

- a comment by the Belfast Branch

Normally, the name of a revolutionary Socialist organisation is comparatively unimportant. Normally, proposals to change such an organisation's name would not merit the writing and printing of an internal document. But the circumstances attending Comrad. [redacted] proposal for changing the name of the Revolutionary Marxist Group are not normal and they should not be so if the Group is to play a decisive role in the coming Irish Revolution.

It is easy to understand the background of the proposal. The fact is that our programme of action is being executed too slowly. This relates particularly to the morale of the Dublin comrades. Constituting the largest of the Group's branches, and being situated in the centre, they bear the lion's share of responsibility for managing the propaganda activities at the centre of our strategy. The second issue of the Marxist Review has now been produced, though rather late, but the Group is still waiting for the first of our series of pamphlets. The Belfast Branch is prepared to help out in the production but, inevitably, Dublin must bear the brunt.

Part of the reason for the delays is the Dublin comrades' inexperience in the large scale production of publications. A certain amount of error is bound to occur, typing not done, keys mislaid etc. But the important thing is not to panic over these mistakes but to make sure they are not repeated. There is no reason why they should not be overcome; the BICO produced as much as we are trying to do with a smaller membership. It is worth taking a lesson from BICO on one matter - its sheer doggedness.

While the Belfast Branch has no mystical veneration for the Group's present title we would oppose changing it unnecessarily. Over the past decade, the mainstream of Irish Trotskyism, of which we are the present manifestation, has changed names at the rate of once every two years. Undoubtedly this is an expression of the debility that has effected our movement in this country and prevented us from playing a role worthy of our potential. Before we change the Group's name, therefore, we must be satisfied beyond all reasonable doubt a) that our present name is a positive hindrance and b) that the alternative proposed is an improvement.

While the first point is a reasonable presumption in this case, the second, with the proposal that the name should be 'Republican' rather than 'Revolutionary' Marxist Group is not. The change would be an ill-conceived way to prove to Republicans that we are on their side. The name 'Revolutionary Marxist Group', it is suggested, tends to alienate Republicans from us while 'Republican Marxist Group' places us in the revolutionary tradition of the country. Both these arguments can be disproved but the basic objection is that the proposed title is non-Marxist. In the practice of theory it is impossible to have a "Republican" Marxist Group just as it is impossible to have a "Social-Democratic" or "Syndicalist" Marxist Group. Marxism is the highest development of working class theory known to humanity. Republicanism is superior to many other forms of ideology produced by undeveloped working classes. Nonetheless, it is the inheritance of one such class; it is a petit-bourgeois ideology, albeit one based on workers rather than students, small businessmen etc. The Republican ideology has, therefore, to be fought, although the aim is not to smash it but to transcend it.

But, comes the cry, that is what "Republican Marxist Group" really means: that we are trying to transcend Republicanism into Marxism. This may be what it means to those who know our politics but it is not what it means in itself: to an outsider it will appear that we are a body trying to synthesise Marxism and Republicanism (i.e. debase Marxism). This is what it means grammatically after all. If it is difficult now to talk to people as the "Revolutionary Marxist Group" it will be difficult for quite other reasons to talk to them under the title proposed. If we did so we might get a better immediate reaction but we will find we have to spend much time subsequently denying our Republicanism except for those aspects of it that are far better expressed in Marxist theory. In addition, our task will be made more difficult by our rivals; we don't need to be particularly skilled Marxists to foresee what the BICO, LWR, SWM, IYS et al will do to confuse people as to our nature under such a name.

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Republicanism is the traditional ideology of the Irish revolution, but the history of the Irish revolution has little to recommend it, composed as it is of failure and half successes. This is particularly clear to us in Belfast. We have seen the Kevin St. bpmbs blow away Stormont but we can't see them doing very much beyond this - except, perhaps, causing Britain to sign a negotiated independence with the UDA. The Provos correctly recognised that Northern Ireland would be ended before it would be mended - which puts them above Gardiner Place for acumen, but having recognised that they did not know what to do about it except send in bigger and better bombs. We are trying to lead the Republicans away from this and place the struggle for national unification under Marxist leadership. This will not be done by compromising with Republicanism formally or otherwise.

In the fairly near future it seems likely that as the state machines, North and South, hammer the Republicans they, or at least large sections, will move in the direction of Social Democracy or economism. In that case the name "Republican Marxist Group" will be a hindrance to gaining their understanding. What will we do then? Do we change our name to "Socialist Workers' Group"?

But perhaps the most unhistorical argument that has been given in defence of the proposed name change is the reference to Connolly. We are reminded that in his personal attempt to set up a viable Socialist Party in Ireland he declared the name to be "The Socialist Republican Party," thus passing, as we are told we should do, into the "workers' revolutionary tradition" etc. It is worth remembering that he did this more than three quarters of a century ago, in the days of the Second International, in 1896, two years before the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had been formed, six years before Lenin wrote What is to be Done?, and 22 years before the RSDLP (Bolshevik) renounced its name and became the CPSU. Connolly was acting as a pre-Leninist and in any case never suggested that Marxism per se could be synthesised with Republicanism.

Therefore, the Belfast Branch of the R.M.G. opposes the proposal to change the name of the Group from "Revolutionary" to "Republican" Marxist Group because:

- 1) It is a form of opportunism grounded in defeatism; we have not yet seriously begun to implement our strategy, so we cannot say a change of name is necessary for its success.
- 2) The name "Republican Marxist Group" is an attempt to win Republicans "on the cheap".
- 3) The proposed new name gives an entirely wrong idea of our task; that of subsuming the valid parts of Republicanism (and of other aspects of the Irish working class experience) within Marxism rather than it implies in synthesising Republicanism and Marxism.

If, as is generally agreed, Comrade ██████ expectation of a move towards greater repression on the part of the state powers, North and South, is going to be fulfilled, we cannot expect a mass influx of political cadres; we may even expect pressure on the comrades in the Group to defect. If this is to be combatted, now is the time to do so. In conclusion, then, we declare our opposition to the proposed name change and, unless an outstanding new name is suggested, we would advise our Dublin comrades to forget about the name and concentrate on the work.

Belfast Branch, Revolutionary Marxist Group,  
23rd January, 1973.

**Title:** Giving Irish Trotskyism a Bad Name

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