a seemingly endless supply of consumer goods hitherto out of reach; (2) the construction of what became known as the Keynesian welfare state. In return the working class movement made important con-

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1. See the essays in C. Levy (ed) *Socialism and the Intellegentsia 1889-1914* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987.

2. This section draws heavily on G. Ross and J. Jenson, 'Post-war Class Struggle and the Crisis of Left Politics' in R. Miliband et al (eds.) *Socialist Register 1985/86* (Merlin)





cessions in industrial relations. This new class compromise was partly based on the economic-corporate bargaining power of the labour movement. The core of this compromise between big capital and trade unions was a trade off by the former of collective bargaining, job security and predictably rising wages in return for a free hand in making productivity-enhancing arrangements. When strikes did occur they were cut off from any system-transforming tendencies.

One explanation for this takes account of the changes that occurred in trade unionism whose role in administering its side of the post-war compromise led them to be perceived by workers 'less as collectives for mutual struggle than as distinct and separate agencies which acted for them to be sure, but more often than not in their place'.<sup>3</sup> There was also an important cultural factor. Individual workers tended to de-emphasise the centrality and importance of work in terms of their personal identity and instead tended to affirm themselves in family and private spheres. Increased geographical mobility tended to physically separate work areas from neighbourhoods.

The role of the state was crucial in maintaining the post-war compromise through its use of Keynesian inspired macro-level demand management and the use of state expenditure on a large scale. This did not simply 'happen' but must be seen as the product of a political process. The basis of this was a 'progressive alliance' of the organized working class and sections of the middle strata which had sufficient electoral strength to extract commitments to full employment and the welfare state. This 'progressive alliance' must be seen as the product of a particular political conjuncture based around continued economic growth. When this period ended the conditions which gave rise to the post-war class compromise also ended. In the era of 'stagflation' wages

and public expenditure became more sharply contested and state commitment to full employment (apart from a handful of countries) withered away.<sup>4</sup> By the 1970s social democracy suffered electorally by being associated with the seemingly permanent economic crisis.

In some countries the New Right became popular because of people's negative experience of the managerial or statist approach of social democracy. It is paradoxical that there is a certain convergence in both left and right critiques of social democracy — although when the conclusions from that critique are drawn, the two sides radically differ.<sup>5</sup> The statist approach assumed that the use of the state machinery could run the economy efficiently as well as take care of people's needs. It was claimed that these needs could be objectively determined by experts but this assumption had the effect of turning people into clients of the welfare state. The motto of state-administered social democracy, crudely put, was 'rely on the state to look after your needs. It knows what is best and can deliver the goods'.

The period of the Popular Front and the war-time resistance to fascism enabled communist parties to develop as truly mass parties in several western European countries. In France and Italy in particular, the CPs and their trade union allies became the dominant political expression of the organised working class. These parties had some success in educating the masses to politics and integrating them into party sub-cultures. These parties also attracted the support of many intellectuals. The ending of the Cold War and the

3. *ibid* p.25

4. G. Therborn *Why Some People Are More Unemployed Than Others* London: Verso, 1986.

5. See Claus Offe *Contradictions of the Welfare State* London: Hutchinson, 1984.

beginnings of detente created the possibilities of distinctively 'national' roads to socialism. By the early 1960s after it was clear that the Sino-Soviet split could not be healed, Moscow was no longer the undisputed centre of world communism.

Comparing the respective fortunes of the French and Italian parties is instructive. The PCI made a clear break with the 'insurrectionary road' after 1944. The 'via Italiana' as conceived by its leader, Togliatti, would of necessity have to be different from the Bolshevik strategy in 1917. The PCI abandoned outright opposition in the sense of confining its activity to criticism and propaganda, building its strength and biding its time until conditions were ripe for a revolutionary rupture. Instead the party would continuously intervene in the life of the country in a positive and constructive way, striving to be the 'organic' expression of the working class and all other popular strata.<sup>6</sup> The relative success of this strategy can be judged by its achievements in building an impressive network of mass political, social, co-operative and cultural organisations; its capacity to mobilise millions of people and securing over a third of the electorate by the mid 1970s. The PCI is however by no means immune from criticism and there have been some acute disappointments and failures.

The French Communist Party has fared rather badly compared to its Italian counterpart. Although formally committed to 'un socialisme aux couleurs de la France' its break with Soviet orthodoxy was belated, grudging and incomplete. Until recently the PCF was always able to secure between a fifth and a quarter of the vote and the communist-dominated CGT was by far the biggest trade union organisation in France. The loyal pro-Soviet position of the PCF might well have helped the party during the Popular Front and Resistance-Liberation years when there was a generally positive image of the USSR, but was a considerable hindrance in the post-war period. Because it failed to break with a narrow 'workerism', the PCF was in no position to cope with the sweeping structural changes in the economy and society since the 1950s. Almost accidentally the left came to power in 1981 and the PCF was a junior partner in government. This experience only hastened the party's decline with a series of electoral failures, loss of positions of local power, fall in membership and militant activity, and an unfavourable public image. This long-term decline is best explained by a structural weakness of its integration in French society and it has been unable to define or share in a mobilising political project.<sup>7</sup>

SEVERAL PHENOMENA have steadily undermined the effectiveness of the mass parties of the European left since World War II, and especially over the past generation. Against this background of uncertainty and change a number of questions must be posed: if the world is being remade, what are the implications for the established organisational practices, strategies and ideology of socialism? Are we to say farewell to socialism as well as the classic labour movements? What new possibilities are open to us in the new times? Such questions are implicit in the current battles being fought throughout the European left over the meaning and future of socialist politics.

Let us look more closely at the way the world is

changing. In global terms there is a shift in manufacturing industry to the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs), particularly to the Far East. In the advanced capitalist economies there have been major changes in the labour force which has led to a shrinking of the industrial proletariat and a rise in technical, scientific and other white collar workers involved in production and services. These social strata may technically belong to the working class, but increasingly fail to respond to the ideological or organisational appeals of the historic parties of the Left. As capitalism develops a new regime of accumulation, the work force is likely to split into core workers who trade labour flexibility for job security, and peripheral workers who are forced into insecure, casual and low paid employment. It is probable that a majority of people will enjoy prosperity in terms of a continuing capacity to acquire goods and services. The other side of this story is that a substantial segment of the population will be permanently dependent on state transfer payments and a ramshackle welfare state.

Traditional socialist arguments rested on the assumption of capitalist society as an arena where two class blocs oppose each other and whose opposing interests find expression in politics. If workers could be made to experience their exploitation by capitalist relations of production they would then become 'conscious' of their real class interests. From the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth the mass parties of the left owed their strength to the possibility that most workers would make the connection between class, party and socialist ideology. Today this connection is far less easily made, not just because of structural changes but because of the subjective decline of a sense of class solidarity. Over the last couple of generations, work and the workplace are no longer the socially and culturally central phenomena they once represented for the working class. Today people are just as likely to construct their identities around what they consume and their personal lifestyles.

What implications does all this have for class politics? One response is to insist that, notwithstanding the growing segmentation and cultural fragmentation of society, there is still an exploited class and an exploiting class. The primary political task must be to forge this deeply segmented working class into a unified political force. This is not an easy task as there is no automatic connection between class location and political position. Such connections must be forged politically and the danger is that if Left parties remain immersed in traditional practices and preoccupations they will produce a discourse which falls on deaf ears. An alternative approach is to drop the insistence on the primacy of class politics. This argument is partially based on the contention that every source of oppression cannot be reducible to the relationship between capital and labour. It is not adequate to say 'capitalism oppresses everyone' and therefore everyone should throw in their lot with the class struggle. Issues raised by the women's movement in recent years have made this impossible. Socialist feminists have argued that the concentration of women in domestic labour and in ghettos

6. D. Sassoon *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party* London: Frances Pinter, 1981.

7. J. Ranger, 'Le declin du parti Communiste Français' *Revue Française de Science Politique* 36 (1) 1986.

of low-paid part time and unskilled employment is not just the expression of capitalist logic but are also reflections of male domination. Women are often oppressed within the family and suffer physical violence from men. One cannot credibly claim that the women's struggle is somehow peripheral, and that women must wait until capitalism has been overthrown. A left political strategy based on these insights would drop the 'anti monopoly alliance' in favour of a 'broad democratic alliance'. This position holds that support for socialism can only be constructed by mobilising people around a programme for radical democratic change. The organised working class would still play a central role but would no longer be portrayed as the privileged purveyors of historic destiny.

THREE POSSIBLE OPTIONS are open to the European Left — Traditionalism, New Realism and Renovation. Traditionalists are found in all parties, but are especially strong within the French Communist Party. The traditionalist current blames social democracy for the current crisis of the European Left. Class remains the fundamental issue. The information society is just another stage of capitalist development. The traditionalists are suspicious of the 'new social movements' (feminism, ecology etc.). These issues, they claim, might express real social demands but they must be integrated into working class politics. The traditionalists also tend to think exclusively in terms of the nation-state and claim that the EC can never really be anything other than a rich man's club.

The New Realist option is particularly strong in the socialist parties of southern Europe. Parties such as the PSF (France), PSOE (Spain), and PSI (Italy) have conceded that traditional social democracy based on the Keynesian welfare state is no longer tenable. These parties have become the self-conscious modernisers of capitalism and have distanced themselves ideologically from traditional socialist policies and from their working class base. This approach has been electorally successful. The French Socialists have regained power, the Italian Socialists have narrowed the gap between themselves and the PCI, and the Spanish Socialists are likely to retain power after the next election despite major opposition to government policies from Spanish trade unions. In the above cases the socialists have gained at the expense of the Communists — leaving the latter isolated and marginalised and allowing the socialists to make an opening to new allies on the centre-right.

The third option, renovation, is distinctly Europeanist in its outlook. The renovators have taken on board the limitations of an exclusively national orientation at a time when multi-national capitalism functions without

regard to national boundaries, and are prepared to engage in a 'supranational' politics in the context of a reformed and democratised European Community. Like the traditionalists, renovators can be found in all parties but are especially influential in the Italian Communist Party and the West German Social Democratic Party. In France the dissident communists led by Pierre Juquin are the leading forces of renovation. Some of Europe's leading trade unions (CGIL in Italy, CFDT in France, IG Metall in Germany) have been involved in planning elementary defensive strategies at a European level in the face of mass unemployment and industrial restructuring.

The renovators have a distinctly Green tinge about them and many strongly advocate a 'Red-Green alliance'. Many European socialists came to embrace the important questions raised by the peace movement and feminism about converting harmful industries to ecologically safe and socially useful production. There is a growing awareness of the importance of 'Post-Materialist values' among younger sections of the population and that politics is increasingly less about conflict over ownership of the means of production.<sup>8</sup> The renovators have moved away from the assumption that system-transforming movements can only be based on the working class.

What I have attempted to do in this article is to show that the conditions which gave rise to mass socialist labour parties no longer exist. This more than anything accounts for the current confusion and uncertainty in the ranks of European socialism. A fundamentalist re-statement of marxist orthodoxy may be comforting, but it will not help us engage with reality and construct a programme which is truly transformative. Such a position underestimates the extent of recent changes and wrongly assumes an underlying continuity over the past century. The New Realist option should also be rejected because it has drawn the wrong conclusions from the failures of social democracy.

The renovation option appears the best placed to further the forces of socialist renewal. The renewal of socialism must be based on the deepening and extension of democracy from the narrow political sphere outwards to other areas of social life. This does not mean that socialism is no longer about defending and representing workers. We cannot lose sight of this function when such defence is needed now more than ever. The contention here is that we must face up to the world as it is, and not as we would like it to be.

8. R. Inglehart and J-R Rabier, 'Political Realignment in Advanced Industrial Society: From Class-Based Politics to Quality-of-Life Politics', *Government and Opposition* 21.4.1986.

*In the next issue, Gerard O'Quigley looks at the possibilities of socialist renewal in Ireland.*

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# CUBAN SOLIDARITY WITH ANGOLA

*Lila Haines*

TWO HISTORIC agreements were signed in New York on Dec. 22, 1988. One was a tripartite accord between Angola, Cuba and South Africa, containing the general basis for a settlement of the conflict in south western Africa. The other was a bilateral accord between Angola and Cuba setting the timetable for the phased withdrawal of Cuban internationalist troops from the African country, a process Cuba began earlier than the agreed date.

At the heart of these agreements and the prolonged negotiations that led to them were Angolan sovereignty and Namibia's right to independence, as set out in UN Resolution 435 of 1978. But throughout the negotiations, the western media presented the conflict as yet another battleground between the USA and the Soviet Union, with Cuba as a 'Soviet puppet'. The US was cast in the role of peacemaker with the presence of Cuban troops in Angola as a major stumbling block to peace. Seldom was the apartheid South African régime's aggression against Angola, and its illegal occupation of Namibia set in its historic context. Similarly the Cuban involvement in Africa, and not just in Angola, is normally distorted by a western media that cannot, or refused to conceive of either civilian or military aid being offered altruistically.

Cuba has always maintained that its involvement in Angola was based on internationalist solidarity. And

indeed that involvement predates the response to MPLA President Agostinho Neto's 1975 appeal for international help in repelling a South African invasion of Angola. And it was not confined to military aid. Cuba has an unimpeachable record of 'no strings attached' aid to Black Africa, Angola included.

Back in 1963, with the Cuban revolution barely four years old, the first civilian internationalists, a group of 55 doctors, went to Algeria. At that time Cuba was still reeling from the defection of half its own medical personnel to the United States. So the medical aid to newly-independent Algeria represented a real sacrifice on the part of underdeveloped Cuba. And it set the tone for the future. Today, some 15,000 Cuban teachers, construction workers, doctors and engineers work in 11 Asian and Latin American countries, and in 26 African states.

It's worth looking at that contribution to Third World development in the context of aid from elsewhere. In 1985, for example, 16,000 Cuban civilians worked in developing countries. That same year, less than 6,000 US Peace Corps volunteers and 1,200 technicians from the US' Agency for International Development worked in 70 countries. In 1989, the number of Cuban physicians working abroad will exceed personnel sent from any industrialised nation and even from the World Health

Organisation.

## **Crucial aid**

For countries like Angola, which has been spending more than half its national earnings on resisting South African-launched aggression, and with one of the world's highest infant mortality rates, this kind of aid is crucial. The only cost to the receiving government is housing and feeding the Cuban volunteers. To contract doctors from other aid sources, Luanda would pay about \$2,000 a month for each professional. Havana requests fees only from governments that can afford to pay.

Construction is also high on the list of services offered by Havana. Cuban construction brigades are to be found building houses, schools and hospitals in Africa, laying roads and erecting bridges, putting up whole sugar complexes, milk processing plants, animal husbandry and artificial insemination centres.

The Cuban enterprise UNECA co-ordinates international construction efforts. Last autumn, in Luanda alone, UNECA expanded the major port, completed a school for 2,000 students, built the medical school and student housing for what will become the America Boavida Teaching Hospital, and laid the foundations for two more schools. It also set up a water distribution centre and built an ice plant. UNECA has also trained over 100 Angolans as skilled operators. What does Cuba get in exchange?



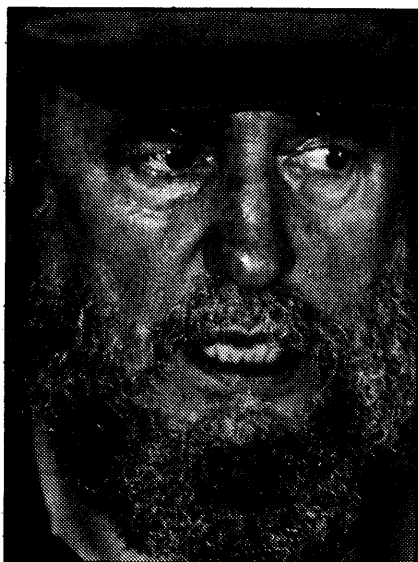
Valuable experience in working under the most difficult conditions, they say, such as when they built the Cahama air base in double-quick time, in order to ferry the Cuban and Angolan troops that defeated the South African army invasion at Cuito Cuanavale.

There are other Cuban enterprises in Angola, like the Tecnogirón Combined Construction Company, which specialises in educational building. This school year opened in Angola with a gift for the 45,000 inhabitants of Kazenga municipality: a new school for 800 pupils built by the Cuban company and furnished by the Cuban Ministry of Education at an estimated cost of \$27,000. And Cuba has opened its own schools to students from Africa. There are some 20,000 mostly African students on the Isle of Youth alone, where Cubans teach subjects like mathematics, biology and sports, while teachers from the Third World recipient countries look after history, culture and politics.

Cuban aid, whatever form it takes is not confined to its ideological allies. There are Cuban internationalists working with the politically diverse governments of Uganda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, the Western Sahara, the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Madagascar and the Frontline States. Last October the first Cuban doctors left for Zaire as part of an agreement between the two countries encompassing 80 Cuban general practitioners in family medicine, and 143 specialists.

### Historic link

Anyone could be forgiven for wondering why and how Cuba, itself a developing Third World state, provides such aid. Western suggestions that Cuba acts as a 'Soviet puppet' or is engaged in an attempt to become a 'new colonial power' are rejected by Cuba and recipient African nations alike. The Nigerian Ambassador to Cuba, whose government is strictly non-aligned and maintains strong trade relations with the West, registers surprise at the notion that the Cuban role in Africa is no more than the ideological facade for Moscow's expansionist adventures. 'I don't know anyone in Africa who thinks that. Nearly two million Africans,' he explains, 'were



*Fidel Castro*

brought to Cuba as slaves. There is this solid historical link between Cuba and our continent. Cubans are very sympathetic to Africa, think of themselves as part of Africa, and see what is going on in Africa from an African perspective. No African would see Cuba as a colonial power.'

David González, of the Cuban Centre for the Study of Africa and the Middle East, suggests that there is a 'political identity' between Black Africa and revolutionary Cuba. In the 19th century, when most Latin American countries were ending Spanish rule, it was thought that achieving nationhood itself would bring about independence.

'That's no longer true,' says González. 'The African and Asian countries that ended colonial ties after the Second World War were aware that economic dependence was just as binding as political dependence. In a greatly changed world, they know they will have to depend on each other if they are ever to be truly free of their former colonial masters. Cuban international assistance — today part of what is known as South-South co-operation — took on an especially important meaning for these countries.'

Economic self-sufficiency was another lesson passed on by Cuba to developing nations. African countries are too poor to afford Western technology, and Cuban specialists have taught them to make the most of local resources. And African National Congress spokesperson, Thomas Nkobi, observed: 'Africa sees Cuba as a brother. It

has gone all out to assist the liberation of our peoples, not only with words: Cubans have sacrificed their own lives in Africa. This is a result of their understanding of socialism and internationalism. Some of us said the African armies should have been the ones helping Angola. But perhaps they haven't been taught that form of internationalism.'

But Cuba is certainly have been. Hard as it may be for the Western reader to imagine, the example of Che Guevara permeates Cuban life. And, of course, Cuba's survival as a nation trying to build socialism just 90 miles from the world's most powerful modern imperialist power, was due in large measure to the internationalist support it received, which it feels bound to pay back.

### Aid policy

Che Guevara, in fact, opened Cuba's first links with Angola, when he conferred with MPLA President Agostinho Neto in Congo-Brazzaville during his 1965 diplomatic tour of Africa. Neto and the MPLA military commander Endo visited Cuba in 1966 and shortly after MPLA-sponsored students began arriving in Cuba.

Cuba chose to co-operate with the MPLA (Movimento Popular da Libertacao de Angola) rather than its rivals — Holden Roberto's Frente Nacional de Libertacao de Angola (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi's Uniao Nacional par a Independencia Total de Angola (UNITA) — for primarily ideological reasons. From its foundation in 1956, the MPLA adhered to an anti-imperialist, multiracialist and pro-socialist position. In contrast, both the FNLA and UNITA were tribalist and even racist. While the MPLA emphasised political education and mobilisation, the other two groups were essentially militarist in approach. Both proved adept at forming opportunist alliances. Savimbi initially propounded a Maoist doctrine of self-reliance, but shifted ground in pursuit of outside aid, finally siding with South Africa.

From its foundation in 1966, Savimbi's UNITA fought against the MPLA more than the Portuguese, and likewise Holden Roberto's FNLA even executed MPLA guerrillas rather than let them operate in its northern power-



*South African troops on the Angola/Namibia border*

base. The scene was set for civil conflict after the Portuguese departure, scheduled for 1975. And compounded by the efforts of the USA and South Africa.

Outside aid too was to play a critical role in events in the mid-1970s, both politically and militarily. And meanwhile Soviet aid policy was showing a tendency to change, and diverging from Cuban policy on the continent.

Cuban aid to the MPLA has continued without interruption — and consistently — from its commencement up to the present. Soviet aid was halted twice: in 1963–64 (before Cuban aid began) and in 1972. The first interruption appears to have been connected with a temporary loss of status with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). The second may have been because the MPLA suffered severe military losses against the Portuguese, as well as two splits. So at the time of Portuguese dictator Caetano's overthrow in April 1974, Cuban and Soviet policy in Angola differed. Shortly afterwards, new aid reached the MPLA from two sources: China in June 1974 and the USA in July. In November of the same year, Soviet aid to the MPLA resumed, on a scale similar to that of the 1960s. Whatever the reason for the USSR's resumption of aid, one thing was clear: Cuba was pursuing an *independent* policy towards Angola, even if that meant being out of step with the world's major socialist state and its own main source of development assistance.

#### South African intervention

As November 11, 1975, the date set for Angolan independence, drew near, the OAU tried to bring the three liberation groups together. The Alfor Agreements established a shortlived unity. The USA immediately increased covert aid to the FNLA, which then attacked the MPLA offices in Luanda and expelled it from the northern territories it controlled. In March, 1,200 Zairean regular troops entered Angola to fight alongside the FNLA. The MPLA requested and got more aid from the USSR and Cuba. And, the MPLA's own strength in urban areas helped turn the tide in its favour and it looked set to form the first independent government of Angola.

That was when both UNITA and the FNLA turned to South Africa for support. The US also stepped in, sanctioning a massive increase in arms aid and covert CIA action on July 17th. On July 20th, the FNLA joined forces with rightwing Portuguese military and secret police to launch an attack aimed at capturing Luanda before November 11th.

On August 9th, South African troops crossed over into Angola from Namibia. It also opened bases for the FNLA and UNITA in Namibia and southern Angola. The MPLA requested extra help from abroad. Only Cuba responded, and the additional Cuban troops were decisive in helping the MPLA hold its own. Then on October 23rd, South Africa launched 'Operation Zulu', in which 5,000 apartheid troops moved rapidly up through Angola, covering some 500 kilometres in just over a week. Once again the MPLA appealed for overseas aid. Once again, Cuba responded. And the Cuban troops made the military difference: by mid-December the South African advance had been halted and when the US Congress prohibited further US aid to the FNLA or UNITA, South Africa withdrew its troops to the border, charging that the US had defaulted on its pledge to provide whatever military assistance was required to defeat the MPLA. The rest, as they say, is history: on February 11, 1976, the OAU admitted the People's Republic of Angola to membership, thereby recognising the legitimacy of the MPLA government.

But the crisis had not ended. The MPLA inherited the government of a country that was potentially wealthy but chronically underdeveloped and over-exploited. In colonial days substantial revenues were generated by the export of coffee, diamonds and oil, but 85% of the population lived at subsistence level. The country's development needs and potential were constantly hindered by the continuing war waged against it by the US-backed counter-revolutionaries and South African incursions, to name only the major sources of foreign interference. Militarily, the country hit the world headlines periodically over the following decade, but it was to be the battle of Cuito Cuanavale that turned the tide

eventually, in January 1988. Meanwhile, Cuba and Angola had tried to implement a phased withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. The Cuban force reached a low point of perhaps 12,000 in late 1976, but had to be reinforced again in response to persistent attacks from the sources mentioned above.

#### Independent position

Meanwhile, civilian aid poured in. Cuban teachers, engineers, medical personnel and construction workers amounting to some 2,600 within a year and a half of independence, helped begin the development process. And this crucial aid continued, as outlined in the earlier part of this article. Before bringing the story up to date, it may be worthwhile quoting Cuban President Fidel Castro's statement on his country's Angolan involvement:

Cuba made its decision completely on its own responsibility. The USSR, which had always helped the peoples of the Portuguese colonies in the struggle for their independence and provided besieged Angola with basic aid in military equipment and collaborated with our efforts when imperialism had cut off practically all our air routes to Africa, never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country. The USSR is extraordinarily respectful and careful in its relations with Cuba. A decision of that nature could only be made by our own party. (April 1976, quoted in *Granma Weekly Review*)

(And if anybody doubted Fidel Castro's ability to act independently from the USSR, they should have revised their opinion following Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov's April 1989 visit to Havana, when the London daily *The Independent* took umbrage on Gorbachov's behalf, accusing the Cuban President of insulting him by stating Cuba's independent position and speaking 'irreverently' of internal Soviet affairs!)

But to conclude this look at Cuba's involvement with Angola, it is essential to examine the phase of that country's recent history identified with the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. That period is the stuff legends are made of! Undoubtedly,

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## *Will the United States bring pressure to bear on South Africa to fulfil its part of the bargain? That is the crucial question.*

Cubans who took part in the defence of Cuito Cuanavale are seen as heroes at home, and there is no reason to doubt that all its defenders of whatever nationality are similarly regarded in Angola. But in Ireland we tend nowadays to be cynical about military heroism, not without reason. Therefore, Cuito Cuanavale deserves to be placed in its historic context, to understand its significance for Angola, for Africa as a whole, especially southern Africa, and for Cuba.

### **Decisive defeat**

In October 1987 South Africa mounted a huge operation against Angolan territory, using infantry, tanks, long-range heavy artillery, fighter jets and bombers. It was interested in taking Cuito Cuanavale, which is on the front line and occupies a position from which Angola can prevent invaders from crossing the Cuito river. But South Africa's interest was more than military: it was also interested in driving Luanda to the negotiating table at a disadvantage.

Besides troops from the South African Defence Forces (SADF), the so-called South West African Territorial Forces — the Namibian army under South African command — and thousands of UNITA *contras* took part in the attack. Despite Pretoria's claims, there were no Cuban advisers, combat units or military personnel in Cuito Cuanavale at the time. The first Cuban forces arrived on December 5th.

South Africa had created an extremely tense situation, concentrating 30,000 soldiers, 435 tanks, over 80 fighter jets and 400 cannons and mortars in illegally-occupied Namibia to the south of Angola. Additionally there were already 3,000 troops supported by 70 armoured cars and diverse artillery in Angolan territory.

The South Africans were so sure of victory that President Pieter Botha visited his troops in Angola

and watched military operations there. Between November 15 and December 1, South Africa carried out 15 air raids and 17 artillery attacks on civilian and military targets and its planes violated Angolan airspace 90 times. But the apartheid troops lost their advantage with the arrival of Cuban advisers in early December, and defeat loomed when troops arrived fresh from Cuba, led by experienced officers from the 1975–76 war.

Pretoria, also facing criticism at home due to mounting casualties among white conscripts, announced a troop withdrawal schedule for December 23rd. But far from withdrawing, South Africa stepped up its attacks. From December 29 to January 3 they constantly fired cannons on and bombed Cuito Cuanavale and the right bank of the Cuito river. On February 13 and 14 they launched artillery attacks with tank superiority and air-backed infantry. Still they failed to take Cuito.

### **Talks**

The failure was due to the combined action of Angolan, Cuban and SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation — Namibian independence group) forces — using air, artillery and armoured and mechanised infantry units. And as defeat of the South African invasion became a certainty, the diplomatic process swung into action. Rounds of talks culminated in the signing of the Tripartite and Bilateral Accords in December 1988. But neither the talks nor the treaties would have taken the form they did without the defeat of South Africa at Cuito Cuanavale, a defeat inflicted by the three forces, but certainly due in large measure to the advice as well as military participation of the Cubans.

If there are those liberals who say that nothing justifies military intervention abroad by any country, whatever its politics, then Cuba, Angola and SWAPO would argue

that a régime like that in Pretoria, enforcing apartheid on its own citizens and with a long history of aggression against its neighbours could never have been brought to the negotiating table by any other means. At the time of writing, the future of the accords and of UN Resolution 435 are in the balance. Cuba has already withdrawn several thousands of its troops, all of whom received heroes' and heroines' welcomes here, from leaders and the population at large. Will they have to return? Nobody wants them to, but I suggest that if they do, they'll receive a supportive send-off too. Cuba had hoped, at this time of financial crisis for the entire Third World, which the socialist countries have not been spared, that the troops could be incorporated into the process of economic development at home. Welcoming the first group home in January 1989, army chief Raúl Castro said: 'We expect our victorious internationalists to immediately join the great battle the country is fighting for economic and social development...' (quoted in *Granma* daily, 12.1.89)

Cuba is engaged in a huge building programme, for example, in which the experiences and strength of ex-Angolan veterans could be well-utilised. It's continuing rapidly with developments far beyond the dreams of most Third World countries, modernising and diversifying all aspects of its economic base. The continuing cost of military aid, and the home defence budget due to the US's belligerent attitude, are a drain on resources they would prefer to use in that development process.

Therefore the speed at which Cuba fulfils its development programme, as well as the future of south western Africa, are in the balance. Will the United States and its allies bring pressure to bear on South Africa to fulfil its part of the bargain made in New York last December? That is the crucial question.



# CULTURAL FRONT

## LOOKING SOUTH

IN the autumn of 1988, Dennis Kennedy published *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State*.\* To its credit, the *Irish Times* serialised this important work. The book has been widely reviewed and most of the reviewers have commended the incisive and scholarly approach which it embodies. Yet there is perhaps a possibility that the wider significance of the work has not yet been grasped.

Kennedy quotes Sir James Craig, shortly to become the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in February 1921: 'The rights of the minority must be sacred to the majority... it will only be by broad views, tolerant ideas and a real desire for liberty of conscience that we here can make an ideal of the Parliament and executive.' As Kennedy goes on to say: 'The rights of the Catholic minority, 430,000 strong and almost 34% of the population, were less than sacred to the majority — broad views and tolerant ideas were in short supply. And Unionists went to great lengths to distance themselves from the rest of Ireland and from any concept of Gaelic nationalism.'

Today, Sir James Craig's words have a hollow ring. This quotation seems destined to ring eerily through the corridors of history, like a similarly hollow one from Garret FitzGerald,

### PAUL BEW considers some of the issues raised in a recent study of Northern attitudes to the Republic.

sixty years later in September 1981. 'We have created something which the northern Protestants find unacceptable. I believe it is my job to try and lead our people to understand how it is we have divided Ireland... If I was a northern Protestant today, I can't see how I could aspire to getting involved in a state which is itself sectarian in the entirely sectarian way Northern Ireland was in which Catholics were represented.'

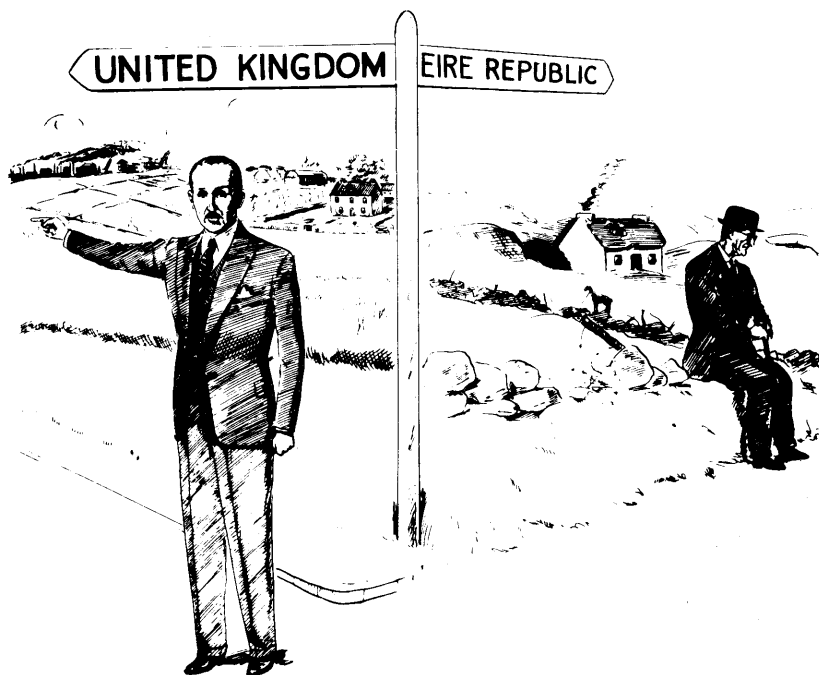
The significance of Kennedy's work is that it provides, at least, a partial explanation for this lamentable state of affairs. As Richard McMinn has put in in the *Linenhall Review* 'Readers of the work of Charles Townshend or Michael Farrell will already be aware of the excesses of the Crown Forces and of the Protestant mobs in Belfast. Kennedy sets alongside these the excesses committed against civilians north and south by the IRA and its supporters.' Part two of the book surveys the developments — de Valera managed to get his 'I am a Catholic

first' in at the Fianna Fáil ard fheis of 1931 just before Craigavon's 'ours is a Protestant government and I am an Orangeman' on 12 July 1932 — which drove north and south further apart. It is a meticulous, well documented study which discusses questions such as the treatment of the Protestant minority in the south in a highly original way. But what are the wider implications of all this?

Everyone today talks about the siege mentality of the Unionists who ran the Northern Ireland state from 1921 to 1972. Since the publication of Dennis Kennedy's *The Widening Gulf*, we have a better understanding of the reasons for that siege mentality. Dr Kennedy reveals how the narrowly sectarian record of ascendant Irish nationalism reinforced prejudice and reduced the space for the expression of the better, more generous impulses, such as they were, of the Unionist leadership. But we still feel along with Dr Kennedy that the Unionists might have done better, especially after 1925, for after this date their position was much more secure. It is not that their fears and irritations were not genuinely felt — it is that the possession of state power imposes a special responsibility on those who hold it. Those who hold state power have the initiative — to expect an equal and reciprocal response from those who feel themselves (not without good reason) to be excluded or traumatised by aspects of government policy is to expect the impossible.

It was, therefore, futile for the Unionist political leadership in the inter war period to sit on their hands and to expect nationalists to drop their 'disloyalism'. But it is equally futile for those who have responsibility for the government of Northern Ireland today to expect an equal and reciprocal response from those — and every poll tells us that they are a substantial number in both communities — who feel themselves excluded and traumatised by official policy since 1985. It is up to the government to look at ways in which the atmosphere might be improved — and this is likely to involve unilateral action of a placatory sort — rather than wait for an autonomous communal drive towards reconciliation which is, however regrettably, rather unlikely.

\* Published by the Blackstaff Press, Belfast; UK£11.95



Unionist election poster presents choice of a prosperous, industrial North, or an impoverished, rural South.

# The reality of racism

**RACISM AND THE PRESS IN THATCHER'S BRITAIN** by Chris Searle and Nancy Murray; Institute of Race Relations;

THIS SMALL pamphlet reproduces two articles from the journal *Race & Class*. They are deeply and doubly depressing. First, because they display the dismal neanderthal racism of current British journalism; second, because it is not at all clear what solutions or ways forward the authors can offer. If you want good examples of vulgar racism, shoddy sensationalism and malicious fabrication, then as we all know — and as Chris Searle shows in his piece — you need look no further than the *Sun*. The problem is that we, (that is intelligent knowledgeable left-of-centrists) already know all this. We do not really need to be persuaded of the *Sun's* awfulness. What we need to know is why people in their millions buy it. Searle is loathe to suggest that the British working class might share some of the *Sun's* politics. Instead we are told that the *Sun* forms part of a 'Murdoch curriculum' designed to divide the white British working class from black people, and that the answer lies in an anti-racist counter-curriculum — 'because the dread of the *Sun* is of an educated working people who will scorn its racism and degradation of women and tear up its pages, armed with the tools of criticism that will know it for what it is.' If the working class is not to have racist and imperialist attitudes, it must be the dumb dupe of the Digger, discovering feminism and anti-racism through an ideologically sound education. Come off it, Chris! Who are you trying to kid?

Nancy Murray reviews the range of attacks that have been mounted on anti-racists and their policies within the British press, from the *Times* through the *Mail* to the *Sun*. The problem with her account is that she tars everything with the same brush. The rhetoric of the New Right is certainly racist. But it has an intellectual self-assurance and sophistication which distinguishes it even from the classically literate diatribes of Enoch Powell. Roger Scruton is not a *Sun* editorialist, and it does not help to imply that in all essential respects he is. At the same time, it is unhelpful to suggest a stark contrast between racists and anti-racists, being a part of the problem or a part of the solution. The terms of the current debate about race are complex and often elusive. When the talk is about 'multi-culturalism', Ray Honeyford presents an elusive and ambiguous bogymen for

## BOOKS

anti-racists. For its part, the Left does not always seem to offer a clear and compelling alternative to the prescriptions of the New Right. Murray dismisses assimilation as 'acquiescence in the racist status quo'. She is probably right to do so, but what then should the non-racist society look like?

Racism is a pernicious and sadly prevalent political evil. It embarrasses a Left who are disappointed in the hope that class will always subvert and supplant race as an organising ideal and badge of membership. But it is a reality. It requires more than an angry listing of arch-demons. It needs to be understood and a compelling alternative defended. Without that I am afraid that the *Sun* and the message it peddles will continue to soar away.

*David Archard*



'Salvadoreans in Sanctuary worship at a church in Chicago.' One of the photographs from *Forced Out: The Agony of the Refugee in Our Time* by Carole Kismaric, with a commentary by William Shawcross. (Penguin Books, UK£12.95.)

The Red Dancer (detail) Kees van Dongen



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