

*m a k i n g*  
**SENSE**

**ANGLO-IRISH DISCORD**  
**THE LEFT & THE DEBT CRISIS**  
**LIFE & DEATH IN WEST BELFAST**  
**PARIS '68**  
**ALTHUSSER/DIME NOVELS**



**Proinsias de Rossa**  
**interview**





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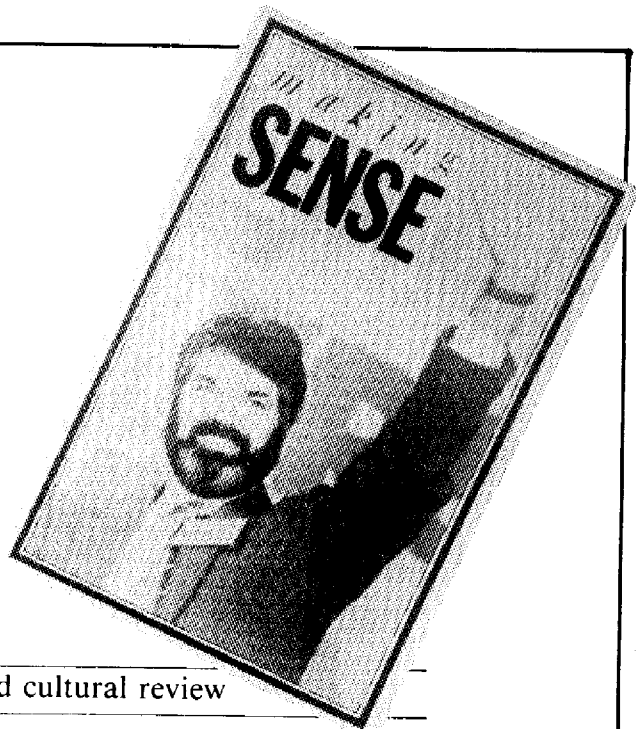
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Ireland's political and cultural review

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Number 1 Summer 1988

- 5** Mary Maher talks to Proinsias de Rossa T.D., newly-elected President of The Workers' Party
- 8** Many optimistic claims were made on behalf of the Anglo-Irish Agreement when it was signed three years ago. Paul Bew explains why they are no longer tenable
- 10** 'While others will strive for publicity, the IRA will kill for it' — Media File
- 11** Paul Sweeney outlines a socialist approach to the debt crisis
- 14** Rosheen Callender argues that social insurance pensions for the self-employed are right in principle, but wrong in practice
- 16** Mary McMahon considers some questions of life and death in West Belfast
- 18** Derry McDermott ponders the Tories' appeal to women
- 21** Maurice Goldring recalls the heady days of May 1968 in Paris
- 22** 'The nation today is living through a difficult but inspiring time...' Victor Kiselev, a senior research associate of the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, looks at the evolution of the theory of socialism and its application
- 25** Lorraine Kennedy examines some recent developments in Irish cinema
- 27** Book reviews: Henry Patterson *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*; Aidan Parkinson *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America*

## 'The murderers — my country'

FUTURE STUDIES of Irish nationalism with any claim to authority will draw heavily on the exposition of nationalist sentiment by Desmond O'Hare in Green Street Court in April. The delivery was crude, but every word rang true. It got to the heart of the matter, and laid bare the anglophobia, the land hunger, and — above all — the hatred of Protestants which lie at the heart of militant Catholic nationalism. It also gave clear expression to the obsession with violence and death which has long since subsumed any progressive or positive dimension to nationalism in Ireland.

There can no longer be any doubt as to the real intent of the various gangs who murder and maim in the name of Ireland. The aim is not to 'bomb a million Protestants into a United Ireland', but to terrorise them *out* of Northern Ireland. There should no longer be any room for ambivalence on this score.

But ambivalence continues and so long as it does terrorism will thrive. Ambivalence is so deeply ingrained that nationalist political and religious leaders found enormous difficulty in arriving at a position of outright condemnation of the Sinn Féin/IRA axis. It took the massacre of eleven Protestants at Enniskillen last November to finally shame them into it.

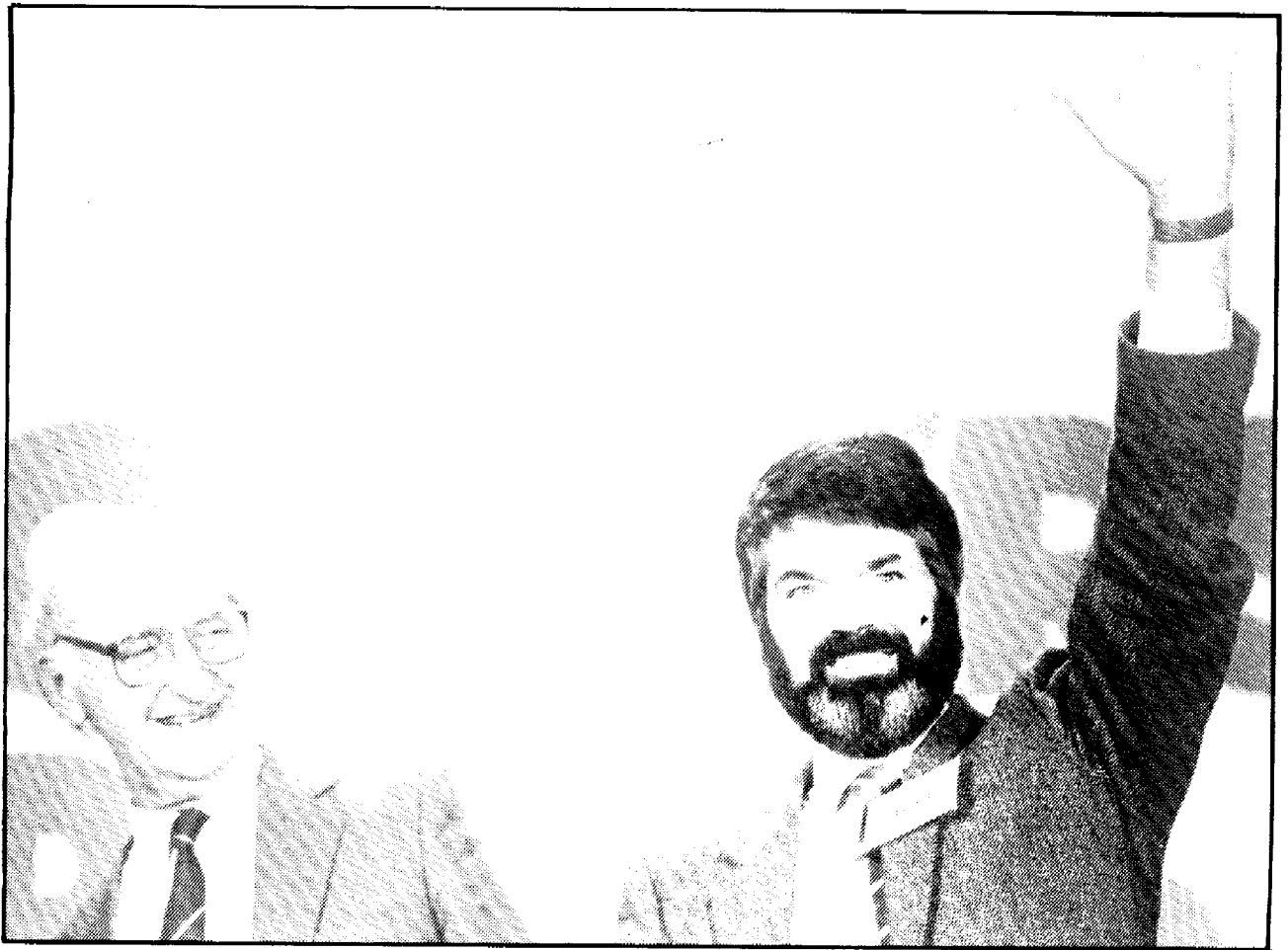
Enniskillen was an act of sheer terror on a par with the neo-fascist bombing of Bologna in August 1980. Nobody — not even its cowardly perpetrators — could condone it. The Sinn Féin/IRA 'apology' was almost as sickening as the act it sought to disown. But the Provisionals cannot disown murder; they are in the business of murder, and it is the business they obviously intend to continue.

In this, they will be encouraged by the invitation to talks with the SDLP, and by the possibility of an invitation to a 'constitutional conference' *a la* Charles Haughey. There are those who argue that any effort to secure peace is justified. So it is, but the Provisionals have asserted that peace will only come about following a British withdrawal. (This, of course, is typical Provisional double-talk: British withdrawal in the present climate would lead to a sectarian bloodbath.) The SDLP is fully aware of Sinn Féin/IRA thinking on this question, and obviously saw the talks leading in another direction — possibly to the formation of a Catholic Front in time for the review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The democratic way forward lies in the opposite direction. It requires an immediate end to ambivalence — from whatever quarter; there can be no 'ifs' or 'buts' about terrorism. It also requires the active participation of the mass of the people in the struggle against terrorism. And it requires committed political leadership to prosecute the struggle.

The first step in the struggle is to recognise that the terrorists, their fellow-travellers — together with the more circumspect 'sneaking regards' — are in our midst. This is simply to recognise as Brecht did: 'The murderers — my country'.

The terrorists therefore must be isolated, and not allowed to masquerade as 'patriots', 'freedom fighters' or under any such grandiose titles. Their deadly mixture of the Armalite and the ballot box must be rejected. And their claims to speak and act on behalf of 'the people' must be repudiated — something best done by the people themselves.



*Outgoing Workers' Party President Tomás Mac Giolla TD (left) and his successor Proinsias de Rossa TD.*

## THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

**MARY MAHER talks to Proinsias de Rossa TD, newly-elected President of The Workers' Party.**

SIT in the press gallery of the Dáil any length of time, and you get familiar with the style of the elected representatives. There are bustlers, there are amblers; there are provocative punters, armed with jibes and waiting for targets, or the solemn and somewhat disdainful; then there are the amiable ones strolling in and out with slightly vacant smiles. Party leaders generally try to project a little stage presence on the scene — not quite regal, but definitely commanding.

It is difficult to imagine Deputy de Rossa, though, looking other than he does, which is calm and slightly inscrutable. His expression rarely gives anything away. He is not above putting a swift dig into a

speech, but he almost never engages in the banter which is the Dáil version of blood sport. He is not playful. Even his opponents concede that he is one of those deputies who speaks only because he has something to say. There are few enough.

These days he's doing quite a lot of speaking, a lot of it in private. Since he was elected Workers' Party leader in mid-April he has been in talks — with the Labour Party leader, Dick Spring, and Jim Kemmy, leader of the Democratic Socialist Party; in the North, with the leaders of the Official Unionists, Alliance and the SDLP.

He is cautious, but hopeful, that something will come of all the

talking, and it is already clear that he would like his term of leadership to be characterised by a movement outward and upward in the party. 'I think it's important that the Party goes out and embraces a whole range of issues; they are all part of our struggle. We need to ensure, always, that our direction is outward and our philosophy is positive.'

### **Liberation**

He does not think in terms of listing priorities so much as encompassing all concerns, and accepting that the Workers' Party have not yet got all the answers. He has been singularly good in the Dáil on women's issues, and at an early stage in his parliamentary career startled the august chamber by raising the question of a creche for all parents whose work took them to the Dáil. 'I believe it's important not to have

off certain issues as women's issues and separate from the main issues. Women's liberation must be an essential part of the liberation of the working class.'

But he is less sure about the shape of the family in a socialist state: 'Well, there are biological realities that dictate the process of procreation, and human and social realities of relationships, and socialism has made an attempt, but hasn't really come to terms yet with how the state should relate to these facts. In many areas, how you struggle for objectives determines what you get at the end.'

This means, for de Rossa, that the struggle must be in line with a positive philosophy. 'When I was speaking to the IMI conference just after I was elected leader, I said that socialism offered a positive view of life. Capitalism has sold the idea that the socialist philosophy is a dead and restrictive thing. In fact, what we are about is freedom.'

#### **Freedom**

The concept of freedom was what first intrigued him about politics. He had no interest at all when he joined the Fianna at the age of 12. He joined because his mate from school was in it, and had assured him that 'there was great scouting and hiking and all that.' Given the nature of the Fianna, all that turned out to be rather more than boys learning to conquer the great outdoors.

The lessons were also about politics, and in the 1950s in Ireland, that meant the North, and freedom. 'De Valera was stomping the country about getting the Six Counties back; the IRA campaign had begun again.' He says that he had only the most romantic idea of what the word 'freedom' was about, but felt it had very practical implications, such as work and the possibility of living in Ireland. 'You have to remember that unemployment was massive. There were queues at the docks, every day, going to Liverpool. The teachers in schools told us to go to England, that it was the only option.'

The teachers also reminded them that Emmet's epitaph could not yet be written. Ireland was unfree, and Partition was the obvious identifiable reason. He remembers a particular poster of the time that underscored the easy link between

poverty, unemployment and the campaign to reclaim the North — a green map with an orange corner, and the slogan 'Fight Your Corner — Don't Emigrate.'

The same simple line, he says, is still being pumped out by the Provisionals and it fails to take account either of the manner in which Ireland, now and even then, was making its peace with international capitalism, or of the actual concerns of the people living in Ireland.

#### **Process of change**

In 1956 four Sinn Féin TDs were elected, and in May of 1957, a week after his 17th birthday, de Rossa was rounded up with a number of others and sent off to further his education in the Curragh. There he found more talk of freedom, and more considered argument that continued into the early '60s on what it was and how it was achieved.

### **'What we're about is humanising life, giving people a real life, here on earth.'**

He has great admiration for the leadership of that period who began the painful process of change. 'It took a major effort to stand back and look at the realities, to accept that the task was to organise the people of Ireland to liberate themselves instead of remaining a conspiratorial army doing that for them.'

He stayed in the organisation as it moved into social action campaigns of the 1960s. Did he ever feel like bailing out? 'Oh, often!' But he didn't; and he says he supposes what sustained him was still the idea that freedom was a goal to be pursued. 'There were so many inequities in Ireland — people talk about the '60s as being prosperous and liberated, but there were still 60,000 people unemployed in the state, there were 20,000 homeless, there was the same oppression.'

As the party evolved, it went through internal struggles not once but several times. His personal decision against physical force came

relatively early. 'It was a very minor thing, back in the '60s. A train was hijacked and it made no sense to me. Shortly after that I began to withdraw from that side of things.' This is not to be taken as a reflection on those for whom that decision came later, he added; the evolution of a political party is a process and full support for decisions is only won gradually.

#### **'That is our past'**

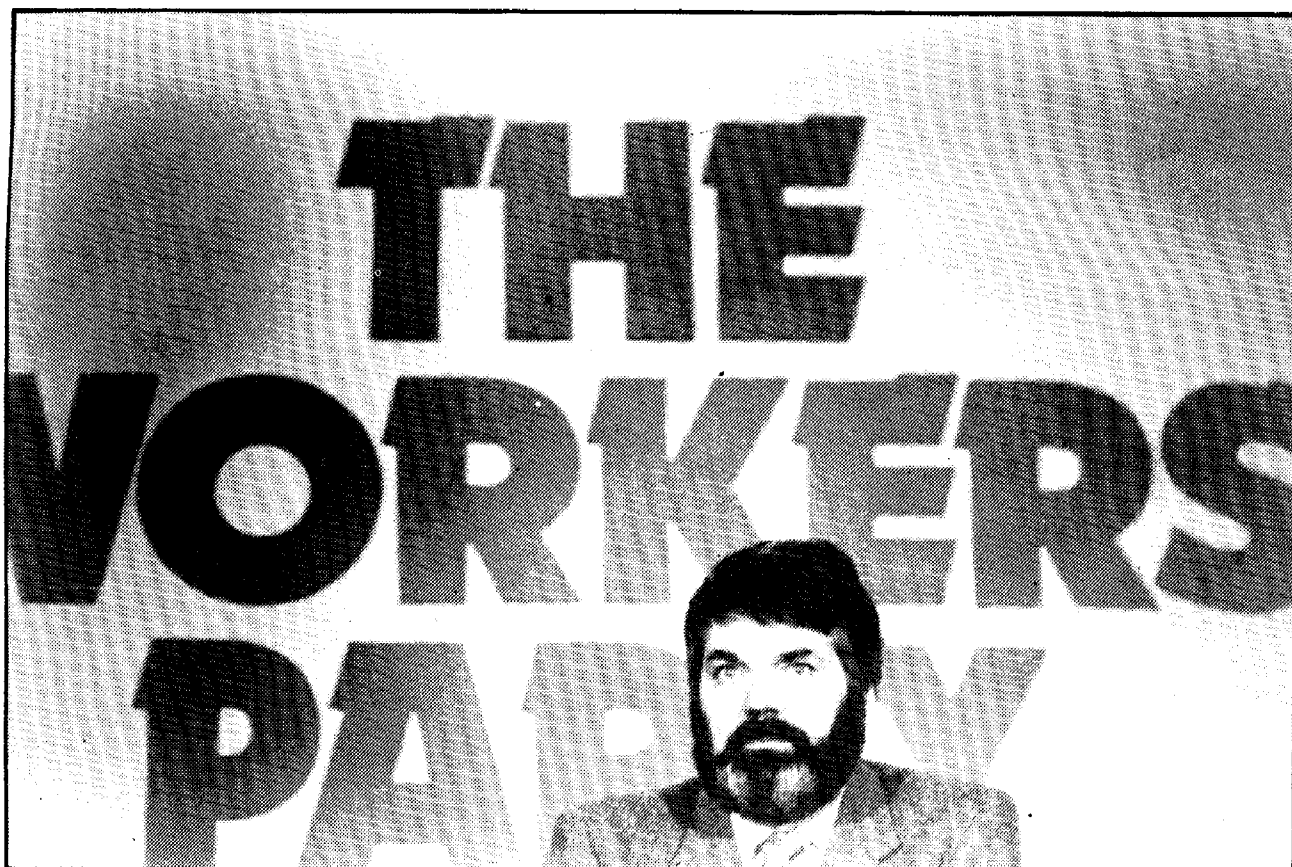
What of the whiff of ammunition that still trails after the Workers' Party today, the allegation that units of an Official IRA remain in operation in Northern Ireland? How was the Official IRA finally disbanded? De Rossa responds with some irony. 'When did Fianna Fáil disband its army? When did Labour disband the Citizens' Army?'

He believes that political opponents will continue to use the military scare against the Workers' Party as long as possible, and it doesn't concern him unduly. The Party can only point to its record: 'We have made it quite clear, again and again, we are totally opposed to sectarian violence in the North, and committed to pursuing our goals in peace and through democratic procedures. We have stood our ground, and we have won the right to say "That is our past".'

He says that the record of support in the North from both sides, while still small, is the strongest proof of that right. He carefully avoids talking in the terms of the religious traditions, and describes the working class of Northern Ireland as a single community divided on sectarian lines. The division was fostered by both Unionists and Nationalists for many years for electoral advantage which didn't serve the interests of workers, and now, he says, the Provos and the UVF have driven the single community apart.

Nor is it difficult to understand why that should be so. 'If there's a brick wall at the end of your street and the people on the other side are threatening to kill you, and people on your side promise to defend you, you will support your own. I have no doubt that there are people who support the Provos electorally who would not support their military campaign, but they have been driven into this position.'

And contrary to what is some-



*'It's necessary to demonstrate that politics can work'*

times perceived, the party's policy on Northern Ireland has not changed over twenty years. 'Our objective is a 32 county socialist Republic. We believe that cannot be achieved without the support of both communities through democratic struggle.'

#### **Democratic struggle**

It is the commitment to 'democratic struggle' that is the basis for the talks de Rossa has set out to have with political parties in the North since he became leader. 'We have nothing in common economically with, for instance, the Official Unionists. What I hope we do have in common is a commitment to the right each of us has to struggle democratically for changes in society. But there is a necessity for agreement on democracy in Northern Ireland, and on the need for a democratic forum within Northern Ireland.'

In the Republic, he sees a necessity for a different kind of agreement, and to that end he has been talking to those with whom the party does have something in common economically, the parties on the Left. This, too, he sees as part of the commitment to 'demo-

cratic struggle' by putting in long and diligent effort in the parliamentary system; and again, even the Workers' Party's opponents admire their performance in the Dáil.

'Well, it's necessary to be there, to demonstrate that politics can work; that the choice is not between emigration and despair, or the Provos. It is possible to make progress in this system. There will come a point when it is not possible, when a choice will have to be made about what system we have.'

#### **Left co-operation**

That is the point toward which the Left should now work in unison. How? 'There are basic ground rules — mutual respect for each other, a commitment to avoid sniping about personalities, or about peripheral matters; and agreement to co-operate wherever possible on specific issues.'

In de Rossa's view, this should emphatically mean co-operation outside the Dáil as well as inside it. 'It is outside the Dáil that the Left has to grow if we are to go anywhere. If the Left is to succeed we must be able to persuade the working class that there is an alternative,

a credible alternative, to what we now have; an alternative vision of society. The Left has to get out on the doorsteps and bring politics to people.'

That people prove steadfastly resistant to the Left doesn't worry him much either. 'There's a Marxist dicta that says that "the dominant common sense of any age will be the view of the dominant class."' In this age, that means workers accept cuts that injure themselves and vote for right-wing parties, and that is exactly why, he points out, it is now so necessary for left-wing parties to pull together in bringing home the idea that there is a real alternative. 'You're working against the tide all the time. It's a question of matching the parliamentary activity with extra-parliamentary activity, building to a political movement.'

What that movement should be about brings him back to a starting point, a vision of freedom. 'We're not just about running a more efficient society. We have examples now of more efficient capitalist societies, and of less efficient socialist societies. What we're about is humanising life, giving people a real life, here, on earth. We're about the liberation of humanity.'







# ANGLO-IRISH DISCORD

## Mindless optimism cannot disguise the failings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement argues PAUL BEW

IT IS possible to argue endlessly about the ultimate purposes of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Was it about strengthening the Union as Margaret Thatcher, Charles Haughey (and even Sir Robert Armstrong) said? Was it a first step to a United Ireland as Seamus Mallon said? Was it about the end of Irish irredentism as Garret FitzGerald put it at Edinburgh? Or was it about getting Protestants to question the Union as Mary Holland argues in her *Irish Times* articles? It hardly matters; while some are still in mystic transcendent flight above the grimy realities ('the framework of the solution', John Hume, or the 'problem is solved but not settled', Richard Needham), with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, what you see is what you get — a more unstable form of direct rule: 97 deaths in 1987 as against 54 in 1985.

The worst aspect of all this is that there appears to be no benign way out. Some believe it will be possible to replace this Agreement with something which is more Unionist or more Nationalist according to taste. In the foreseeable future this seems to be unlikely. Others believe that the Agreement will eventually work to achieve 'peace' and 'reconciliation' over a ten or twenty year period. Nobody can argue against this with certainty — and I certainly hope it is true — but in the long run we are all dead anyway. Unfortunately, at the moment it seems unlikely.

The best we can hope for is that those close to the Agreement slacken up on their penchant for obfuscating and self-deceiving formulae ('the healing process', 'the table is the thing' etc), and come to terms with the reality of a deteriorating environment.

### Mindless optimism

At the moment, rather than face up

to this, the Northern Ireland Office and the media prefer to engage in a bout of mindless optimism. Endless newspaper articles have appeared implying that a breakthrough may soon be possible. The most substantial reason for believing this is the adoption by Jim Molyneux, the Official Unionist leader, of Charles Haughey's phrase the 'totality of relationships'. Yet Molyneux clearly means by this that Unionists could support a new Agreement which did not discriminate against Ulster Unionists by having a purely six-county focus; in other words, it would have to protect the rights of Irish nationals throughout the United Kingdom.

If the British and Irish governments were prepared to accept such a symbolic change, it might unlock the political situation. It might then be possible to capitalise on the obvious desire of some Unionists for compromise. If the two governments do not respond, then the Unionist leadership will be seen by their supporters to have advanced a reasonable, flexible proposal and been snubbed. A new ice age will set in. As last month's *Fortnight* poll has indicated, the Unionist community remains as implacably opposed to the Agreement as ever and there has been a significant shift away from support for power sharing and devolution (17%) towards integration (47%).

### Adams/Hume talks

On the Nationalist side, the most crucial development has been the Sinn Féin/SDLP talks. In the early phase of the Hillsborough Accord, the Agreement strategists insisted that the Agreement would lead to the political isolation of Sinn Féin. When a sloppy Marplan poll in September 1986 gave Sinn Féin a mere 3% of public support, Stormont Minister Nick Scott touted this as a triumph for the

Agreement. In the end, Sinn Féin's share of the vote fell only slightly; from an 11.8% share in the local government elections of 1985 to 11.4% in the parliamentary elections of 1987.

If the Sinn Féin electoral melt down had occurred, it is doubtful if the Adams/Hume talks would now be taking place. Whatever their outcome, it is clear that the insistence of Seamus Mallon that Sinn Féin should participate in eventual round table negotiations with the Unionists has further alienated a section of protestant opinion.

### Failed strategy

All this leaves precious little room for optimism. The relations between the two governments have been soured by 'Stalkergate', the Birmingham Six case and Gibraltar, plus a host of other incidents. Inter-governmental relations will inevitably improve as these fade into the background, but there still is the complex of knotty political and legal questions surrounding extradition. Even if extradition were to work smoothly, would it be good for the SDLP? And if it does not, will it further contribute to Thatcher's reduced expectations?

It is possible to conceive of a sensitive political package which would reassure protestants in the political sphere by separating questions of reform from creeping unification and whilst reducing catholic grievance on the economic sphere. There is no overwhelming obstacle to such a package — but it would require an implicit acknowledgement by the British government that the strategy of November 1985 has, at least, in some important respects (though certainly not all from their point of view) failed. Such an admission is unlikely; it is equally unlikely however, that the two governments will regain the initiative and sense of a shared strategy — leading to devolution within the framework of the Agreement — which they had in late '85 and early '86.

# Dying for a few paragraphs

EVERYBODY wants it but some will go to greater lengths than others to get it. Ministers pull strokes for it, political parties appoint full time staff to make sure they get a share of it and Dick Spring rings RTE on a frequent basis to complain that the Labour Party is not getting it regularly.

Publicity is what is in so much demand and in the first week in May the IRA came out and confirmed what most of us had suspected for a very long time. While others will strive for publicity the IRA will *kill* for it.

The murder of three RAF men in Holland as socialists celebrated May Day, was described by 'sources close to the IRA' as having been committed as a major propaganda coup.

The fact is that a democratically elected TD from the Workers' Party or Labour might put weeks of work into a Dáil speech or a constituency project without gaining as much as a paragraph in the national papers or even a fleeting appearance on television while the Provos can control acres of space and prime TV time at the squeeze of a trigger.

Behind the scenes it is now being admitted that the IRA's campaign of violence cannot bring victory in the terms of forcing the British out of Ireland. What is going on at present, they freely admit, is a publicity war.

The men who died at Loughgall and the men and woman who died in Gibraltar did not, it follows, die for Ireland, they died for the Nine O'Clock news. The air force personnel killed in Holland lost their lives because the IRA felt left behind in the publicity race.

Judged in this context even the massacre at Enniskillen can be regarded as a success by the IRA.

And successes are easily come by. At the moment, there is a circulation war in full swing between two of the national morning papers. The *Daily Fortuna* relentlessly struggles for readership with the new tabloid *Daily Bonanza*. The new 'Irish' *Star* struggles for survival after the collapse of its predicted 100,000 sales to a figure of around 45,000.

Hard cash is being thrown at readers, anything that will gain extra sales is regarded as legitimate, and there is no better boost to circulation than a good old IRA massacre, the gorier the better.

In essence, therefore, the Provos can

## media FILE

control the national media. They can continuously hog the front pages while politicians who have taken the road of legitimacy are squeezed out. Saving a hospital from closure is not as newsworthy as filling a hospital with bodies.

And this manipulation of the press is not confined to the *Star* the *Fortuna* or the *Bonanza*. The old lady of d'Olier Street, the *Irish Times*, is every bit as susceptible as the others.

Recently the *Times* editorialised that it was hard to differentiate between the evil involved in the killing of the two Signals Corps corporals in Andersonstown, and the killing of Gillian Johnston the girl who went to buy chips in County Fermanagh.

In the very same issue, the *Times* answered its own question. It gave more than ten times as much space to the killing of the soldiers than the killing of the young woman. The judgement was that the murder of the soldiers was a 'sexier' story than the murder of the young protestant woman.

The action in Andersonstown had been seen by millions on TV whereas the action in Fermanagh had been seen only by those who had pumped more than forty bullets into the body of the innocent girl.

The *Irish Times*, therefore, while not part of the giveaway circulation war, is undoubtedly affected by it. The paper now finds itself with no competitors for the lucrative top-end of the market. The *Press* and *Independent* have dragged each other downwards in the course of the circulation struggle. They are now in competition with the inanities of the *Star* rather than the solidity of the *Times*.

For its part the *Times* has begun to feel more confident and the result has been a drift so far to the right that many of its foreign editorials seem like reprints from the pages of the American press of the Cold War years.

In an editorial on Hong Kong the *Times* described China as 'the incoming colonial power' thus suggesting, ludicrously, that Hong Kong was not an integral part of China. In another leader on the Olympic Games the paper referred to tunnels dug by 'communist sappers' to bomb parts of the South Korea. The use of the word 'communist' in this sense is typical cold-war speak. South African police, for example, are never described in the *Times* as 'capitalist constables'.

Perhaps the worst incident was a headline which suggested that one of the hijackers of the Kuwaiti Airlines jet had links with the Soviet Union. There was no truth in the allegation.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the paper's issue of May 2, the murder of the RAF men received the full treatment. Twenty four paragraphs, eight per body, on the front page and more inside. In other words it got almost as much attention as the shenanigans of the bosses at the IMI conference in Killarney.

In contrast, the biggest May Day parade Dublin has seen in decades passed off in comradely harmony and goodwill as thousands celebrated the left's great festival. The *Irish Times* did not consider this event to be worth even a passing reference. The parade was not mentioned either in the *Daily Fortuna* or the *Daily Bonanza*.

Good news is no news



Endymion

# THE DEBT CRISIS HAS THE LEFT GOT THE RIGHT ANSWER?

*Paul Sweeney*

MARGARET THATCHER is fond of using analogies to promote her economic policies — an effective legacy from her grocer background. Similarly, the three conservative parties in Ireland have coined a simple analogy to explain Ireland's economic crisis and the debt. They say that Ireland is like a family with one PAYE income of £10,000 a year, which is spending £12,000, including interest on loans for the house, video, car, TV, etc. The only way to make ends meet is to cut back on spending and perhaps sell off a few assets. It's difficult to argue with this.

However, it is a false analogy. Ireland's economy should not be

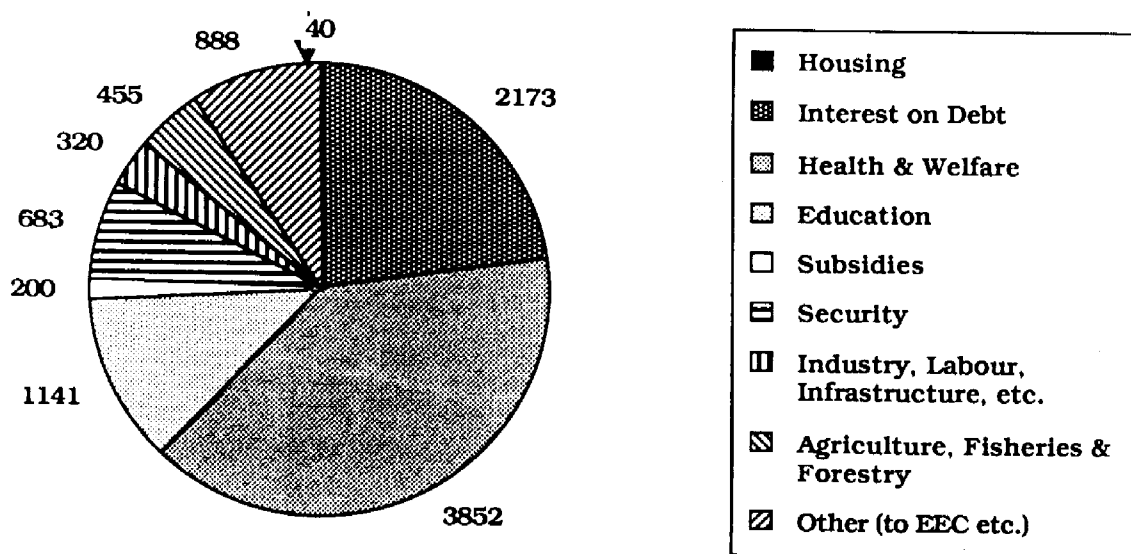
compared to a family on a fixed income, but to a firm. It is like a firm, a family firm, with an income of £10,000 a year and costs of £12,000. Cut-backs are not the solution. To make ends meet the firm must stop selling below cost (tax avoidance), stamp out theft (tax evasion), and collect debts (uncollected taxes), and if they want to give jobs to growing teenagers, then they must expand by selling new lines of goods and services (i.e. implement an effective, interventionist industrial policy.) An economy must not be compared to a family on a fixed income, but to a firm with the opportunity to effect many changes.

## Size of the debt

At the end of 1987, the debt was £26,345 million, 152% of GNP. Interest payments will amount to £2,173 million this year, or 22% of all government spending. 40% of the debt is foreign and interest on this is a net loss to the economy, though other outflows exceed these interest payments.

The biggest element of outflows are profits, dividends and royalties, at £1,346 million in 1986, compared to debt interest of £761 million. Other outflows give a gross outflow of £2,695 million. This figure is expected to increase over the next few years and the ESRI has estimated that it has knocked 2%

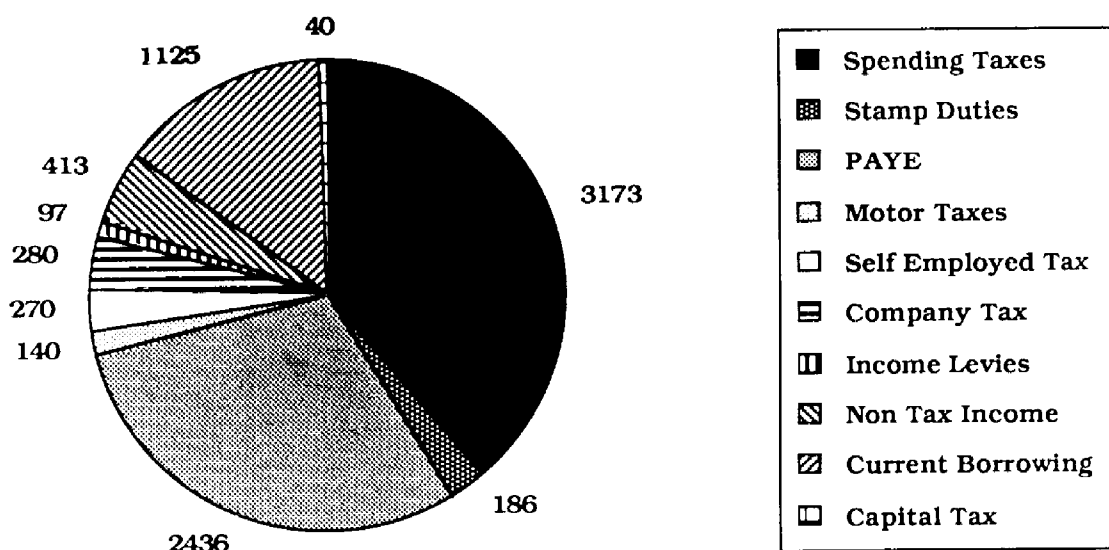
**GOVERNMENT SPENDING 1988 (£m)**  
(Source: Principal Features of the Budget, 1988)





## GOVERNMENT INCOME IN 1988 (£m)

(Source: Principle Features of the Budget 1988)



off Ireland's growth rate each year for the past six years. Considering that growth has averaged 1.8% a year for the past five years, the outflows have more than halved the rate of growth in the economy, a point ignored by many.

The debt was run up in just ten years, from 1972-1981 inclusive. There has been a surplus of tax over spending on services for the past six years, with interest payments eating up more than the surplus in tax. The debt continued to rise because of high real rates of interest internationally, adverse exchange rates and the low rate of growth of GNP. Even with the cutbacks, the government still had to borrow £1,700 million this year.

### Stabilisation

It is now agreed by all, including the ICTU, that the debt must be stabilised or held still, as a proportion of GNP. There is, however, strong disagreement as to how this is to be done, with the conservatives going for cuts in spending, which are simultaneously reducing GNP and making the task more difficult. They focus only on one side of the equation — spending. They ignore the income or taxation side, and this is the fundamental flaw in their strategy.

That does not mean that their strategy to stabilise the debt by 1991 will not work. It may, but at great social and economic cost, with lower growth, lower employment, a

lower population and lower living standards.

### The socialist approach

Socialists have argued, correctly, that there must be a two-pronged approach to the debt. On the one hand, there must be a reform of state spending, on both the current and the capital side, and within the public sector and in aids and subsidies to the private sector. On the other, there must be total tax reform. There is always room for increased efficiency in the public (and private) sector and there are many excellent reports, from NESC, ESRI, etc., and individual social scientists which would improve efficiency and savings, if they were dusted down and implemented.

The parliamentary representation of Irish socialism is quantitatively weaker now than in the past, accentuated by the qualitative changes in ideology of the main parties, which has been assisted by the emergence of a 'straight right' party (the Progressive Democrats), and the international swing to the Right. However, countervailing these changes, is a qualitative improvement in those parliamentary socialists and in some in particular, which reflects the substantial development of socialists' understanding of politics in general — in particular, the national question and in the workings of the economy within the world economy, and also

in socialist thought.

There is a danger that the emergence of the Left/Right divide in Ireland may take effect with a massive imbalance, with most people moving to the Right. This is something over which socialists have a major influence, and there never has been such an onus on us to develop a feasible alternative to the kind of society which the conservatives are creating. The solution to the debt crisis outlined here is a 'managerial' or 'technicist' approach, which exposes the contradictions in that of the conservatives, and it proposes a more efficient capitalism than that of the capitalists'.

Is this a sell-out? Is it reformism? It is not a sell-out but it is advocating progressive reforms, which, if implemented, would improve society, create jobs, reduce the debt and the interest on it, etc. It runs counter to the emiseration theories of those who hold that socialists must stand by and let things get worse until the working class turns and requests that socialists take over. This is a first step in promoting socialism as an alternative practical philosophy to Irish people, most of whom do not as yet have a clear view of what it stands for. The word 'socialist' conjures up muddled images of social justice, caring, idealism, Cuba, mingled with negative images of unlimited public spending, CIE, and Pol Pot! As we develop our



*PAYE workers still await tax reform*

practical socialism, simultaneously we must begin to work on a clear understanding of what socialist means to us, including an image of what kind of society we aspire to, based on the world we live in.

### Reforms

On public spending which aids the private sector, the hand-out regime must be replaced with an active participative one, where returns are expected on public investment in private enterprise. Industry alone gets £400 million a year, plus £900 million a year in tax breaks from the taxpayer. Its return is zero in financial terms, and with 46,000 (or 20%) job losses since 1980 it makes the least efficient public enterprise look like a paragon of efficiency.

Other cuts in public spending should include changes in the system of paying doctors, chemists, consultants, etc., and reducing subsidies to private schools, to vets and farmers (including the scandalous disease eradication programmes) and to the mushrooming health system.

On the question of tax reform, too much has been said and too little

done. It is now imperative that there is reform, even from a technically efficient capitalist point of view. Can we afford to have the banks, building societies, foreign and domestic manufacturers and financial services, all totally exempt from making any contribution to the running of the state, when it is in crisis? Why is there little or no tax on property, wealth, farming, and widespread evasion and avoidance, at this time of crisis? When Tony O'Reilly or his newspapers bemoan the high personal rates of taxation, do they forget that as the conservative *Economist* magazine said of Ireland that it is 'awful for earners, lovely for property and profits'? The debt cannot be repaid out of cuts. It has to come from taxes.

Industrial policy has ceased to work. Foreign firms are repatriating all their profits, they have low linkages; and new foreign investment is drying up. Successful indigenous firms prefer to invest abroad and sustain jobs there with growth by acquisition. Therefore, the only way forward is through a more active interventionist

industrial policy, funded by tax reform and an end to the 'business men's dole', to no-obligation grants and the subsidy spongers.

### Immediate strategy

The immediate strategy of socialists must be to seek:

- A minimum effective tax of 10% on all manufacturing profits
- Conversion of most state grants to equity or loans
- A total tax reform package — need more be said?
- Charges for the myriad of free services to industry, tourism, and farming, to be raised progressively each year to the full economic cost, in three years
- Nationalisation of the banks and building societies, first having adjusted their share value with the necessary changes in monetary policy. Nationalisation, not because of the size of their profits, but because of their importance in the economy
- Increased investment spending by the state, after a task force of economists etc. have reappraised the return on capital spending to make it more effective
- New public enterprises in growth areas, having been identified by another multidisciplinary task force
- Purchase of growth companies, licences etc. abroad and ship them back
- A cost-benefit analysis of the present programme for redundancies in the public service, with negotiation and agreement with the unions to build a better efficient consumer-oriented public service

### One voice

The flaws in government strategy, which focuses only on the spending side, must be highlighted. The only development strategy being pursued is the Custom House Docks, based on a dubious tax exemption strategy. There is room for reform of public spending, particularly where it is inequitable and ineffective, but in addition, taxation has to be reformed. It is important that trade unionists and socialists get down to deepening our understanding of the economy in crisis and to speak with one voice on persuading the working class that there is an alternative to stagnation, inequity, despair, emigration, and lower living standards.

# PRSI for all (more or less)

THERE HAS been surprisingly little serious debate about the government's decision to extend PRSI to the self-employed this year.

The farmers must be secretly delighted at getting off so lightly — a contribution of 3% (even if it gets collected and even if it rises to 4% next year and 5% the year after) won't amount to much when calculated on earnings less capital allowances. And overall, it won't cover more than 18% (rising to 24% and 30%) of the cost of providing the self-employed with fairly generous contributory social welfare pensions. The Exchequer — still, mostly, the PAYE taxpayer — will have to pick up the tab for the rest. No wonder the IFA 'protests' were such a token affair; and that only the doctors — out of all the other self-employed groups — rowed in behind them.

The employers haven't said much on this issue, although they must have some worries about the long-term cost implications. Trade union demands for a more realistic contribution rate were seen by the media as farmer-bashing and largely ignored. Representatives of the pensions and life assurance industry made their views known mainly through the National Pensions Board, rather than the national media. (They did not want to be seen as 'too political'.) And the National Pensions Board, whose brief was (among other things) to assess this question and make recommendations to the Minister for Social Welfare, worked hard to produce a detailed report — which has since been studiously ignored.

In the Dáil, all the opposition parties opposed the government proposal — but for different reasons. Many of these reasons were ill-considered and betrayed ignorance of crucial issues.

In the media, a few commentators — very few — tried to grapple with the points at issue. Some serious objections were raised and appeals for further debate were made. However, there was little or no response and at this stage the matter has virtually died a death.

## FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

The truth is that extending PRSI to the self-employed was, briefly, a hot political potato. However, for their various reasons, most people dropped it as soon as they decently could.

This does not mean it will quietly go away. Far from it — the problems inherent in Fianna Fáil's decision will grow rapidly unless addressed. The implications of that decision are numerous, serious and very far-

## ROSHEEN CALLENDER argues that social insurance pensions for the self-employed are right in principle, but wrong in practice.

reaching; they must be examined.

Why bring another 250,000 people into the PRSI system? Especially when they won't be paying their way? And when the PRSI system has been widely criticised for being regressive, costly, a 'tax on employment' and a 'disincentive to work'?

In my view, there are several good reasons for bringing the self-employed into social insurance for purposes of pensions cover. This has now been done — but the reasons are not widely appreciated or agreed. There are also strong reasons for bringing them in at a contribution rate which is fair, both in financial and other terms — and of course this has *not* been done.

Perhaps the main reason for extending PRSI to the self-employed is the nature of the workforce, now and especially in the future. There has always been some movement, in Ireland, from employee to self-employed status and vice versa. However, this movement is now increasing, as is the relative size of the self-employed sector. Also, a high proportion of the non-farming self-employed comprises former (and potential) employees — mainly contract or 'own-account' workers whose status often derives from redundancy or prolonged unemployment; who work on their own, without any employees, any 'job security', or any legal protections; and whose assets are generally minimal.

## CLEAR NEED

Farmers make up about half of Ireland's self-employed, but of the rest, about two-thirds are 'own-account' workers. For them, the need for social insurance is very clear; and if possible, it should be on the same basis as for employees, with whom they may be frequently interchangeable. While they are working, they should be contributing on a pay-related basis, like most employees; and this should give them state pensions cover, as of right, when they reach a certain age.

Indeed, for all self-employed persons, it should be seen as preferable — and infinitely more

dignified — to make social insurance contributions while working, and then receive contributory pensions, than to depend on non-contributory, means-tested pensions which are an increasingly burdensome and unacceptable drain on the taxpayer. The problem is that for the farming self-employed, especially, non-contributory pensions (which are almost as high as contributory ones) have come to be viewed as an entitlement; and the question of who finances these pensions has never been fairly and squarely faced by them. In other words, when you're used to getting something for 'free' (i.e. at someone else's expense), it's hard to start paying for it yourself.

The decision to ask the self-employed to start paying for their pensions is a correct one. However, the decision to 'ease them in' with a purely token contribution rate is extremely dangerous if — as seems clear — there is no intention of raising it quickly and substantially. Certainly, it will raise some revenue where none was raised before; and will reduce the cost of non-contributory pensions in the long run. However, it will build up an enormous bill for future contributory pensions.

If the self-employed are to be paid the same level of pensions as employees, it is essential that their contribution rates be raised very soon, to a level which demands, *at most*, the same contribution from the taxpayer as do employee pensions.

The National Pensions Board (NPB) did costings on this and concluded that if the self-employed were to pay the same as employees and employers pay in respect of employees' pensions (with an adjustment for the tax-relief which is allowed on employers' contributions), the contribution rate should be 6.6% of 'reckonable income'. This would leave the Exchequer meeting 60% of the projected long-term costs, compared with 38% for employees. (However, since the average 'reckonable income' is much lower for the self-employed than for employees the difference in costs to the Exchequer — in absolute terms — would not be as great as this implies.)

## TOKEN CONTRIBUTION

A majority of the NPB therefore recommended a contribution rate of 6.6% for the self-employed, although their report also pointed out that if the taxpayer's contributions were to be the same, in percentage terms, for both



groups, this would imply a contribution rate somewhere between 10% and 12½% (depending on the adjustment, if any, for tax-relief on the 'employer' portion of the contribution). Obviously, there are strong arguments in favour of this position too.

In the end, of course, the government simply introduced the contribution rate (3%) which it had promised the farmers in the first place, long before asking the NPB for costings and recommendations! There is still no commitment to raising this token contribution even to the level (6.6%) recommended by the (somewhat cautious) majority of the NPB — never mind the minority who thought that between 10% and 12% would be fairer to the taxpayer.

Aside from the idea of 'fairness to the taxpayer' (and the rather more nebulous concept of 'dignity for the self-employed'), there are also strong labour-market reasons for requiring the same contribution from the self-employed as from employers and employees combined. If this is not done, it will give another major labour-market advantage to contractors and other self-employed workers competing with employees for work. If an employer can obtain the same services from a contractor who can, in effect, avoid paying the 'employer's portion' of social insurance, this gives the contractor a clear advantage (on top of various others already enjoyed, e.g. in the areas of tax and employment legislation).

#### DUBIOUS VALUE

The costing of social welfare pensions for the self-employed (and indeed for employees) is a complex exercise and involves making a lot of assumptions about the future. Certainly there is a grave danger that unless the self-employed are required to pay a higher contribution towards their pensions, the cost of their contributory pensions will make them an even greater burden on the taxpayer in the future than the cost of their non-contributory pensions does at present. The rest of us may derive some satisfaction from the fact that some of them have to start paying contributions, but if the benefit they derive from these contributions is so disproportionately high, and the ultimate cost to the taxpayer so great, this will be of dubious value. Especially as the likely consequence is a hefty hike in contribution rates for *all* the groups involved — employees, self-employed, employers and the Exchequer.

When the NPB recommended a contribution rate of 6.6% for the self-employed, the IFA dissociated itself from the majority position and argued that farmers were being treated unfairly: all they wanted was 'equity with



*Ray Mac Sharry: soft on the self-employed*

employees'. Since private sector workers, according to the IFA, 'only pay 2.4% and public service workers 'pay nothing at all', it was terrible to ask the farmers for 6.6%. However, the IFA argument was wrong on both counts.

First, it is misleading to refer to 'the employees' contribution' to social welfare pensions being 2.4% (and the 'employers' contribution' being 4.2%). In the private sector, most workers pay 5.5% for social insurance (plus the health contribution and employment levy) and most employers pay 12.4%. The Exchequer also makes a contributIn to social insurance; and covers the full cost of social assistance.

Employers' and employees' insurance contributions go towards the cost of *all* insurance benefits and the amount deemed to go towards pensions each year is purely arbitrary — it varies from year to year (depending, for example, on the number employed and paying PRSI, unemployed and claiming benefit, retired and claiming pensions, etc). In 1987, when contributory social welfare pensions cost 13%, it was decided that this would be made up of 2.9% from employees, 6.2% from employers and 3.9% from the Exchequer. The figures have been different in other years, but the proportions tend to stay the same, with the Exchequer's contribution to pensions remaining roughly in line with its contribution to insurance benefits generally (i.e. 30% of the total cost).

The IFA's argument on public service workers is also misleading. In the public service, pensions are arranged solely through occupational schemes (which sometimes leaves public servants at a disadvantage compared with private sector employees who can have both social welfare and occupational schemes). The vast majority of public servants pay pension contributions (or have their salaries depressed to take account of notional contributions) amounting to 6.5% of pensionable pay (5% for their own pensions and 1.5% for spouses

and children). Curiously, this is almost the same contribution rate as the one recommended for the self-employed and so strongly resisted by them.

#### MINIMUM RATE

In summary, therefore: there are good reasons for including the self-employed for PRSI but it is essential that in doing so, they are treated as the equivalent of an employer and an employee. This means a *minimum* contribution rate of 6.6%. They cannot suddenly 'decide to be employees' for purposes of PRSI (while retaining employer status for tax and other purposes); they should not be given further labour-market advantages over employees; and the taxpayer should not be required to carry a higher burden for their pensions than for those of employees. A contribution rate of 6.6% is the same as the one paid by voluntary contributors to PRSI and similar to the pension contribution paid by most public servants. Finally, it represents only 38% of the projected cost of providing self-employed pensions — and it still asks them for nothing towards the cost of non-contributory pensions (of which the vast majority are paid to the self-employed, especially farmers).

Until such time as a higher contribution rate is introduced, Paul Tansey's cynical swipe (*Sunday Tribune* 7.2.88) at socialists, trade unionists and others (like the Commission on Social Welfare) who have argued for extension of PRSI to the self-employed, will have to be let stand:

'It could only happen in Ireland. After a long and bitter campaign, the trade union movement has forced the government to concede a better deal to the struggling masses of the self-employed... It was concerted pressure from the Left... which brought about this unlikely outcome... And so the hated stigma of the means-test will be removed from those living in the self-employed ghettos of Ballsbridge and Montenotte and from those eking out an existence on the plains of Meath and Kildare, isolated from their neighbours by the size of their farms... Moreover, in relentless pursuit of this unique exercise in income re-distribution, the government have generously agreed to cover most of the costs of extending eligibility for social welfare pensions to the self-employed.'

Indeed, it could only happen in Ireland! But not, unfortunately, because of the power of the Left, on this occasion. The prospect of getting an extra few million into the Exchequer this year has a lot more immediate significance, for Fianna Fáil, than the problem of how to pay for the social welfare pensions of an ageing population in 15 or 20 years time.

# CRY FROM THE HEART & BULLETS IN THE HEAD

DEREK WOOD and David Howe were murdered by the Provisionals on March 19th 1988. They were not their first victims, and unfortunately, they are not likely to be their last. The manner of their deaths — brutal, callous and clinical — was not unique in the dreadful annals of murderous activity of para-military organisations that have blighted Belfast for over 20 years now.

Yet they are murders the Provos are anxious to distance themselves from: because television and camera lens caught in horrific detail the last minutes of life of these two young men. The sickening gory detail of the Provo murder machine, their 'war of liberation' was available for the world to see. It was quite all right for the same lens to carry on filming in Milltown Cemetery just two days earlier when Rambo stalked the graveyard in the person of Michael Stone. He, of course, was 'one of them'; 'our side' kill cleanly. Death and mutilation were meted out with a bloody vengeance during those forty-eight hours in March in West Belfast, and no sectarian gang had a monopoly on dealing in it.

What went wrong for the Provos was the sudden revelation 'that our own' side was now forever shown to be capable of blood-thirsty killings. What has annoyed so many of their apologists in the interim is the crude association of a whole community with the killer label. Yet these same people had no difficulty labelling another sectarian killer gang with a communal label years earlier. There were very few articles written or commissioned to explain how the 'ordinary people of Shankill' felt at the use of their community name to describe a particular gang of cut-throats.

## Apology

The *Irish Times* article (31.3.88) by Ms Roisin McDonough was not an exercise in objective journalism: whether it was commissioned and

**The murder of two British soldiers in West Belfast last March shocked people throughout the world. Television cameras captured an aspect of Provisionalism the Provisionals prefer to conceal. Leading Provisionals were embarrassed into silence, and hid behind articles such as 'Cry from the heart of West Belfast' in the *Irish Times*. MARY McMAHON responds.**

intended as such is difficult to say. But it was a clever piece of writing, an apology for the Provos. Not once, anywhere in the article does the author mention the perpetrators of the double killing on the Andersonstown Road, although Michael Stone's gruesome deeds are re-counted in some detail. This was somewhat akin to the behaviour of the MP for West Belfast who managed to disappear from public view shortly after the kidnappings and before the killings and say nothing, contenting himself some 48 hours later with a verbal condemnation of the murder of Gillian Johnston in Fermanagh. Sinn Féin mouthpiece Danny Morrison was the first pushed into the media line of fire to defend the Provos action on 'their road', in 'their district', by their members.

(Those journalists in the Republic so distressed by the restrictions of Section 31 and their inability to question the Provos about such atrocities would do well to note that when the Provos want to avoid interviews, they do so. Whatever about repealing Section 31 it will not have the effect of making the Provos or their apologists available for questioning about their unsavoury activities.)

Another significant omission from Ms McDonough's piece was any mention of the 10,00 Protestant people who live and work (and die — sometimes at the hands of the Provisionals) in West Belfast. But she is not alone in this. The SDLP in particular have taken to a new geo/political definition of West

Belfast: one that starts at the Falls side of the concrete divide and stretches to Poleglass/Twinbrook (Lagan Valley) and Dunmurray (South Belfast). A cynic might say an exercise in counting the Catholics. Presumably whatever the 'ordinary decent people of the Shankill' felt about the Andersonstown Road killings, and the Milltown Cemetery killings, they were not part of Ms McDonough's community.

Perhaps the author believed that all Catholics think alike. Undoubtedly the views expressed in the article reflect the views of many like-minded people. But they do not reflect the views of even a simple majority of 'Catholic' residents of West Belfast.

## Fear

The first universal response of the dreadful events of that week in March was FEAR. A paralysing fear; a numbness; a feeling of living out a nightmare. Had we really witnessed these appalling acts of murder in our midst in such a short space of time? Maybe it was the presence of the media which left many people feeling it simply wasn't true, that it was theatre, a film, but not for real. Twenty years of sporadic, largely individual killings had concentrated in one small piece of land, over a short time span. Perhaps, for the first time, thousands of people in West Belfast began to feel and experience the same emotions and reactions as the people of Enniskillen had suffered some 20 weeks earlier.

TODAY

# Cry from the heart of west Belfast

In response to Mary Holland's article last week about the isolation of the North's Catholic ghettos, Roisin McDonough, a community worker and writer who lives in west Belfast, writes about perceptions of recent violent events in her area.



Cpl. David Howes (left), and Cpl. Derek Wood (right), murdered by the IRA.

Allied to that was apprehension: that somebody, somewhere would seek bloody vengeance outside the law and that anyone who came in their way would be their victim. None of the para-militaries get terribly exercised about their victims. They don't really have 'targets', they live off death and corpses. Like vultures, anyone will do.

It is the Provos who like to describe West Belfast as their fiefdom. In this they are assisted by lazy journalists. But West Belfast has consistently refused to provide Sinn Féin with anything near 50% of the votes, in any election. They are unquestionably, the largest single pernicious para-military influence, with plenty of political boot boys to apologise for them: but they are not a majority. Very few of their apologists, including Ms McDonough, have berated the Provos for their community activities, especially their efforts to police parts of West Belfast. There were few concerned community workers who wrote or sought to have articles written about how the Provisionals 'community police'

murdered Patrick Devlin at Riverdale in 1982 or Danny Taggart in August 1986. It is unfortunate that Ms McDonough could not inform the public about the jackboot of Provisionalism that literally tramps all over hundreds of young people in West Belfast day in and day out.

In her discourse Ms McDonough described the very short life, and brutal death of Thomas McErlean. She fails to mention that the Provos legally and illegally armed, who were in Milltown Cemetery that afternoon (March 17th) stood back and allowed young McErlean, and scores like him (young, idealistic with loads of nervous energy) to respond to the gunman in the only way they knew: to give chase on foot. Perhaps the armed Provos present had more sense; they certainly were not concerned to prevent any loss of life. What is known for certain is that his young widow and family will not be looking to, or seeking the Provos to speak for them in the months ahead.

## Not unique

Perhaps it doesn't fit Ms

McDonough's perception of reality but West Belfast is not unique in these islands: its endemic poverty, unemployment, ill-health, loss of young people can be repeated in any major urban city, not least Dublin. The contribution of the Provos to these factors has not been to focus attention on the problem but rather distract attention. The police were once unarmed. But then that was before Ms McDonough came to live amongst us. It was the Provos who rearmed them. Of course strip-searching is wrong. But what did Ms McDonough have to say about Mary Travers, Gillian Johnston, Elizabeth Mathers or Elizabeth Mahon. None of these young women were strip-searched by an alien regime in a hostile environment: they were gunned down outside their homes, at work or place of worship by the Provos. So much for sisterhood.

In conclusion, the only people in West Belfast, or anywhere else for that matter, who felt 'got at' by the media reportage of these dreadful days in March were Provos; they all indeed share collective guilt for murder.



# THE TORY WAY WITH WOMEN

*Derry McDermott*

TWO of the main forces to have impacted on the lives of British women in the 1970s and 1980s have been feminism and Thatcherism. The startling disparity between the two catalysts are examined by the socialist/feminist writer, Beatrix Campbell\* who reminds us that women have long been the mainstay of Tory political success; besides being hewers of sandwiches and drawers of tea they bring out the vote and raise funds. After all, it is through the work of women that men secure their political base.

Across class boundaries more women (by between six and eight per cent) than men vote for the Tory party. Women continue to work tirelessly for a party which depends on their dedication and support but yet is resistant to their asserting a clear agenda for themselves within it. The traditional Tory woman — hat and all — has been influential but not powerful within the party. In the 50s and 60s she was mobilised to re-assert the values of family morality and to stress the domestic role of women, all of which laid the foundations for the rise of the Thatcherite new right in the 70s.

In 1974 Sir Keith Joseph gave an extraordinary fillip to the 'moral re-armers' when he singled out working class single mothers for attack: they were the classic scroungers who were 'producing problem children, the future unmarried mothers, delinquents, denizens of our borstals, prisons, sub-normal educational establishments, hostels for drifters....' Joseph's speech lost him any hope of succeeding Heath as party leader but it very clearly painted the political landscape of Thatcherism.

## **The family**

One of the Conservative party's great strengths has been its representation of itself as the party

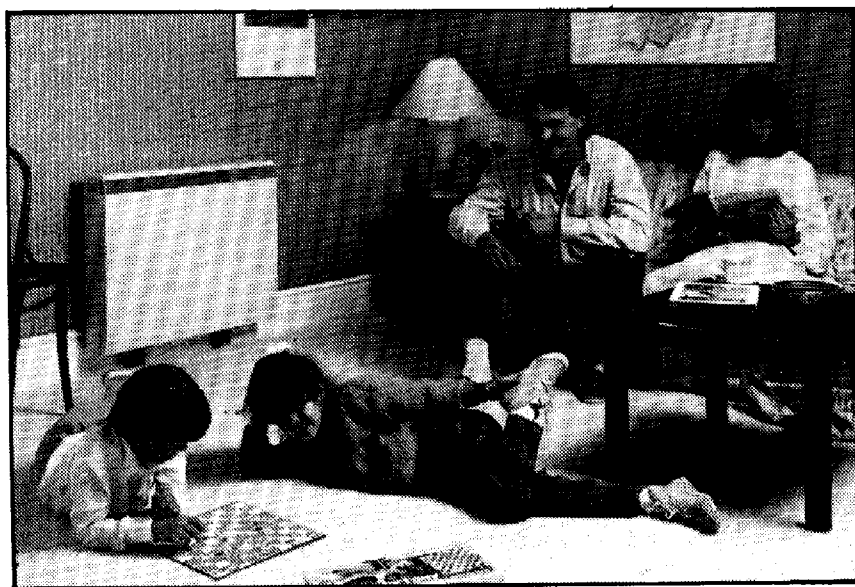
of the family and for this reason it has been successful in drawing women into the political debate, though hardly in their own right. Resolutions over the years have given the impression of the great concern of the need of children for their mothers and the necessity not to force women into the work-force. However, there is also a 'coercive injunction' behind the cult of motherhood in Conservative culture — that *society* needs women to stay at home and police their children; a sort of Family-Against-The-Scrounger-State. In 1979 Thatcher told a party conference: 'Let us remember, we are a nation and a nation is an extended family'. Thatcherism seemed to invoke Britain's finest hour in which men were real men, leaders where real leaders and Britain really ruled the world.

After Thatcher's election in 1979 it did not take too long to sink in that Tory policies were very bad indeed for the family but, as the new government set about dismantling

the welfare state, the ideology had to be sustained. Thatcherism mobilised individualism against class, against the labour movement and against the welfare state. Feminism was taken on too. It was argued that there were 'forces' deeply inimical to the family including the 'ideological extravagances of the feminists'. Thatcher's zealotry for what she called the 'moral force of the family' had at its centre the image of a woman who lacks economic power or an active role outside her home but who, nonetheless, carries a huge moral responsibility for the ills of the big bad world — violence, delinquency, latch-key kids, junk food, laziness, permissiveness and crime. This bolstering of the patriarchal family is all the more astonishing given that the number of British families living in the traditional mould (man at work, dependent wife and two children) is five per cent, yes *five per cent!*

## **Male chauvinism**

Margaret Thatcher the 'most



*Only five per cent of British families live in the 'traditional mould'*



**'The fact that Britain has a woman Prime Minister should have been a hopeful sign for women's progress; the fact that it is Margaret Thatcher is a great tragedy.'**

famous working mother of all' is still trying to explain herself in the language of the 50s. Although working women are typical they are still *regarded* as exceptional. Their needs for childcare for example do not feature on the political agenda. While the Conservative party may not have tried to turn the clock back by purging mothers from the work-force what it has done is to 'refuse to look the clock in the face and tell the time'. It does not represent the typical working woman and it assumes a welfare state based on a false family model. Tory Ministers like Tebbit ('dry to the point of dehydration') and Jenkin ('If the Good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work he wouldn't have created man and woman') keep the flag of male chauvinism flying by spewing out the 'prejudices of the public bar, the patriarchy of the pub'.

The Conservative government has neither promoted the expulsion of women from the work-force nor, indeed, has it promoted equal opportunities. Why would it have done either? After all, women's presence in the labour market was central to its employment strategy in

the 1980s — virtually all the net increase in jobs was part-time (of the 153,000 new jobs in 1983/84, 152,000 went to women working part-time). It cemented the sexual division of labour and women's economic inferiority by a policy of low pay and the whittling away of part-timers' earnings and employment rights. Since 1979 more women are living in poverty, there has been no policy or programme on women and EEC directives on cancer screening and health have been defied. Nursery and pre-school child-care has been reduced as has women's entitlement to maternity leave, rights and pay.

When Norman Fowler tried to shift child benefits, paid to the mother, to family credit, paid to the man, the Conservative Women's Committee took a unanimous vote against it in September 1985. In keeping with the Tory ethos of not washing one's dirty linen in public the women decided to press their case with the Chancellor behind the scenes; but, exasperated by the lack of progress the committee joined the coalition organised outside the party to make the government change its mind — which it did. The leadership

was not amused and the price paid was that the annual women's conference was made even more harmless and the women's organisation staff at central office was cut.

#### **Tory woman**

The fact that Britain has a woman Prime Minister should have been a hopeful sign for women's progress; the fact that it is Margaret Thatcher is a great tragedy. She has used the fact that she is a woman to get her own way very powerfully. President Mitterand observes in her the 'eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe'. She is a 'prime minister, a warrior and a housewife' says Campbell. However, her appeal to women in speeches and interviews emphasises their motherhood as typical and her own career as exceptional. She acknowledges the importance of women in her party, but does not invite them to become powerful like her. Insofar as she has referred to the experiences of women at all it is in their role as housewives and is generally preceeded with the phrase 'as every housewife knows....' as is her use of the domestic economy as a model for the national economy. She presents herself as an ordinary housewife and yet she has *never* been an ordinary housewife; it is almost as if 'Margaret Thatcher the woman subsequently became the victim of Thatcherism, the ideology'.

She has used the power she gained uniquely not to promote other women (not even in her own Cabinet) but to weaken them. Her politics are patriarchal although that does not make her a man. 'Femininity is what she wears, masculinity is what she admires' according to Campbell.

The politics of paternalism espoused by the Tory party appear to give women and their problems a central place but denies them the possibility of real change. Campbell takes Conservative women seriously which is more than can be said of their leader. She concludes 'Women are everywhere in a weak position and yet are not weak. Women are subordinate and yet are strong. That describes the Tory woman.'

*\*The Iron Ladies — Why do Women Vote Tory' by Beatrix Campbell, Virago, UK£4.95*



Maurice Goldring  
recalls the heady days of May  
in Paris twenty years ago

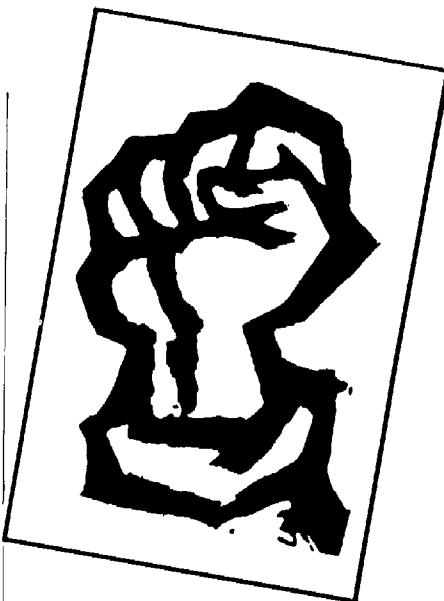
# '68~'88

I CANNOT believe it. Twenty years! I have to write an article on events that took place twenty years ago. On May '68. Student revolts, barricades in the Latin Quarter. If I were to tell the truth, I would tell you, you, and you that I was then a member of the Communist Party and as such, May '68 caught me unawares — it did everybody else, but for different reasons — my own reason being that I was a member of the CP. I was rather suspicious of a movement that was led by ultra-leftists, students and intellectuals. Let it be clear right at the beginning. Asking me to write an article on May '68 is like asking a monk to write on the sex-shops in Pigalle.

But once it started, I never left the turmoil. Arguing over everything from revolution, the vanguard role of the working class, the Soviet Union, intellectuals, education, the universities, violence and politics. You name it, we debated it.

The students demonstrated and were beaten up by the police. Then the workers went on strike. It is said they were ten millions. Enough, at any rate, for the country to come to a standstill. From then on I felt at ease; I was walking the *cour de la Sorbonne* with *l'Humanité* under my arm, vilified by the ultra-left, but accompanied by ten millions workers.

An election followed and a right wing majority was elected out of the barricades. Then the Soviet Union interrupted springtime in Prague. Over here, in Paris, it was summer; we were lucky — a fine summer, I seem to remember.



The May '68 turmoil exploded into different trends, movements, ideas. In the workplace, workers insisted on their rights. They wanted to be regarded as responsible human beings, not simply as cogs on the assembly line. Militants and activists expressed the same point to their trade-unions and their political parties. Women insisted on their rights, on the fact that they were half the population, that one person out of two is a woman, that half the wage-earners are women, half the students are women and even in a married couple, half is female. A real epidemic.

The Communist Party considered the events of '68 in Prague and Paris, and decided on a course of democratic socialism — a long process, mind you — and adopted a pluralist view of French society and of the Left. There would no longer be 'them' who were wrong and 'us' who were right. A process that led to

discussions with the Socialist Party, eventually soaring up to the Common Programme, a broad left-wing front, and together with other communist and socialist parties, the development of Eurocommunism, does anyone remember the name?

Francois Mitterand was elected in 1981, by the electors that had been on strike and demonstrating in May '68. One million students, ten million strikers, and their offspring who had the right to vote at 18, it was enough to put a left-wing government in power. Since that time, people have been trying to understand the differences between a left-wing policy and a right-wing policy. No longer is it an abstract issue, but a concrete one: what does one do when one is ruling the country?

When I was asked for an article on this anniversary for *Making Sense* I remembered that in Ireland, 1968 was also a rather hectic year and was followed by big changes. What was the difference? The one took to arms, the others did not. A miracle, it seems. Ultra-leftism could topple into terrorism any time. Why didn't it? I don't have the answer: I do know that it is not to be found in the genes of the French people. It did not happen; we were lucky. Otherwise, we would be discussing today such fascinating questions as: Should paramilitaries be considered as political prisoners? Can a democracy fight terrorism, can you vote with a gun or shoot with a ballot? Whereas we talk of the differences between a right-wing and a left-wing policy. Aren't we lucky?



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# SOCIALISM

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## All-round renovation

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IN 70 YEARS, socialism in the USSR has gone through three major stages. First in 1918-21 there was an attempt to realise the Marx and Engels concept using a policy of War Communism. Then came Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921-29 and finally there was Stalin's concept, one largely responsible for the discrepancies in social relations which are now being eliminated.

The nation today is living through a difficult but inspiring time of re-shaping the entire system of social relations in order to restore Lenin's idea of socialism.

### Marx and Engels

The essence of the Marxist concept of a socialist society is that it must replace capitalism and its laws of value and state organisation.

According to the logic of Marx and Engels, capitalism would gradually exhaust its growth potential and create the pre-requisites for the elimination of the law of value and commodity-money relations. The key objective of production would become the all-round development of man, thereby "ending all that history with its convulsions and suffering".

Socialism, as Marx and Engels saw it, was going to be a non-commodity, self-ruled and plan-governed type of society, based on the common ownership of the means of production. The state would be necessary only for the period of transition and violence would be used only to overcome the resistance of the bourgeoisie that

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**'The nation today is living through a difficult but inspiring time...' VICTOR KISELEV, a senior research associate of the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, looks at the evolution of the theory of socialism and its application.**

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was to be overthrown.

The working masses would be organised into self-governing Paris commune type associations, while the government would be cheap to run, take care of common interests and be open for the masses to supervise.

The army and the police would be abolished to lower the cost of administration and avert the constant danger of class domination being arrogated by the government.

Emphasising that the state in his day was an ideal aggregate capitalist, Engels maintained that public ownership would not resolve the basic contradiction of bourgeois society, but it was a technical means to resolve it.

The productive forces would be "tamed" while the state would be itself redundant, i.e. would wither away. The effect of public ownership of the means of production would be:

1. to end the class division of labour;
2. remove the drag on the development of productive forces, including crises;
3. abolish the folly of luxury and waste by the dominant classes and their political proxies, and

4. establish planning based on the utility of consumer items rather than the law of value.

This logic is justified. To remove the upper echelons of power with commodity relations intact, could allow the free play of market forces, conflicts between associations, regions and so on, for there would be no way of regulating or safeguarding common national interests.

But the elimination of commodity-money relations creates conditions for bureaucracy and arbitrary rule — working people have no other way to exercise economic control over the effective performance of the machinery of government.

Therefore for Marx and Engels to deny the need for the state under socialism meant for them to deny the need for the law of value and the other way round. From the very start of their revolutionary and practical activities, Marx and Engels considered it was impossible, and none of their concern, to construct and offer ready-made solutions for succeeding generations.

### Controlling the machinery of government

Lenin wrote: "We do not regard

Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life." And in 1919, speaking at the Seventh Party Congress, he said that we did not know what socialism would be like when completed because there was no evidence as yet to judge it by.

Lenin shared the view that socialism would be a non-commodity self-ruled society until he began actually to build socialism.

The policy of War Communism — the Council of the National Economy, command supply from a common source, expropriation of the peasants' surplus food stocks, consumer communes, free distribution and so on — was a result both of the conditions of the Civil War, foreign invasion and economic disarray, and attempts to bring the vision of socialism to fruition.

But revolution in a single country, a backward one at that, compelled Lenin to depart from the concept. To begin with a new type of state apparatus, including the army and repressive and law enforcement bodies, had to be created.

The experience of the early post-revolutionary years led Lenin to look for ways of going over from non-economic to economic instruments of administration and to using commodity-money relations, the market, cost accounting, taxation, etc.

One thing he found to be of particular importance was co-operation which, he said, allowed one to discover "that degree of combination of private interest, private commercial interest, with state supervision and control of this interest, that degree of its subordination to the common interest which was formerly the stumbling block for very many socialists".

By bringing the law of value and the concept of state into his model of socialism, Lenin passed from considering NEP a "step backwards" to recognising that it might well have "come to stay".

With commodity-money relations accepted as an essential element of his concept of socialism, Lenin reconsidered his idea of the state. He felt that self-government was yielding ground to a purely institutional



*Mikhail Gorbachev — leading the return to Lenin's ideas.*

set-up.

In his last years Lenin pondered over how the working people would exercise control. While expecting the state to tame unruly market forces, he was aware of the formidable danger of bureaucracy: the state of armed workers and self-governing associations gave way to a state of government officials. "The state apparatus... bad beyond description; lower than the bourgeois level of culture"; "this apparatus does not belong to us" — Lenin was wholly committed to fighting bureaucracy.

To express and safeguard the interests of the community, the state had to strengthen the role of the centre as a barrier against unruly forces (including those of the market), parochialism and so on. At the same time, it had to make wide use of value-related forms to identify and ensure individual, collective and regional interests.

Furthermore, all the components of the state apparatus connected with the economy had to be open for commodity-money control over efficiency. It was no accident that Lenin thought of tying civil service pay rates to effective economic performance.

But those reflections of Lenin's

were largely forgotten and his idea that the NEP should "come to stay" ignored. In the late '20s the NEP began to be abandoned to give way to a model of state socialism with non-economic coercion, management by injunction and a sophisticated bureaucratic hierarchy. That model of Stalin's endured, right until the present policy of reform.

### Stalin

Stalin created his own model of socialism, using Lenin's heritage but distorting it. He found a way of combining plan and market, but he solved it by rejecting the NEP and switching over to direct command methods of management. He reduced commodity-money relations to record-keeping and money to mere receipts. But rather than slowly withering away the state was reinforced.

Underpinning the Stalin model of socialism was a utopian hope that the nationalisation of the means of production would automatically lead to a great leap from the "kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom". However, the maximum centralisation of the means of production led to the state apparatus holding a monopoly on all the resources of life.

Control over the functions of power began to be determined by control over property, and production relations found themselves absorbed by political regulators. On the one hand this excessive politicisation of social relations eliminated genuine politics and reduced it to the voluntarism of some and political indifference of others. On the other hand it created a dead end in economic life.

Nationalising the basic means of production was taken as a necessary and sufficient criterion of socialisation and even as its finale. Control over the means of production gave the state a monopoly on the representation of public interests.

Simultaneously involvement in administration and power began to offer economic privileges.

The features of the Stalin model were:

- total centralisation of social life; command-and-administer methods coupled with state terror — including mass reprisals and the establishment of forced labour camps;

● an extensive cost-no-object politico-economic mechanism, fully precluding the assessment of performance based on social effectiveness;  
● renunciation of the values of the preceding forms of democracy, the removal of the masses from government and the formalisation of democratic institutions; renunciation of the idea of self-government, and the sanctification of power up to the personality cult;  
● public life not being subject to even formal democratic procedures, the coalescence of the party and state apparatuses. Control by executive over elected bodies. Punitive bodies were out of legal and public control, and hence there was arbitrariness.

All these forms of deformed, "barracks-type" communism are diametrically opposed to self-government socialism and to the ideals of social emancipation which Marx, Engels and Lenin had worked for.

After Lenin, a vulgar economic understanding of socialism — a crudely material view — prevailed for a long time in the Soviet party and in propaganda literature.

The nationalisation of the means of production as the highest criterion of socialisation and the establishment of collective farms led to the declaration in 1936—39 that socialism had been fully victorious. By 1939 the Eight Party Congress raised the task of a direct transition to communism.

Faith in a swift transition then found reflection in a thesis put forward in 1961 by the 22nd Congress that the country was embarking on full-scale communist construction.

But slowly, and painfully, came a process of realisation. In 1967 the CPSU leadership declared that a developed socialist society had been built in the USSR. It was now a question of refinement using the laws and principles of socialism.

But the obvious gap between the declared stage and real difficulties of the mass of the population led Yuri Andropov to state that the USSR was only at the beginning of a long stage of developed socialism.

#### **Perestroika: a return to Lenin's ideas**

The term "developed socialism" has disappeared altogether from official political language and has

been replaced with the term *developing socialism*. This cautious term on the one hand is a recognition of the victory of socialism and on the other the abandonment of an enforced scheme, of the imposition of artificially constructed stages and historical landmarks in life.

The 1987 plenary meeting subjected the facile perceptions of communism, various prophecies and abstract speculations to severe criticism.

It is important that the process of resolute de-Stalinisation is underway, that there is a return to Lenin's ideas, on the basis of which a new model of socialism is being born, one which meets real conditions and is freed from utopianism and dogmatism.

Of course it would be wrong to think that this model will first be worked out at party plenums, at scientific symposia and in learned papers, and only then put into practice.

Practice — life — is not only a criterion of theory, but also its source. However, without theory, without a serious generalisation of practice neither experiments nor the stern days of perestroika will ever lead to a systematic renovation of Soviet society.

Prompted by the demand for a closer study of life, the idea that what we have is state socialism, and that we need to return to the understanding of socialism as a self-governing society is now gaining ground in Soviet science and journalism.

Above all, an understanding of the essence of socialism not as a state entity, but as an associative, collectivist one, with a diversity of forms of the relationship of initiatives from persons, groups and societies is being asserted.

We are trying not to ignore unifying interests, and to avoid their administrative, enforced subordination. Instead, we are coming to recognise their diversity and to accept their democratic expression.

The concept of a diversity of socialist forms of social life, established at the 27th Congress, has also led to a recognition of the need to further develop the various forms of co-operation and individual labour activity alongside state property.

The process of further social-

isation within state property has also been resumed thanks to a re-allocation of rights from the central state apparatus to enterprises. The state is not abdicating supervision over common interests: only the forms of this control have changed — the centre of gravity has moved to cost-accounting levers.

It means that central bodies will be able to focus on strategies, on the representation of all people's interests.

Full cost-accounting is how the property relations intrinsic to socialism are being revived and the economic relations of the working people are being asserted. A basis is being created for mass initiative and enterprise. Wage levelling is being overcome and talent, industriousness and professional competence are being encouraged.

A radical reform of the economic mechanism by enhancing the role of commodity-money relations has begun. Great importance is being attached to the socialist market, its functions, and its inherent contractual relations between producers and users and between enterprises and administrative units.

The aim is to overcome the diktat of the producer over the customer and to use socialist competition as the engine of economic and social progress.

It involves society's control over state institutions, the creation of a system of constitutional and legal guarantees for perestroika, a consistent democratisation in the work of all administrative units and diverse methods of protecting the individual from bureaucratic structures.

There is a need to carry out transformations in the political system as well, which according to Lenin has to be constantly completed and remade. Perestroika is unthinkable without an all-round renovation, without the employment and promotion of socialist pluralism. Socialism is a society of growing diversity in opinions, relationships and activity of people.

We need a restructuring of the Soviet social system that will create the possibility for its continuous adaptation in accordance with changing conditions. The mechanism of the system itself must have built-in abilities for self-regulation and for a flexible and prompt reaction to the exigencies of renewal.

# CULTURAL FRONT

## Through Irish eyes

Lorraine Kennedy  
on new developments  
in Irish cinema

TWO IMAGES of Ireland are familiar to cinema and television audiences worldwide. The fresh pastures and wild scenery of the West of Ireland with its quaint peasants and timeless lifestyles have been promoted both by American cinema and Bord Failte.

On the other hand, British cinema has chosen to view Ireland as a land obsessed with irrational political violence. These views of Ireland are often taken as being the products of the country itself,

### CINEMA

as indeed they sometimes are, but since the 1970s these stereotypes of Ireland have been challenged by an increasingly vibrant indigenous film culture. For the first time, Irish film-makers have begun to gain an international cinema and television audience.

Resources from both state institutions and private investors has led to the beginning of what may, for the first time, be called an Irish cinema. As the recent history of film in and about Ireland *Cinema and Ireland* (1987) declares, 'the breakthrough film in the 1970s was *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire* (Lament for Art O'Leary 1975)'. History as a film subject came under scrutiny for the first time. The film sought to relate eighteenth century events to the present. This led to a new and fresh questioning of the reality of historical 'truth'. Such a critical view of history was only the beginning of the exploration of a series of themes which made their appearance as subjects of Irish fiction film matters in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ireland's best known stereotypical representations on film are of the West of Ireland, most notably in the island primitivism of *Man of Aran* and in John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952). Bob Quinn sought to inflect his *Poitin* (1978) with a critique of Ford's view of the West by introducing a harsh 'social realist' element into that landscape. Such may also have been Kieran Hickey's ambition in his *Exposure* (1978): The West of Ireland where three surveyors and a foreign woman photographer are staying serves as the base for the



Photo: Irish Film Institute

'*Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire*' led to a new and fresh questioning of the reality of historical 'truth'



exploration of male sexuality in particular. The oppressive family lives of the two older men leads to the breaking-up of the developing relationship of the young surveyor and the photographer. Family conflict has been a dominant theme in recent Irish films such as in *The Woman Who Married Clark Gable* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan 1984) where the unstated oppression of a couple is their inability to have children. In *Traveller*, (Joe Comerford 1982) a young match-made traveller couple embark on a journey of exploration which leads to the woman coming through a process of socialisation and awareness. Part of that journey is to Northern Ireland, a subject not often covered by recent Irish films.

One film-maker who made her feature film debut with a film about Northern Ireland is Pat Murphy whose *Maeve* (1982) explored the interface between republicanism and feminism in Northern Ireland. In contrast, *Angel* (Neil Jordan 1982) fits within a form of representation of Ireland which has more in common with the images of Ireland produced by British commercial film-makers during the past forty years than with any indigenous tradition. *Angel's* (and Pat O'Connor's *Cal* 1984) representation of the Irish as having an irrational, and sometimes insatiable (or psychopathic) appetite for violence, independent of any social or historical context, makes these two films significantly different from the new representations of Ireland which have been produced in the last decade.

In fact most film-makers have concentrated on the changes within the South itself where the socio-economic and political structure has undergone significant alteration during the past two decades. In *Pigs* (Cathal Black) for example, part of the South's increasingly public sub-cultures are to be seen: a pimp, a prostitute, drug dealer, mentally ill person and homosexual, find themselves temporarily together as squatters in a derelict house.

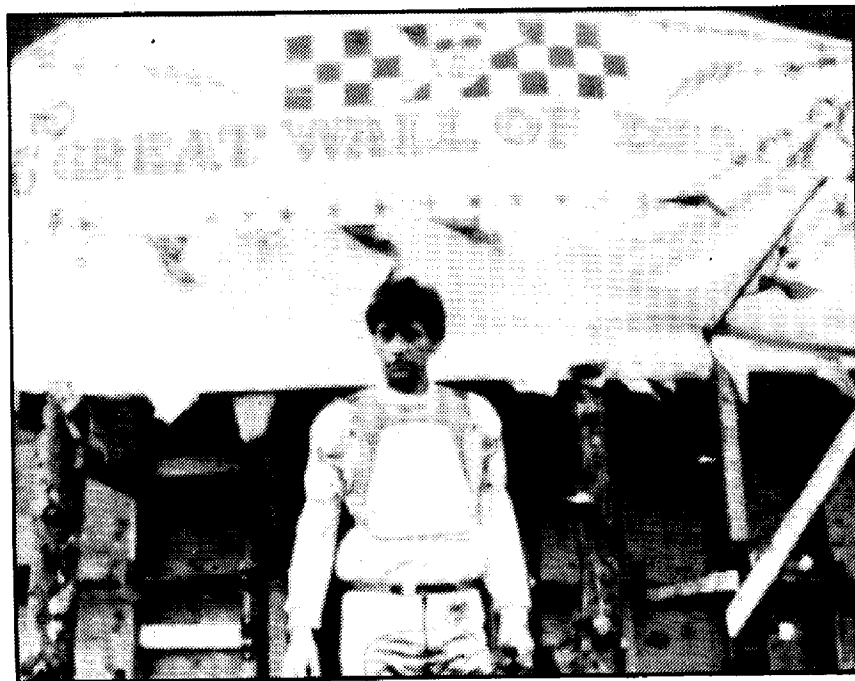
The evolution of indigenous film-making was also aided by the institutional developments whereby the Arts Council, RTE and the Irish Film Board, set up in 1981,



'Angel'... has more in common with British images of Ireland

all gave assistance to Irish film-makers rather than foreign production companies. With a

## 'The emphasis is gradually shifting towards larger scale productions'



Productions such as 'Eat the Peach' could carry dangers of cultural compromise

wide selection of mainly 16mm films made by independent film-makers since the mid-1970s, the emphasis is gradually shifting towards larger scale productions (such as *Eat The Peach* Peter Ormrod 1986) for the cinema. This development inevitably carries with it inherent dangers of cultural compromise with British and American television and film production companies.

The closure of the Irish Film Board in 1987 removed the only state body whose main brief was to aid Irish film-makers. While the Board only provided about one quarter of the production finance for these films, it was often the crucial initial development money. Without this investment such films as *Clash of the Ash*, 1987, *The Courier* 1988 and Joe Comerford's soon to be released *Reefer and the Model* would not have been made.

The dilemma now facing Irish film-makers is how to even initiate projects when there is no single State Agency for film, the object of the Irish film community's campaign since the demise of the Film Board. The depressing result could be a return to the failed policies from the 1940s onwards which treated film exclusively in terms of employment and the provision of a factory for films, and not as a means of carrying messages about Ireland, both to Irish people and to people abroad.

# Audacious Marxist

**ALTHUSSER: The Detour of Theory** by Gregory Elliott; Verso/New Left Books; UK£9.95 (paperback)

IN HIS conclusion Elliot lists over 70 books in a wide range of areas — the history of Marxism, the analysis of the capitalist State, anthropology, literary theory, the historical analysis of particular countries, the theory of ideology, feminism, and marxist economic theory which have been inspired by the work of the French philosopher, Louis Althusser. He also points out that no 'cursory list... can do justice to the continuing productivity and vitality of the Althusserian research programme.'

This is certainly an important index of the influence of Althusser who was arguably the most significant Marxist theoretician since Gramsci. But Althusser would have regarded this sort of influence as very much secondary to his main project which was to link the radical reform of Marxist theory with a Leninist political position. He alluded to the primacy of politics in his work in a piece written in 1975: 'I would never have written anything were it not for the 20th Congress and Khrushchev's critique of Stalinism and the subsequent liberalisation. But I would never have written these books if I had not seen these affairs as a bungled destalinisation, a right wing destalinisation which instead of analyses offered us only incantations; which instead of Marxist concepts had available only the poverty of bourgeois ideology.'

He was convinced that the development of a humanist critique of Stalinism within the French and other Communist Parties would not rescue Marxism from the 'blockage' of the Stalin period. His own reading of the development of Marx's thinking focussed on a radical discontinuity whereby Marx moved from a humanistic critique of capitalism which sought the force for change in the contradiction between the human essence and an inhuman reality. In its stead Marx had developed a new theory of history which for the first time sought the origins of change in contradictions in the fundamental economic structures of a society. But as Althusser argued in one of his most crucial essays, economic contradictions never act as a separate and independent 'first cause'; their effect is always mediated by political and ideological structures and struggles. Althusser was particularly impressed with the way in which Lenin and Mao

## BOOKS



Louis Althusser

had developed political strategies which took into account the complexity of national and international contradictions.

A philosopher by training, Althusser had joined the French Communist Party in 1948, and launched his radical theoretical manifestoes from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* which trained France's intellectual elite and where he taught. The most important of these — a collection of his essays *For Marx* and the collaborative volume *Reading Capital* written by him and a number of his students were published in 1965. At a time when the international communist movement was being shaken by the major breach between the CPSU and the Communist Party of China, what the English Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm called Althusser's 'ideological hardline' was attractive to those, particularly strong in the student movement, who were sympathetic to Maoism. Many of Althusser's pupils were active in the Communist student organisation where they resisted the more militant Maoists for a split and the formation of a new 'Marxist-Leninist' organisation. At the same time their obvious sympathy for Chinese positions

and their openly expressed desire to combat the 'revisionism' of the leadership of the PCF by 'internal struggle' led the leadership to become increasingly critical of Althusser's role, a process encouraged by those communist intellectuals led by Roger Garaudy whose 'theoretical humanism' Althusser had been attacking.

In March 1966 a meeting of the PCF Central Committee produced a long resolution which rejected the key propositions of Althusser's critique of Marxist humanism and reaffirmed the PCF's allegiance to Moscow. It was the point of no return for many of Althusser's students who more vociferously reiterated their anti-humanism and charged the CC with 'liquidating' Marxist theory. The result was their expulsion from the communist student organisation and the formation of a maoist student group. Althusser did not contemplate leaving the PCF and the CC meeting had acknowledged the freedom of party intellectuals to pursue their research. Elliot argues that his 'China Syndrome' — his continued interest in and sympathy for the Maoist critique of the Soviet model of socialism had a negative effect on Althusser's work and was in part responsible for the fact that, in his opinion, he never produced work of a similar stature to that of the early 60s.

His reasoning is first that Althusser was much too uncritical of the Chinese experience and too ready to believe that through processes like the Cultural Revolution, China had produced in a practical form a non-Stalinist road to socialism. Elliot has a point here and the work of the Althusser-inspired and pro-Chinese historian of the USSR, Charles Bettelheim, illustrates many of the weaknesses of the Maoism of the period. However, it remains the case that the Maoist critique did raise serious questions about the nature of socialist societies and the history of the Soviet Union which Althusser correctly realised demanded a serious theoretical response. Incidentally one positive by-product of this period was Althusser's crucial essay on ideology, which for all the criticisms that have subsequently been made of its functionalism, remains a major landmark in this underworked field.

The second point which Elliot makes is that staying in the PCF while attempting to develop his theoretical work along lines which had been publicly anathematised, put a major strain on Althusser. Under suspicion by the leadership, he was then to come under increasing criticism from some of his more prominent ex-students who attacked him for backtracking on his own theoretical principles. His less than enthusiastic response to the student uprising and general strike in 1968

intensified the denunciations of him. He also gets short shrift on 1968 from Elliot who quotes Althusser's description of May 1968 as 'the most significant event... in Western history since the Resistance and the victory over Nazism', and then condemns him for ending up justifying the conservative role which the PCF played at the time. What is not clear is what Elliot considers the revolutionary possibilities of the time were — certainly one side of the equation was there with large sections of the working class unwilling to go on in the old way. However the other side — the clear inability of the ruling class to continue to rule in the old way — was not present. There is a problem here — the efficacy of essentially insurrectional strategies in advanced capitalist societies — which the author (with the typical disdain of the New Left Review circle for the Eurocommunism of the 1970s)

dismisses too easily.

This is an intellectual biography and the personal history of Althusser does not figure much. However in relation to the stresses brought about through the intersection of personal and political crises he quotes the Italian Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi with whom Althusser corresponded at this time: 'Althusser fell ill in the very midst of May, caught between the revolt he'd invoked and the reality of its configuration.' This is a reference to the severe manic-depressive illness against which he had fought against for a lengthy period and which was to occur with greater frequency and intensity after May 1968. It undoubtedly contributed to his failure to produce anything comparable to *For Marx*, although he continued to produce work of interest and significance down to the end of the 1970s. It was this illness which

produced the final terrible domestic tragedy which finished his career.

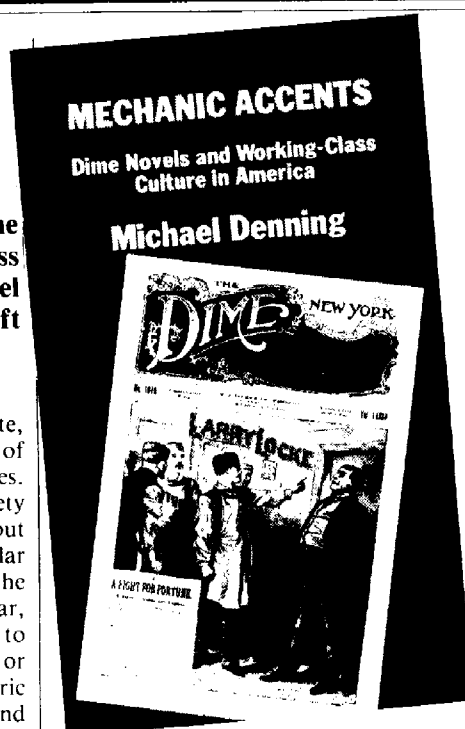
This is without doubt the best account of Althusser's work available in English. It is written clearly and critically but with a fundamental sympathy for what Althusser attempted to achieve. It is based on a familiarity with the wealth of material by and about Althusser in French, supplemented by interviews and correspondence with some of his most important collaborators. It provides an excellent overview of the work of a man whose enterprise has been described by an English ex-Althusserian as 'the most audacious and productive development in marxist theory since the last World War.' (Paul Hirst *Marxism and Historical Writing* (London 1985) p.6

**Henry Patterson**

## The rhetoric of class

**MECHANIC ACCENTS: Dime Novels - and Working Class Culture in America by Michael Denning; Verso/New Left Books; UK£9.95 (paperback).**

'MY WORK', writes Denning in a note, 'is *not* a contribution to the history of "class formation" in the United States. As Katznelson writes, "class society exists even where it is not signified; but how and why it is signified in particular ways in particular places and times is the study of class formation". In particular, my study is meant as a contribution to the history of class consciousness, or what I would prefer to call the "rhetoric of class", the words, metaphors and narratives by which people figure social cleavages.' The 'rhetoric of class' with all its disparate nuances and stresses is manifested in the 'mechanic accents' of dime novels. A history and sociology of American mass culture in the 19th century is no simple matter. Denning argues 'that these popular stories, which are products of the culture industry — "popular", "mass", or "commercial" culture — can be understood neither as forms of deception, manipulation, and social control nor as expressions of a genuine people's culture, opposing and resisting the dominant culture. *Rather* they are best seen as a contested terrain, a field of cultural conflict where signs with wide appeal and resonance take on contradictory disguises and are spoken in contrary accents.' Denning also sees



as his task the re-appropriation of these novels, which in the 20th century were re-written and sanitised by middle class criticism to become the reading of a 'collective American boyhood'. They were no such thing; but were, in fact, read by factory girls, foreigners, workers, in a word, 'the lower classes' and, at the time were the scandal of the middle classes.

Dime novels first appeared at the tail end of the newspaper revolution of the 1830's, when the penny press was established.

Technological developments in production and distribution with the emergence of the steam driven cylinder press and an extensive rail and canal network coupled with the arrival on the scene of a new

literate reading public provided the conditions for the emergence of these serialised story papers.

The dime novel industry itself was founded for the most part by a generation of artisan entrepreneurs. Erastus Beadle, Robert Bonner and Francis Shubael Smith among others had all apprenticed in the printing trades and were journeymen compositors or stereotypes. And the distribution monopoly of the American News Company made the dime libraries a national industry.

The writers themselves began as celebrities: George Lippard and Ned Buntline, for example, made enough money to start their own story papers. 'But the tendency of the industry was to shift from selling an "author", who was a free labourer, to selling a "character," a trademark whose stories could be written by a host of anonymous hack writers and whose celebrity could be protected in court.'

As a result of the strict requirements of publishers some discount their dime novel productions as merely writing for money but all defend their morality and usefulness. They deny, with some insistence, that the novels are 'trash', have no problem seeing the writer as a 'manufacturer', and note with pleasure that Edgar Allen Poe's 'prose stories have all the qualities of a good dime'. When the *New York Tribune* attacked the novels as 'pestilent stuff', Frederick Whittaker's surefooted riposte asserted that it is these so called dime novels 'which must be depended upon for the regeneration of American literature'.

Production, distribution and finally consumption. *Who* were the readers and *how* did they read? Common school reform in the 1850's and compulsory education laws in the '70's created a large reading public among American

workers. And this being a pre-broadcasting age meant that there was still much reading aloud in family circles. The picture one gets is that these sensational, adventure and romantic fictions were a widespread part of the imagination of the American 'lower classes'.

Of course controversies raged from time to time. The efforts of a 'gentility' to reform this popular mass culture were many and bitter. I won't go into these controversies but suffice it to say that similar debates rage today about the effects of television, videos, comics and popular theatre and fiction. These controversies were also the terrain of class struggles (as they are today), a policing of the boundary between genteel and sensational fiction. They were the exercise of cultural power on the part of a shocked middle and ruling class.

The question of *how* these fictions were read brings us into the interesting world of reception theory where we find it demonstrated 'that the reading process actively involves the reader himself, and is not the area of a terrorist operation in which the text and its meaning are forced upon the reader'. The usefulness of this for Denning is that it poses the 'hypothesis that different publics will have different readings of the same books or stories'. He goes on to suggest that 'allegory is a mode of reading...that one may read works that do not appear to be allegorical in an allegorical fashion' The point is that when read allegorically the typical dime novel household becomes a microcosm of the social world. 'For an allegorical mode of reading to shape a system of reading, there is usually a master plot, or body of narratives, that are shaped by a culture; this is clear in the case of Christian allegory'. The master plot, Denning

reveals, was made up of nationalist, class-infected stories of the American Republic, inter-related, if sometimes contradictory tales of its origins and threats to it.

He then shows that this plot 'shaped allegorical readings' of the dime novels. The importance of this is that 'allegory is a mode characteristic of subordinate groups. As Alfred Habegger has argued, 'allegory is the literature of exiles, prisoners, captives and others who have no room to act in their societies...Allegory is one of many human artefacts expressing a sense of human powerlessness'. So if allegorical modes of reading are in one sense a traditionalist resistance to the novel's individualism, they are also a sign of the powerlessness of working class readers. The dime novels that elicit allegorical readings in order to make sense of them are novels of disguise: the stories of tramps who are discovered to be heirs, and of working girls who become ladies. All depend on magical transformations to compensate the impossibility of imagining 'realistic' actions by powerful agents. The cheap stories that come closest to novelistic realism — the tales of young craftworkers in small, knowable communities — express the genuine, if eroding, power of the 'craftsmen's empire.'

Once Denning gets down to examining individual stories (*The Quaker City*) and authors (George Lippard) his own text becomes littered with the colourful figures of 19th century fiction: detectives and outlaws, Molly Maguires and tramps, virtuous working girls and honest mechanics; however, rather than go into any of these stories, I'll just look briefly at the main theoretical thrust of his argument. Basically, Denning is concerned to uncover the social and ideological conflicts represented in any

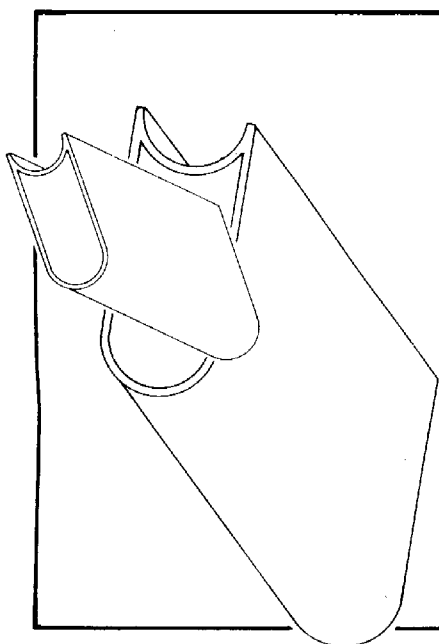
particular story. He quotes Marx who devoted a large part of *The Holy Family* to a critique of Eugene Sue's *Les Mysteres de Paris*. In analysing Sue's novel Marx considers its narrative stance, its fictional world and its protagonist. This form of close scrutiny, used by Denning throughout his own book, reveals sometimes the contradictory ideological locations of both novelists and novels: quite often the artisan republican rhetoric of the narrative is belied by the formulas of the fiction itself.

'The narrative elements Marx identified in Sue — the depiction of workers as passive victims, a world made up of the elite and the lumpen, and the quasi-aristocratic supermen heroes — prevent the emergence of an *active* working class protagonist, a mechanic hero. Despite the labour sympathies of the writers and the working class public of the genre, the paradox persisted.' Lippard was more successful in imagining a mechanic hero set in the past. His 'legends' of the American Revolution were a form more adaptable to the accents of artisan republicanism. Here Lippard was able to depict the mechanic as an autonomous and heroic agent.

Tramps, outlaws and detectives, the James Brothers, Kit Carson, Old Sleuth and Sly Dick Johnson, as archetypal heroes of one ideology or another also make their appearance in the dime novels. All these figures have their roots in the history, or rather the 'news' of the time. The detective came on the (fictional) scene at the time of the murders and sabotage of the Molly Maguires; the tramp 'was a category constructed in the wake of the 1873 depression and the 1877 railroad strikes to designate migratory and unemployed workers; indeed it was ideological naming of the new phenomenon of unemployment'; and the ambiguous figure of the outlaw also emerged as a result of the 1877 strikes. Each of these 'heroes' had different meanings for different audiences and what Denning does is plot these meanings by close examination of several texts, their authors and the historical context.

Theoretically informed by Marx, Gramsci, Bakhtin and Frederic Jameson among others, this is a rich and welcome book. The irony and the misfortune, as usual, is that this book would be so much hieroglyphics to any self-respecting, say, detective story buff. However, we can only hope that such precise, adventurous and well-informed treatises about working class culture will soon begin to appear on the scene in Ireland.

**Aidan Parkinson**



**Books for review  
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# 'IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL CRY IF I WANT'

**David Hamly:** Can I ask you, Marvin Tailor Chairman of the Labouring Party, what your response is to the invitation from Proinsias de Bossa at the weekend to come and play with his Party?

**Marvin Tailor:** Oh! The LEEBOR PARTY IS THE PREEMEER PARTY so it is a matter for us in the PREEMEER PARTY to issue such invitations. We have more members in the creche than the Working Party. We have more space in the creche and we make more noise. We are, you might say, the Big Noise around here.

**David Hamly:** Are you saying, Marvin Tailor you are not in favour of the Labouring Party and the Working Party playing together

**Marvin Tailor:** Well, I have to be careful here. I have convinced the media — on very little evidence, may I say, speaking as a Lawyer — that I am a Lefty. Therefore I would like people generally to think that I'm in favour of the LEEBOR PARTY and the Working Party playing together. However, the LEEBOR PARTY has a bigger ball and if the Working Party wants to play they will have to play with our ball. Blarney Desmond is in full agreement with me on this point.

**David Hamly:** Are you saying the size of your ball is the only obstacle? If the Working Party's ball was as big as your ball would the Labouring Party co-

operate then?

**Marvin Tailor:** Well I *am* concerned about their origins, you know.

**David Hamly:** Origins?

**Marvin Tailor:** You know, their ANTECEDENTS.

**David Hamly:** Antecedents?

**Marvin Tailor:** Antecedents yes....you know with a name like Proinsias de Bossa it is doubtful if they are Irish at all; sounds to me more like they came from Italy or South America and are promoting an alien ideology here that might contaminate our members in the LEEBOR PARTY.

**David Hamly:** Speaking of balls, Marvin Tailor, I suppose members of both parties will have a ball at the May Day celebrations.

**Marvin Tailor:** Oh no! The LEEBOR PARTY will have its own ball. The Trade Unions and the Working Party will have all kinds of riff-raff at their celebrations. We were going to send Dermot Morgan along to play Sam Nolan, but he had to turn down the offer: he said it was impossible to parody a parody. But we are holding our own little ceremony outside the Rotunda to symbolise the birth of the new radical LEEBOR PARTY after all those years in Coalition.

**David Hamly:** So Marvin Tailor, you are saying the Labouring Party would prefer a Stag Party to de Bossa Nova?

**Marvin Tailor:** Oh no! I think the LEEBOR PARTY would prefer a Stag Hunt to a Stag

PORTY. When we escape from the creche at the end of a sitting to our own Party rooms this issue causes much of the noise. A Stag Party could be very dangerous.

**David Hamly:** Why so?

**Marvin Tailor:** Well for example, it could mean that a STAG PARTY could link arms with the Working Party against what they call "State terrorism on the West Bank". Bad enough to have to listen to Joe the Worker, the weasel Gregory and that Do-Gooder from the Simon Community reporting on defenseless youths being shot and beaten up on the West Bank. Imagine the LEEBOR PARTY supporting that kind of visit? I could cry.

**David Hamly:** Please, please Mr. Tailor don't cry.

**Marvin Tailor:** It's my Party and I'll cry if I want to.

**David Hamly:** Not on my show, you won't.

**Marvin Tailor:** Now, now....remember what happened to Jenny MacCleave on a previous edition of Mourning Ireland.

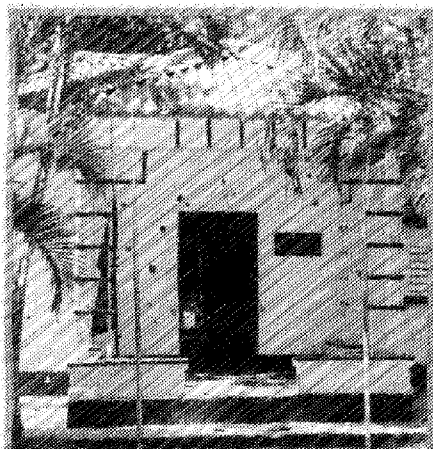
**David Hamly:** I wasn't here for that programme.

**Marvin Tailor:** You won't be here for *any* programmes if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head.

**David Hamly:** Thank you Mr. Tailor. And now we go over to Charlie Bird reporting from under a coat in some exotic trouble-spot — Algiers, or is it Bray?

# September in CUBA

4—16 September 1988



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- English-speaking local Cuban courier
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## NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE:

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- (2) No vaccinations or inoculations are required for travel from Ireland to Cuba.
- (3) A meeting of the tour group will be held in July (on a date to be advised) where there will be a talk on Cuba and on the tour arrangements.
- (4) Climate — the temperature in Cuba in September is: daily high 88°F, nightly low 75°F

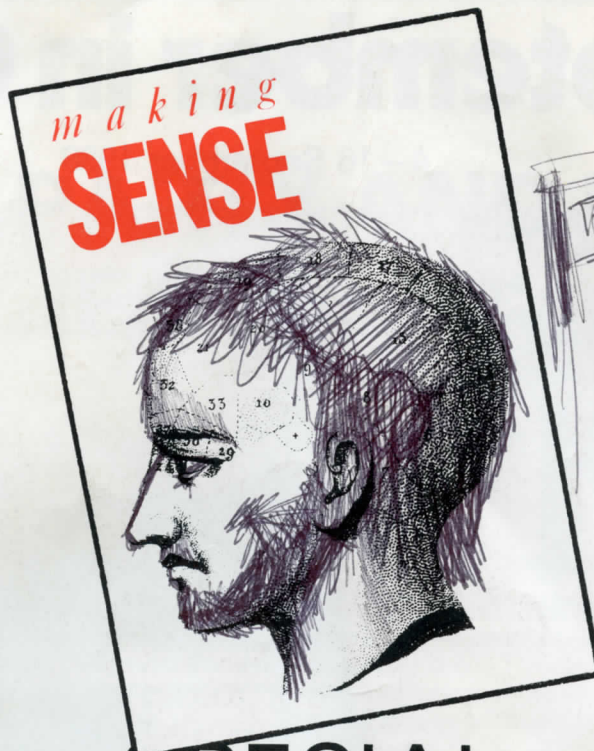
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