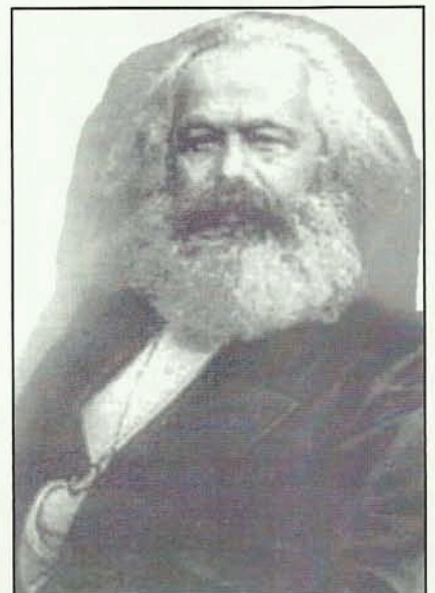


# *The Other View*

Winter 2000

Issue No. 3



Did Jesus and Marx  
Share Many  
Common Ideals?

Page 3



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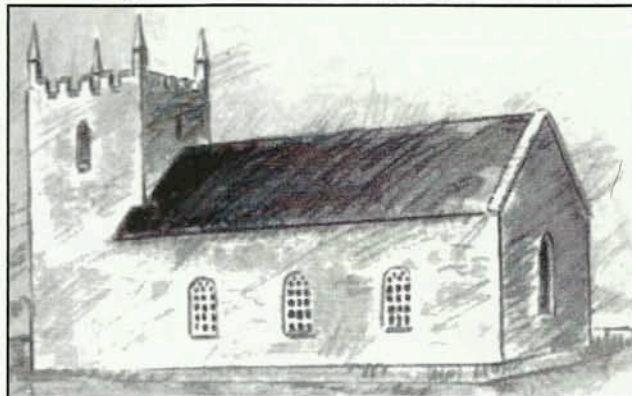
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# Christian Socialism

by Billy Mitchell

**A** common charge levelled against loyalists like myself is that we have abandoned the faith of our Protestant heritage and sold out to secular socialism. Those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ are especially targeted for our alleged apostasy.



The belief within certain sections of the Protestant-Unionist community that Christianity and class politics are mutually exclusive has fuelled the bitter antagonism which religious fundamentalists have towards the Progressive Unionist Party.

The fear that any interaction between Christians and socialists must lead to a dilution of the faith is completely irrational and displays a clear lack of faith and a lack of confidence on the part of the fearful.

While Christianity and Marxism are philosophically irreconcilable I believe that Jesus and Marx, as individuals, shared many common ideals. If it were possible, I believe listening to a dialogue between Jesus and Marx would prove to be very informative and most enlightening for Christians and Marxists alike.

## Jesus & Marx

Both Jesus and Karl Marx had a passion for transforming social structures. Both wished to em-

power those who were excluded from the power structures of their societies. Both sought to enrich and enhance the quality of human life for the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. Both were outraged at the social and economic inequalities that forced people in their days to live in poverty and oppression. Both had a deep and abiding sympathy for the deprived, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed.

While they would clearly have expressed irreconcilable differences with regards to philosophy and theology, they would have found much in common to talk about and, more importantly, to act upon. I believe too that both would openly disassociate themselves from much of what has been said and done in their names.

Jesus would certainly have disassociated Himself from the religious wars, the inquisitions and the persecutions that have been carried out in His name. I would like to think that Karl Marx would disassociate himself from the purges, the Gulags and the suppression of hu-

man rights that have been carried out in the name of socialism.

## Jesus' Manifesto

The Bible abundantly testifies that there is a special place in the heart of God for the poor.

Indeed when Jesus commenced His earthly ministry He used the following statement to outline the focus of His mission: - "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed". (Luke 4.18).

The church has often attempted to spiritualise the words of Jesus as if to say that He referred only to spiritual bondage, spiritual oppression and spiritual blindness. However, as the Christian historian, Timothy L. Smith, points out: - "The poor are not oppressed simply by their sins but by an exploitative society. To face up to social wrong - unfair wages, desperate housing conditions, the reign of ignorance and



deference to the idols of race or class or nationalism—is the obligation of every Christian”.

In his book, *Religion and Revolution*, the Marxist revolutionary Fidel Castro said, “the church should take the lead in responding to the widow, the orphan, the hungry and the needy.” Notwithstanding the differences in belief and ideology that exists between Castro and Jesus, I would suggest that no genuine follower of Jesus could disagree with his statement.

Indeed if we set Castro’s comments alongside those of the Apostle James (James 1.27) we will see that they are both singing from the same hymn-sheet.

### Jesus and the Poor

Jon Sobrino, the Latin American Liberation Theologian, has identified two classes of “the poor” for whom Jesus the Liberator had a soft spot. The first class was the economic poor – the hungry, the poorly clothed, the badly housed, the sick and the infirm. The second class included the social outcasts of his day – women, prisoners, prostitutes, winebibbers, lepers, strangers, and the one who was different.

Looking back on my childhood days our family certainly fell into the first category. My own experience of life was one of watching my young widowed mother struggle to feed, clothe, house us and nurse us through the many sicknesses that came with poverty. For our

family, life was a struggle to obtain the basic necessities of life and to ward off the attention of the moneylenders, the tick men and the host of other parasites who fed on the misery of the poor.

It wasn’t until I went to prison, and fell into the second of Sobrino’s categories, that I had time for both personal reflection and interaction with others from a similar background. In Long Kesh we explored issues that we took for granted on the outside.

Even in prison we did not attempt a scientific analysis of our experiences. I have never exhaustively read *Karl Marx* but I have read and experienced *Other Marks* – the marks of pain furrowed across the brow of my widowed mother who was at her wits end because her money and her food had run out, the marks of pain on the faces of at least a dozen neighbours or friends who died before their time as a result of industry induced cancers, the marks of shame on the face of a school friend who felt that the only marketable commodity left to sell was her own body. These marks spoke volumes.

Doctrinaire socialists may well be correct in producing their scientific analyses of the causes of poverty and deprivation. My analysis, flawed as it might be in terms of doctrine and theory, is the product of personal experience. I have been there, I have experienced it and I am entitled to wear the tee-shirt.

### Spiritual Dimension

I know too, from personal experience, that there is more to human well-being than material things. There is a spiritual dimension to human existence that needs to be nurtured as much as the physical. For me, a living relationship with the Risen Christ meets that need.

Tony Benn, the left-of-centre socialist who has described himself as a “Christian without God”, acknowledges that the moral roots of socialism lie in religion. In his “Arguments for Democracy”, Benn follows Keir Hardie and George Lansbury in acknowledging that his “political commitment owes much more to the teachings of Jesus...than to the writings of Marx whose analysis seems to lack an understanding of the deeper needs of humanity”.

Jesus fully understands those deeper needs of humanity. Thus, a socialism that is informed by the spiritual passion of Jesus ministers to the whole person.

I see no contradiction in being a follower of Jesus Christ while, at the same time, seeking the social, political and economic emancipation of either the economic poor or the social outcasts. On the contrary, I believe with Jon Sobrino that that is exactly what Jesus Himself would seek to do.

Thus, I am neither ashamed of my faith in Jesus Christ or of my commitment to class politics.



# Scientific Socialism

by Tommy McKearney

**F**redrick Engels, speaking at the graveside of Karl Marx, said that the key to his friend and colleague's theory could be summed up in two concepts. Marx he said, had emphasised the vital role of competition between classes throughout history and that this contest can only be properly understood by a materialist (as distinct from spiritual) analyses.

The concept of class struggle or conflict is something that is easy to understand and recognise. What

one might think of its validity or relevance is, of course, another point. It is the aspect of materialist analyses that some people find more difficult to grasp. Moreover, it is the materialist concepts that have for so long disturbed and even outraged religious believers.

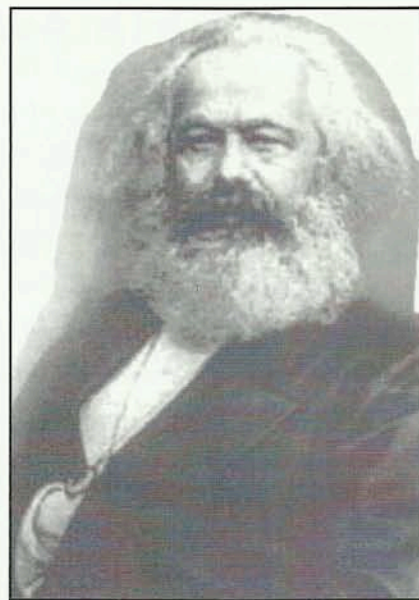


*Fredrick Engels*

To properly appreciate the reason why the first socialists so often found themselves in conflict with organised religion, it is necessary to recognise the type of era in which they lived. In nineteenth century Europe, the standard of education was generally quite low among a majority of working people. Relatively expensive newspapers and books were all that was available in the way of a mass media. Mind broadening travel was confined to either the idle rich or the itinerant journeyman.

In such an era, the great battle for ideas was not fought out in television or radio studios. Nor did people have the opportunity to spend their formative years in schools, colleges and universities learning of and researching life's options. This was the time of the illiterate rustic and the untaught factory worker. A time when the average working person found it very difficult to differentiate between a religious leader speaking in a spiritual capacity and when the same person spoke in a temporal capacity.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that entrenched establishments sought (and usually gained) either the outright or tacit support of popular religions. In return for support or tolerance, religious leaders could be relied upon to endorse the status quo. And it



*Karl Marx*

did not matter whether the religion was Protestant or Catholic. Roman cardinals, Anglican archbishops and Orthodox patriarchs all performed the coronation ceremonies and royal marriages for monarchs and baptisms and blessings for the captains of industry and commerce that indicated approval for the existing order. There were of course many examples of individual clergyman adopting a radical economic and social line but this was manageable dissent rather than a major challenge to the social order.

None of this is to say that there is anything incompatible with being a socialist and holding religious beliefs. Where problems have arisen though was when the powerful and wealthy drew organised religion into the debate in order to distort the argument. When reasoned discussion was overturned by peo-



ple claiming that there was divine support for "the Boss".

Socialists have long sought to demonstrate that their philosophy is an economic science and not an idealistic superstition. They have for long insisted that the merits of a socialised economy is something that should be measurable in much the same way that universal health care is a measurable benefit to mankind. These ideas remain controversial but nowadays are rarely adjudicated upon by clerics. The World and its technology is more sophisticated than it was a century back. Academics, politicians and trade unionists argue the value of economic measures. Church leaders rarely venture into the debate over economics in Western Europe.

As a consequence, the bitter antagonism between church and socialism is not quite as obvious today as it was a century ago. Many religious leaders remain quite conservative but few would attempt to describe socialism as sinful or immoral even though socialists of the Marxist school are almost always non-believers.

There are many advantages in this view of society. It is an outlook that allows us to see society in a very different light. Tribes and nations and ethnic grouping don't disappear but assume much less importance to a socialist. What is important is the creation of a better and equitable society. It is not possible to do justice to socialism in a brief article. It is a subject that deserves much more discussion in this magazine (and elsewhere) but one thing we must say for it is that a socialist society would leave many of our Northern Irish problems redundant.

Although the dispute with the religious institutions has abated many socialists continue to adhere to the concept that class struggle exists in the absence of socialism. Central to this argument is the concept that people should not be viewed as isolated individuals but as part of a class within society.

A person's class is defined not by



# Some Thoughts on Protestant Cultural Identities

**'This struggle is about nationality: Irish out'**

by John Nixon

**T**he mural cliché above, not to mention the current battle for cultural ownership of Cúchulainn and St Patrick must surely sow the deepest confusion among many Loyalists/Unionists who see it flaunted on walls, postcards and at rallies. Political murals and cultural representations have developed a symbiosis that requires a thesis on its own. 'Whenever I hear the word culture I go for my gun'. The Nazi leader Goebbels understood very well the value in exploiting culture to attain social, ethnic and political hegemony; a lesson not at all lost today on elitist groups and individuals working off ethno-political agendas.



*Cúchulainn 'Hound' of Ulster*

A timely publication then is Paddy Logue's book *Being Irish* in which

100 people from a very broad spectrum in all walks of life throughout this island outline what being Irish means to them. Definitions and perceptions of 'Irishness' have changed. It's like religion in a way, collectively we identify with 'one true church', but we interpret what that means to us in a unique and individual way.

Cultural identity for David Trimble means "Ulster British" and he is thus an integral part of a larger group of people whose identity is borne out of their unique historical experience. Sammy Douglas, a community development worker, grew up in Sandy Row where he experienced no sense of 'Irishness' until he went to England where he discovered just how Irish his fellow British subjects perceived him to be: another 'Paddy'. Into the equation comes religion. Jack Boothman, former president of the GAA a southern Protestant thus claims to a different cultural historicity.

Racial identity, as the Duke of Wellington remarked, is not determined by whether you were born in a stable but that ultimately you are what your life experience makes you. So what is race. Joyce's Leopold Bloom defines it: "A group of people living in the same place at the same time".

When young working class loyalists from the lower Shankill or Ulsterville Park proclaim that their 'struggle' is about nationality, Irish out; they can do no other.

Cultural/racial identity frames have been determined, extended and transformed by events of the past thirty years. So are commonalities diminishing: they is they and us is us?

To add to galloping confusion into the same equation comes nomenclature: Ulster-British, Ulster-Scots, Scots-Irish, Royal Irish, Anglo-Irish. Any of them have become convenient pre-fixes to suit political and cultural orientation.

Twelfth-century Anglo-Norman settlers shared a common faith with the indigenous peoples of south Leinster. By the 15<sup>th</sup> century they were Anglo-Irish. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century an Anglo-Irishman was a 'Protestant on horseback'. The late Dougie Hutchinson, a former DUP councillor in Armagh, was highly instrumental in preserving the future of Navan Fort/Eamhain Mhacha. He declared to Sam McCaughrty he was Anglo-Irish. It was an elegant anachronism. Dougie's origins 'like my own' surely stem back to the Scottish migrants of the Elizabethan or Cromwellian plan-



tations. If Sam queried my cultural identity I might pronounce: 'I am an Irishman; a member of four hybrid nations that are guests to an archipelago on the rim of the world that is western Europe'. Sounds Joycean.

The trouble with language is that it can be a costly business. Recently over £4 million was allocated to Ulster-Scots culture and language.

A linguistic analysis carried out by Queen's University has shown that Ulster-Scots amounts to simply an imperial dialect; so does the dialect of the Cotswolds. How many speak it in East Belfast? Ulster-Scots street signs erected in loyalist areas in Dundonald overnight were wrenched down the next day because somebody thought they were in Irish!

Extravagant amounts of Peace & Reconciliation money could have been better deployed to promote awareness of the unique relationship and centuries shared culture between Scotland and Ireland. Are we not the same people? Lord Laird of Artigarvan knows he is on to a good thing when he claims that 'parity of esteem means parity of funding'. More a case of 'parody of extreme'. Its a bit rich, indeed, putting Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson and the American Declaration of Independence into the Ulster-Scots cultural fast track to strengthen the case for identity ... or funding.

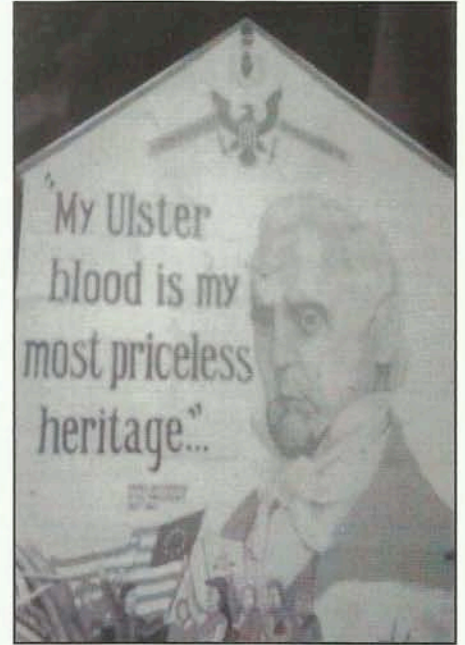
Ulster Protestants today are making up a serious deficit in aware-

ness of their own unique history, especially working class communities who are recording and writing their histories, more so for its intrinsic value than hegemonic. It's their story whether Shankill/Lurgan or Shankill/Belfast. There are still a few headbangers though, who subscribe to fanciful notions that Ulster Protestants are the lost tribe of Benjamin.

It's time now to separate the silver from the dross, for sincere Loyalists to assess the true value of their history and define their cultural identity in this fast changing dot com world.

In the wake of the cease-fires one thing has become clear; both communities have become increasingly introspective. We are looking for new ways to look at old ways and vice versa.

Being Irish, Anglo-Irish, Ulster-British, etc, may simply be a 'choice of allegiance' and that a vision for the new millennium would be, as one contributor put it; 'To raise the issue of identity from "the bloodlines of ethnicity to the lifelines of human rights"'. Sounds Joycean.



President Buchanan Mural





# Is Abortion Always Wrong?

by Dawn Purvis

**T**here are groups within Northern Ireland who would argue that abortion is always wrong. There are others who would argue that it is only wrong in certain circumstances and others still who say it is a matter of choice for the woman concerned.

Who determines whether abortion is right or wrong and do they have the authority to make that judgement?

The majority of Northern Ireland's politicians have consistently voiced their opposition to women having any choice in the matter. It could be argued that this is because of the influence that churches in Northern Ireland have over our politicians.

## Gynaecologists

In a survey conducted by C. Francome in 1992, Northern Ireland's gynaecologists were asked to record their views and practice on abortion. There were conflicting positions taken by a few and just under half had a conscientious objection but the overall majority said they would carry out abortions — a clear indication, in my opinion, that gynaecologists do not think that abortion is always wrong.

GP's in Northern Ireland are of a similar position. When surveyed in

1994, 70% of the respondents said that "the decision as to whether or not to continue a pregnancy should be left to the woman in consultation with her doctor". The British Medical Association has expressed its support for the retention and extension of the 1967 Abortion Act.

Public attitudes in Northern Ireland have changed considerably over the last number of years with recorded increases in the level of support for abortion at the request of the woman i.e. 25% in 1992 to 30% in 1994. On all grounds, Protestants are more likely to support legal abortion than Catholics e.g. in cases of severe handicap, 74% of Protestants as against 39% of Catholics. On the grounds of sexual assault or the physical or mental health of the woman, a majority of Catholics supported in each case.

## Religious Opinions

The attitudes of Protestants in the surveys, closely resembles the view of the main Protestant churches, i.e. that abortion can be justified in cases where there is a threat to the mother's life or well-being or in cases of rape or incest.

Catholic attitudes vary somewhat from their churches view. The Catholic Church believes abortion to be morally wrong in every case although this was not the view un-

til the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Before that, a female child could be aborted before the 'quickening' (i.e. feeling movement) but not a male child. The 'quickening' was regarded as the moment of 'ensoulment' and occurred on the 48th day for the male child and the 80th day for the female child. (C. Coppens, Moral Principles and Medical Practice)

This view changed when the church ruled that "the embryonic child has a human soul, and therefore is a man from the time of its conception". (Tribunal of the Holy Office, 1889) No exceptions exist in the Catholic Churches view that abortion is wrong even in cases where the mother's life is at risk.

The Tribunal of the Holy Office indicated in March 1902 "that no action is lawful which directly destroys foetal life" even if the mother is in "immediate danger of death". (C. Coppens)

Sally Mc Mulkin concluded in her analysis of the 1989 Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey "that religious affiliation is a large influence in determining attitudes to abortion". (1993, P38) This is certainly reflected in the various surveys conducted over recent years in Northern Ireland.



## The Views of Women

In May 1980 the 'Northern Ireland Abortion Campaign' was set up after the death of a woman as a direct result of a back street abortion. Campaigners set about trying to gain the extension of the 1967 Act to Northern Ireland. They did not succeed in this but the campaign did raise the issue in public debate. Since the 1990's another group has formed to campaign not only for legislation but also to raise the issue for debate; this group is called 'Alliance for Choice'.

To date they have succeeded in highlighting the issue but there has been no proper, informed debate. A measure of their success so far has been the formation of anti-abortion groups such as 'Precious Life' based in Ballymena, Northern Ireland's 'Bible belt' (so named for the concentration of deeply religious people). This group uses similar 'shock' tactics to promote their campaign as have been used by various American extremists.

They recently circulated a video tape entitled "The Truth about Abortion". In it, American anti-abortion campaigners talk and show shocking scenes of abortion practice.

The United States permit abortion up to full-term pregnancy i.e. 40 weeks. The scenes shown in this video were of 'late' abortions.

Abortion in the UK is only permitted up to and including the 22nd week of pregnancy.

There is no doubt that groups like Precious Life are engaged in a propaganda war aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people of Northern Ireland, using whatever means necessary. Their recent advertising campaign caused a storm of protest from pro-choice groups and family planning professionals who accused Precious Life of "encouraging back street abortions". (Sunday World, 21 March 1999).

Those opposed to the tactics employed by Precious Life, called for an informed debate on the issue to be conducted in a calm and rational environment.

## Abortion is a Reality

Whatever the views of the churches, medics, pro or anti groups, abortion practice is a reality. As Audrey Simpson of the Family Planning Association pointed out, "This is a service that women will always access".

Whilst the government holds the authority in determining whether abortion is right or wrong in legal terms, the influence of the churches can still be a deciding factor for many women. Of the 2,000 women from Northern Ireland who travel to England every year for an abortion, whether people tell them it is wrong or not, it is obviously right for them.

I am sure for every woman who chooses to terminate a pregnancy, there are many who choose not to.

Without properly collated statistics, it is impossible to tell. What is important, at the end of it all, churches, politicians, public opinion aside, a woman chooses whether abortion is right or wrong for herself.

*(An expanded version of Ms Purvis' article can be obtained from our website*

*<http://www.theotherview.com>)*



# Abortion Does Not Liberate Women

*A Feminist for Life Perspective*

**M**ost modern feminists have betrayed the majority of have made easy access to abortion the very symbol of liberation for women. The literature of the National Organization for Women repeatedly refers to abortion as "the most fundamental right of women" - more important even than the right to vote and the right to free speech. NOW has designated the protection of abortion rights as its top priority.

This is ironic, because abortion does not liberate women. On the contrary, abortion - and the perceived need for it - validates the patriarchal worldview which holds that women, encumbered as they are by their reproductive capacity, are inferior to men.

Abortion liberates men, not women. There are three reasons for this:

1. *Efforts to establish abortion as a legitimate solution to the problems of being a woman in a male-dominated society surrender women to pregnancy discrimination.*

Those feminists who demand the right to abortion concede the notion that a pregnant woman is inferior to a non-pregnant one. They admit that pregnancy and motherhood are incompatible to being a fully functioning adult, and that an unencumbered, unattached male is the model for success. By settling for abortion instead of working for the social changes that would make it possible to combine children and career, pro-abortion feminists have agreed to participate in a man's world under a man's terms. They

2. *Abortion allows men to escape responsibility for their own sexual behaviour.*

A man whose child is aborted is relieved of the requirement that he support his children. It is not surprising that the Playboy Foundation is a major supporter of abortion rights, because abortion is a natural consequence of the Playboy's ideal of uncommitted, anonymous sex without consequences. Women can be reduced to the status of a consumer item, which if "broken" by pregnancy can be "fixed" by abortion.

3. *Pro-abortion feminists have corrupted feminism by embracing male standards, which hold that it is permissible to treat "unequals" unequally, and for the powerful to oppress the weak.*

By accepting this patriarchal worldview, these feminists have capitulated to male dominance. Women who agree to conform to the ideals of a world made by and for men are not liberated; they have merely altered their roles within the patriarchy.

**"Feminism is part of a larger philosophy that values life."**

Truly liberated women reject abortion because they reject the male worldview that accepts violence as a legitimate solution to conflict. Rather than settling for mere equality — the right to contribute equally

*The article by Dawn Purvis, advocating a pro-choice position on the issue of abortion, is written from a secular perspective.*

*The pro-life arguments in Northern Ireland are generally rooted in religious belief and there is seldom any common ground for constructive dialogue between the religious and the secular.*

*Consequently we feel that a pro-life response to Dawn's article ought also to be based on secular rather than religious arguments.*

to the evil of the society — pro-life feminists seek to transform society to create a world that reflects true feminist ideals.

Feminism is, properly, part of a larger philosophy that values all life. Feminists believe that all human beings have inherent worth and that this worth cannot be conferred or denied by another. True feminist thinking recognizes the interdependence of all living things and the responsibility we all have for one another. This feminism rejects the male view that sees all individuals as functioning separately from their fellows, in mutual competition.

Abortion is incompatible with this feminist vision. Abortion atomizes women. It pits them against their own children as competitors for the favours of the patriarchy. Abortion is of no great benefit to employers — who do not have to make concessions to pregnant women and mothers, to schools — which do not have to accommodate to the needs of parents, and to irresponsible men — who do not have to commit themselves to their mates or their children. Women who accept



abortion have agreed to sacrifice their children for the convenience of a man's world.

Women who have been liberated from male thought patterns refuse to participate in their own oppression and in the oppression of their children they refuse to accept abortion, which denigrates the life-giving capacity of women. They strive instead to create a world that recognizes the moral superiority of maternal thinking and is, therefore, gentle, loving, nurturing, and pro-life. Every abortion frustrates this goal and perpetuates the patriarchy. Liberated women will not cooperate. They refuse abortion and all it represents.

**Reprinted with acknowledgements to  
Feminists for Life.**

### Feminists for Life

*Feminists for Life* "proudly continue in the pro-life tradition of our feminist foremothers, who recognized abortion as the ultimate act of violence against women and children, and envisioned a better world for all humankind...a world in which abortion would be unthinkable.

**"We believe in a woman's right to control her body and she deserves this right no matter where she lives, even if she is still living inside her mother's womb"**

### The Feminist Pro-Life Tradition

The feminist movement has, since the late-sixties and early seventies been regarded as the main advocate of abortion rights. This has not always been the case. Traditionally feminists have been pro-life. During the course of research for her book, *Pro-Life Feminism: Yesterday*

*and Today*, Mary Krane Derr came across dozens of essays by a wide range of feminists who opposed abortion and the violence that it did to women.

"According to the early feminists", writes Ms Derr, "abortion resulted from the denial of the pregnant woman's humanity as much as from a denial of the unborn child's."

She goes on to say that "Women felt pressured into aborting because they were deprived of truly life-affirming sexual and reproductive options. This is still very much the case. If we don't want unborn children to be treated as insensate clumps of tissue, we must first of all ensure that their mothers are not treated as insensate clumps of tissue."

ported a pro-life position during the past hundred years would provide a virtual who's-who of feminist activists.

They include Susan Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Gage, Mattie Brinkerhoff, Victoria Woodhull, Sarah Norton, Emma Goldman, Alice Paul, Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Eliza Duffy, Adrienne Rich, Germaine Greer, Shelley Douglass, Jane Thomas-Bailey, Mary Krane Derr, and Maureen Jones-Ryan.

Support for abortion must not be regarded as a prerequisite for feminism. Many women favour a consistent ethic of life which rejects all violence, including violence in the womb.

A list of women who have sup-



Susan Anthony  
Pro Life Feminist Campaigner



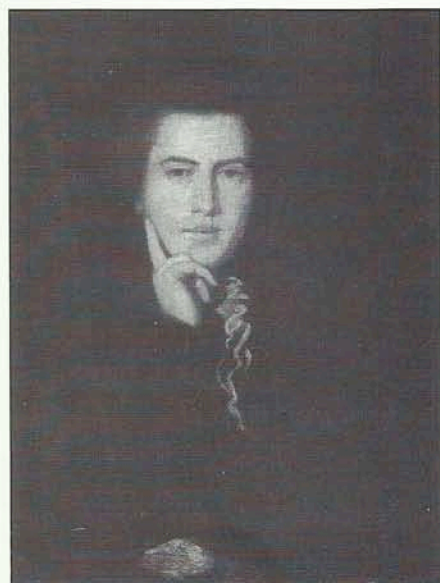
# 1798: Ulster Presbyterians And All That

by Gordon Lucy

## Part 1

**T**he defection of the Presbyterians from the movement of which they were the main originators, and the great and enduring change which took place in their sentiments", wrote the famous historian of eighteenth-century Ireland, W. E. H. Lecky, "are facts of the deepest importance in Irish history and deserve very careful and detailed examination".

That Ulster Presbyterians were the main originators of the Society of United Irishmen cannot be denied. William Drennan, a Belfast Presbyterian doctor and poet of radical views, first suggested the idea of such a society as early as 1785. Drennan is usually credited with being the first person to call Ireland "the emerald isle".



William Drennan

Drennan, like so many of the United Irishmen was a son of the manse. His father had been the friend and assistant of Francis

Hutcheson, the Ulster Presbyterian philosopher who held the chair of Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and may be regarded as the Father of the Scottish Enlightenment.

It was in 1791, prompted by the second anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, that Drennan revived his idea and the society was formed in Belfast in October of that year. Wolfe Tone was present at the meeting at which the society was formed, but only as a visitor and guest. Contrary to popular opinion, the lapsed Anglican was not the prime mover.

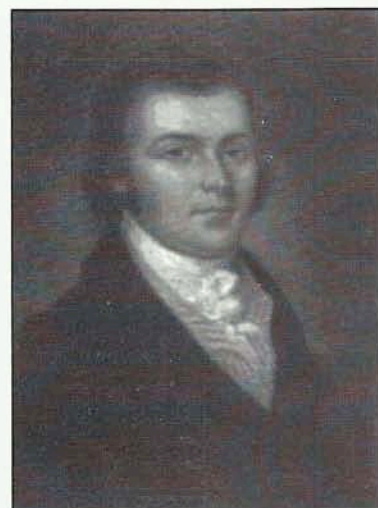
Samuel McTier, Drennan's brother-in-law, was the first chairman of the society. Robert Simms was the society's first secretary. A second society was set up in Dublin the following month.

January 1792 saw the publication of the first issue of the *Northern Star*, the organ of the Belfast Society of United Irishmen. McTier, Simms and Neilson were all Presbyterian.

The principle aim of the Society of United Irishmen was the reform of the Irish Parliament, a point illustrated by the United Irish test:

*I, A.B., in the presence of God, do pledge myself to my country that I will use all my abilities and influence in the attainment of an impartial and adequate representation of the Irish nation in parliament...*

Many mistakenly regard the following formulation espousing re



Samuel Neilson

publican separatism as the classic and definitive statement of the aims of the United Irishmen:

*To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils, and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter - these were my means.*

The truth is that this formulation produced by Wolfe Tone in 1795, was not even an accurate statement of his own views. He had not always subscribed to the view that England was "the never-failing source of all our political evils". Two years previously he had publicly disavowed republican separatism.

While some United Irishmen did



embrace separatism, most probably did not. Drennan regarded himself as a republican but appreciated that many of his colleagues did not share his enthusiasm. Drennan had a very full appreciation that innumerable ties linked Ireland and Great Britain. Among these were 'the sociality of manners, language and law'. He also believed any conflict between Great Britain and Ireland would be a civil war.

It is, however, appropriate to regard the doctrine of the union of all denominations as being central to the United Irish ideals. Nevertheless, many United Irishmen viewed Roman Catholics and Roman Catholicism with distrust, contempt and ridicule. Tone frivolously observed that:

*The emancipated and liberal Irishman, like the emancipated and liberal Frenchman, may go to mass, may tell his beads, or sprinkle his mistress with Holy Water; but neither the one nor the other will attend to the rusty and extinguished thunderbolts of the Vatican or the idle anathemas which, indeed, His Holiness, is now-a-days too prudent and cautious to issue.*

When the Pope was dethroned and exiled from Rome in 1798 Tone prematurely hailed the event as marking the emancipation of mankind from the yoke of religious and political superstition.

A suspicion that Roman Catholics might prove to be most unreliable allies pervades William Drennan's correspondence. He feared that the Roman Catholics had "two strings to their bow". They could make common cause with the United Irishmen in order to extract concessions from the government and they could also do business with the government directly. Thus, in Drennan's estimation, the Roman Catholics had the best of both worlds. While Drennan was perfectly willing to concede that this was "good, and perhaps fair, ar-

chery", he feared that the Presbyterian United Irishmen could well find themselves abandoned by their putative allies. Drennan's fears, arguably, were ultimately realised.

In Ulster the Presbyterians provided the leadership. Presbyterian tenant farmers and labourers provided the movement's rank and file.

The rebellion, or "Turn Oot" in Ulster Scots, in Ulster occurred in the Presbyterian heartland of Antrim and Down. More than a score of Presbyterian clergy were directly implicated in the rising, and of these four were executed and the rest banished to France and America.

This is not to suggest that all Presbyterians supported the United Irishmen. Many did not. For example, the Revd William Bruce, the man to whom Drennan first outlined his ideas for a new political society in 1785 was not a United Irishman in 1798. The minister of the First (New Light) Congregation, Belfast, and principal of the Belfast Academy was loyal to the Crown and served with the yeomanry.

The further west one travelled in Ulster the less likely Presbyterians were to embrace the United Irishmen. Presbyterian United Irishmen were very thin on the ground, if not non-existent, in Armagh, Tyrone and east Donegal.

What propelled so many Ulster Presbyterians into the United Irishmen were grievances essentially the same as those which drove thousands of their coreligionists during the course of the eighteenth century to carve out a new future for themselves in the new world.

During the American War of Independence many Ulster Presbyterians, including William Drennan

who was a medical student at Edinburgh at the time, followed closely the course of that conflict. This is not very surprising when one considers King George III's description of the American Revolution as "a Presbyterian war" and the observation of one of his German mercenaries who wrote:

*Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion. It is nothing more or less than a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian rebellion.*

Events in America gave radicalism tremendous fillip in Ireland, especially in Ulster, in the 1770s and early 1780s. Harcourt, the Lord Lieutenant, observed, "The Presbyterian's in the north are in their hearts Americans." The revolution in France gave radicalism a second wind in the 1790s. William Wordsworth's initial response to the French Revolution as expressed in his famous lines - "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" - would have found a ready echo in the hearts of many Belfast Presbyterians.

Wolfe Tone in July 1791 noted with perhaps a degree of hyperbole that Tom Paine's book celebrating the ideals of the French Revolution - *the Rights of Man* - was "the Koran of Belfescu [Belfast]".

With some justice William Drennan described the United Irishmen as "a constitutional conspiracy". Initially, the Society of United Irishmen was an open and legitimate organisation with aims that were perfectly constitutional. Admittedly, it was an era when Government viewed all extra-parliamentary activity as suspect.

After the outbreak of war with revolutionary France in 1793 an understandably fearful Government clamped down on those es-



pousing the ideals of a country with whom it was at war. That in due course the United Irishmen were to enlist French support vindicated the Government's fears.

In January 1794 Archibald Hamilton Rowan, the proprietor of the *Northern Star*, was tried on a charge of distributing a seditious paper, fined £500 and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In June that same year William Drennan was tried but acquitted of seditious libel.



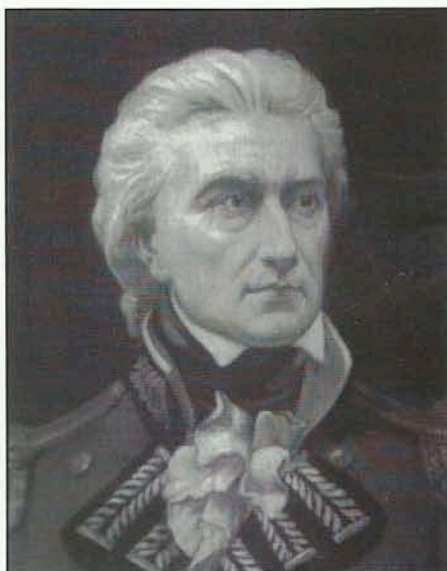
*Archibald Hamilton Rowan*

In May 1795 the United Irishmen met secretly in Belfast and adopted a new constitution. In effect, driven underground, the Society transformed itself into a clandestine revolutionary and military organisation. Many Belfast Presbyterians stepped back. Drennan's trial greatly dampened his revolutionary ardour. Some recoiled as a result of events in France, especially after the execution of Marie Antoinette, the September Massacres and the beginning of the Terror.

The brutal disarming of Ulster by General Lake from March 1797 onwards and the hanging of William Orr of Farranshane, a substantial Co. Antrim Presbyterian tenant fanner, in October 1797, however, had precisely the opposite effect on many others. Although Orr was almost certainly guilty of administering the United Irish oath, he was found guilty as a result of witnesses who perjured themselves and a jury that was intoxicated. Orr, who proclaimed that he went to his death "in the faith of a true Presbyterian", became a martyr. "Remember Orr!" was a potent slogan in mobilising support for rebellion in Antrim and Down in 1798. Orr's death was of far greater value to the United Irish movement than all its French-inspired idealism and ideology

As many as thirty thousand people, and possibly more, lost their lives during the course of the 1798 rebellion. Although normally regarded as a single event, there is much merit in regarding 1798 as a series of very loosely connected events. \*

[to be continued.....]



*General Lake*



*Remember Orr, Northern Star 1798*



# THE PROTESTANT WAY - LUTHER'S LEGACY

by Carolyn Howarth

**A**rguably one of the worst results of the many years of conflict in our country has been the adverse image gained by the Protestant religion. The views of the Northern Ireland Protestant have been misrepresented, misunderstood and maligned. Quite often those who claim to be defenders of the faith have in fact appeared to be its worst enemy and, largely as the result of this, many think of the Northern Irish Protestant as a ranting bigot, more often than not, clad in bowler hat and sash, spouting forth dire warnings which seem to be empty of the love of Christ and to contain little of the hope of the Christian Gospel.

There can be little doubt that the deliverers of these homilies are well intentioned, but their message is lost because of the style of presentation and the total lack of compassion in their plea. So, what is it all about and who is responsible for creating the circumstances which led to what has gone down in history as the greatest schism in the Christian church? I would like to explain what being a Protestant means to me and also to explode some of the myths which surround my faith and the father of that faith, Martin Luther.

Martin Luther was not what some have come to believe, a failed Priest with a grievance against the Pope. He was, in fact, a man of great compassion who suffered from severe depression as he grappled with the realities of life and sought his own personal salvation and right relationship with God. It is true to say that he was the immediate cause of the Reformation but he simply gave voice to the concerns of many who were disillusioned with what the Roman Catholic Church had become. Luther's duties as a parish priest opened his eyes to abuses in the church which he felt actually imperiled the souls of his flock. He was particularly concerned about the issue of the forgiveness of sins and the sale of "indulgences."

An indulgence was the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, it did not have the power to cancel the debt or guilt of sin itself. This fact was hidden from those who purchased these indulgences believing that they were in fact, "buying forgiveness." The practice had thus been reduced to a money making enterprise. The most damning part of the whole affair for Luther, was that the Pope reserved to himself the right to grant indulgences, when they became associated with the so called "treasury of merits," and were sold for money rather than being granted in return for virtuous deeds. Luther recognized that the Church that he had loved and desired to serve had come to be governed by corruption and greed and was deluding the people in their search for salvation. When Luther, driven by a desire to help the people he served, posted the 95 Theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg on 31st October 1517, it was not his intention to instigate the revolutionary consequences which were to be the result, not only for the church but for the political and cultural structure of the West. He actually wanted to provoke theological debate. The ninety-five theses contained no attack on the church or the Pope, but were to lead to the excommunication of Luther in 1520, the Pope denouncing him as a heretic. I therefore regard Luther to be something of a reluctant Reformer. He wanted simply to change the corruption from within but this desire forced him to leave the church to which he could have been an invaluable asset. The loss suffered by the church at this time has proven to be the foundation of my faith. It is interesting to consider the views of Luther which the Pope dismissed as heretical and which were destined to become the cor-



nerstone of the Protestant faith. After studying the words of St. Paul and the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo, he came to the conclusion that salvation could be achieved through grace alone, not by any human activity but by the grace of God alone. This view remains the most important part of the Lutheran legacy for true protestants today.

There are many false images of Protestantism, perhaps the most prominent being that the name implies a protest against something and has only a negative quality. Nothing could be further than the truth. The term itself comes from the Latin, "Pro testari," meaning to profess or to declare openly. It is therefore a positive protestation of a deeply held faith which is pure and open to all. It is not merely an argument against Roman Catholicism. Neither is my faith just a diluted form of Roman Catholicism. It is often a misconception that it is less whole as it is referred to simply as the "catholic" faith and that the word "roman" has simply been omitted. The Catholic faith is in fact faith in its wholeness or totality with no need of any further additions or earthly labels. In the light of this statement, Pelikan has commented that Martin Luther was the first Protestant yet he was more catholic than many of his Roman Catholic opponents.

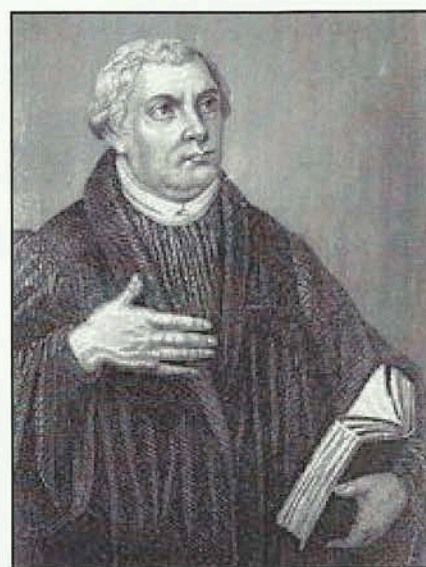
Protestants cherish the right to interpret the Gospel on an individual basis but this does not mean that we are free to make our own Gospel. We must make our own deci-

sion about the Gospel which is proclaimed to us. This need for a personal decision has a particular significance for the Protestant. The reformers, including Luther, cried with one voice "sola scriptura," scripture alone, and this was and is the sole test of faith. Protestants believe that nothing can be asserted which contradicts or goes beyond Scripture. For the believing Protestant, therefore, the Bible should not be infallibly interpreted by Popes or earthly councils. The Bible is regarded as the word of God and its authority rests upon its content and central message of the saving love of Christ. Just as Luther cried, "sola fide," or faith alone, Protestants remain convinced that an absolute reliance upon God is the foundation of salvation. As a result, the Roman Catholic teaching that man possesses powers by which he can make himself acceptable to God, is totally rejected. If man was capable of this, Christ's supreme sacrifice is belittled and made unnecessary. Our faith is a lively reckless confidence in the Grace of God whom we must serve in love. Man cannot be ascribed with any other source of merit and should not be regarded as having an intrinsic capacity for good. No credit can be gained by good works or any virtue conferred by the sacraments of the church.

It should not be implied that the Protestant is against good works but they speak out against a false understanding of their importance. They have no merit as to salvation

but are the natural endeavour of the follower of God. For the Protestant, faith is stressed and is accompanied naturally by good works out of a desire to serve God in love. The Protestant faith is therefore not lacking in warmth or compassion, but has Christ at its very centre and love as its foundation. It is not only the legacy of Luther, but of Christ himself and the Protestant continues to hold on to the words of St. Paul and the central message of the Gospel.

Martin Luther is in relation to the Reformation rather like the opening notes of some great piano concerto, which states the theme, which is then taken up by other instruments. As a Protestant, I must ensure that the compassion is not lost in the struggle for survival which is facing the Protestant faith in our country today. I remain an instrument for the truth of Christ's Gospel, following the example of Luther, the Reformer for truth.



Martin Luther



# From The Shankill To Crossmaglen

by Rev. Mervyn Kingston

I came to work in Creggan Parish, Crossmaglen in 1990, after spending six years in the Glencairn/Forthriver district of the Upper Shankill Road, Belfast. From the first day I felt totally at home in Crossmaglen, which is not what some Protestants might expect! I was conscious of a sense of welcome and warmth, respect for one's neighbour and a spirit of tolerance. For me that outlook reflects the true spirit of the people of Crossmaglen.

In each place in which I have worked I have tried to find one simple task that might broaden ecumenical cooperation and contribute to the wider community. This has resulted in a variety of experiences, ranging from a Baden Powell Scout Group with a large catholic membership in North Belfast (1966) an open Youth Club in a 97% protestant town (1974) and a cross community Youth Training Programme on Belfast's Newtownards Road (1978), which at that time was only the second integrated one in Northern Ireland. On the upper Shankill we shared in the Shankill/Falls clergy fellowship and it was possible to have a nun to preach on two occasions! That is basically where I am coming from, having earlier worked as a civil servant in Turf Lodge/Beechmount/Shankill

Road from 1966-1970, before going to college.

In August 1969 I visited a catholic pensioner the day after she had been burned out of her home in Bombay Street by the loyalist mob. It was her (82nd) birthday. I gave her ten shillings from my own pocket as a present. As a student in 1972 I was within 50 yards of an explosion at a new catholic parochial house, again the work of loyalists. I sent £5 to the catholic parish.

In 1974 I invited a local catholic curate to attend my Ordination in east Belfast, when such a thing was unheard of.

One lesson I learned fairly early on is that Ministry is for everyone, not just for the members of your own congregation. Where numbers are small you have more opportunity of working for the betterment of the local community. In Crossmaglen this has meant involvement as a director of ROSA, supporting the rights of parents to have their children educated through the medium of the Irish language, and serving on the District Partnership Board of the Peace and Reconciliation Programme.

We have tried to develop our shared heritage through cultural

tourism by offering guided tours of the historic churchyard, creating a small Visitors Centre, a Public Park and amenity area and restoring an 18th century walled garden. An exhibition "The Poets and People of the Creggan" has been produced with the active help of Creggan Local History Society. In addition the number of Ecumenical Services, which started in 1988 when the preacher was the late Cardinal Tomás ÓFiaich, has been extended to four or five a year.

Among the visitors to the Centre on Sunday was two busloads of women ex-republican prisoners and their families from Belfast, who for their day out had chosen to go first to Armagh gaol, where they had their photos taken outside the cells they formerly occupied. It would have been a brave man who asked for admission money. I though it was sufficient to make them welcome and encourage them to come back on another visit. Loyalists might like to know that it is alleged that the Red Hand of Ulster is buried in the O'Neill Vault at Creggan. So I will be expecting the busloads from the Shankill too and you will be made very welcome in this lovely place.

At a personal level it has been possible to make representations to the



RUC on behalf of several persons (not of my congregation) who were in trouble with the law. In each case I have to say there was a positive response. We have also had four British Army chaplains to preach in Crossmaglen, of which two came on to preach in Co. Louth. On one such visit it took 25 soldiers and 4 policemen to deliver the preacher to the church!

may be different ten miles up the road where the balance of population is more equal. In Newry/South Armagh the protestant population has declined substantially as a result of the troubles. What can be done by the local majority population to ease this uncomfortable fact, or is it just a matter of indifference?

In 1998 and again this year, one Irish tricolour on display outside the church grounds at Creggan was taken down for my benefit. It raises the issue of the proper display of flags and emblems. Should flags be displayed outside churches? How would you feel if the "opposite" flag was put up outside your church? How do you accommodate your neighbour's flags and emblems?

We live in a complex society where there are many differing views and outlooks interwoven and overlapping. The important thing is to think for yourself, to face up to your own prejudices and to take the risk of moving beyond boundaries. Dialogue is a first step towards encouraging awareness and understanding. Do what you can within your own circle. Don't give in to sectarian prejudice and bigotry. No community has a monopoly of suffering. Try to put

Sometimes in South Armagh, the majority culture is all pervasive, so that only one voice is heard. It can be difficult for Protestants to express their views. How do you encounter the minority community in your own locality? What might help to provide opportunities for this to take place? Minorities need their own space. A community is impoverished when its minority disappears. Do minorities have a right to be heard or should they simply like it or lump it? It is easy for majorities to decide first and consult afterwards. How might this be avoided?

yourself in the other person's position so that you can empathise with the pain and hurt of their community. Be open to others yourself rather than leave it to them to make the first move. You may be surprised by the response.

Rev. Mervyn Kingston is the Rector of Creggan, Ballymascanlan Union and Rathcor.

The parish website may be viewed at <http://www.iol.ie/~creggan>

Protestants are not perceived as a threat in Crossmaglen because their numbers are so small. The story



# A Tool for learning

by Michael Atcheson

**A**fter speaking to Marty Melarky of 'The Nerve Centre' Londonderry / Derry about their new educational CD-Rom which Marty describes as "explaining the rich variety of symbols through which Unionist and Nationalists express their culture and identity today", I was eager to obtain a copy.

On installing the CD Rom the user is introduced to a cross roads with two sign posts one pointing to 'The Somme' and the other pointing to 'The Easter Rising'. Haunting music accompanies this visual experience. If the user moves the cursor to either side ghost like figures appear honouring fallen comrades. It is strange to see this visual experience; it certainly brings home for me the respect both sides have for their dead. It is true when they say that, "one man's enemy is another man's hero". It is also bizarre to think that out of both of these episodes in our history, that on Irish soil these men were enemies but in the Fields of France they were comrades.

It is time for the user to choose the direction, which he/she wishes to follow. A simple click on either signpost takes the user into the symbols menu, which is the same for both subjects, battles, Icons, memory and identity. Once into any selection an easy to use menu gives the user access into several categories, which are complimented with both, visual archive material or audio comments from well-known public figures, politicians and historians.

I have only spent a short time at the

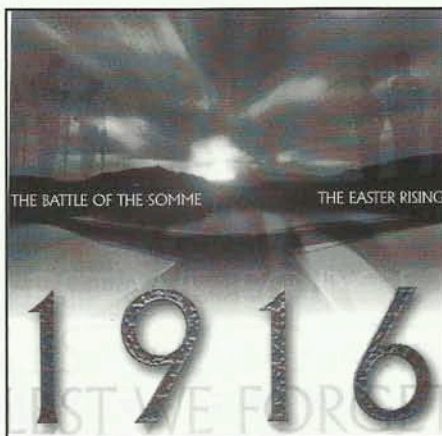
crossroads of these two important events in our history and I am certainly learning as I journey in any direction. There is a wealth of information within the C.D.Rom, even debates, which are relevant today, such as the 'Flags issue'. The team from the Nerve Centre have not only designed the C.D. Rom in

such away that it is easy for the user to navigate through all the material thereby importantly gaining full access to all the information. They have also treated with equality and respect the culture and identity of both of our communities in relation to both of these historical events. Enjoy the journey!.

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## 1916-Lest We Forget

by Emma Totten  
'A' Level Student



*The CD rom is an educational journey back in time. Its detailed exploration back to 1916 includes live film footage which in effect puts you at the heart of it all. Its colourful range of photographs and postcards is captive to the imagination and to the eye, which in effect expands the age to which the CD rom would appeal. The intricate detail and knowledge to which each of the two major events of 1916 are portrayed makes it unquestionably informative. The CD rom focuses on considerable aspects of each event from start to finish highlighting the causes, course and consequences of the two. The Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising shaped history in Ireland and they are key events in the cultural identities of people here today. It contains curriculum based educational support material from Key Stage 3 up to A-Level in history and extra information which would develop general knowledge on topics. Not only is the CD Rom in a historical context but it also has the additional benefit of educational support in the subject of*

*english. The inclusion of poems and extracts of novels would align to the curriculum and again boost understanding and learning. Not only would the CD rom educate about the past but it would help people to comprehend the situation today. The CD rom is compiled by various people from community workers to historians, politicians and school children. The CD rom is very easy to use and comprehend and the fact that it has sound, colour and film can only lengthen the attention spans of children. It is state of the art, with substantial educational benefits even to those who thought they knew all about the events exposing more information than we were aware of. The CD rom takes you to the heart of it all and you cannot help feel a part of it, and we all are! There is a wealth of information in this CD rom waiting to be uncovered as well as the added benefits of a spectrum of colour, pieces of evidence and a boost to general knowledge.*



# IN DEFENCE OF PAT MAGEE

by Anthony McIntyre

In a recent judgement pertaining to the expression of fundamentalist religious ideas a British High court judge made the comment that 'the irritating, the contentious, the eccentric, the heretical, the unwelcome and provocative have a right to be heard...our world has seen too many examples of state control of unofficial ideas'.

It is a viewpoint the former controller (in the most negative and authoritarian sense of the term) of RTE, Muiris Mac Conghail, would seek to dispute thus placing himself to the right of the British judiciary - no mean achievement. In an *Irish Times* opinion piece on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September Mac Conghail seemed incandescent with rage that Patrick Magee - convicted for the 1984 Brighton bomb attack should have his views aired on RTE. Magee was not rallying people to the cause of killing murderous British Prime Ministers. In fact he expressed the somewhat strange and arguably unsustainable view that it was better Margaret Thatcher survived the attack as it led to the peace process.

Indeed it would seem that Mac Conghail was alert to this and under the guise of attacking Magee's right to speak he sought to undermine the wider public's right to hear. Hence his complaint that 'what Magee achieved in his interview was a considerable psychological victory for Sinn Féin as the truly nationalist party in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in Ireland as a whole'. If he was so upset about those convicted of killing others during the course of the Northern conflict being allowed to speak on RTE, is it not plausible to expect in the interests of consistency and

non-partisanship, that his voice of opposition would have been raised before now? Opportunities were abundant - myself, John White of UFF notoriety and others have articulated our respective positions on the airwaves.

As a former comrade of Patrick Magee, convicted of activity of a similar gravity, and a reasonably frequent participant in RTE discussions - accompanied by Eoghan Harris who did not walk out or object to my presence - I think it is essential that people like ourselves have full freedom to explain why we behaved as we did. Equally so, the full rigour of investigative journalism should be employed against us so that our views may be challenged and that the public are afforded a fuller appreciation of the issues at stake. Colum Kenny in the *Sunday Independent*, in this respect, has a much greater appreciation than Mac Conghail.

In this context it is important to bear in mind that the Brighton bomb did not impact on everyone as it did on Muiris Mac Conghail. When asked for his views on that particular attack the former Prime Minister of Israel - a state for which Thatcher had profound admiration - Yitshak Shamir said 'I would say neutral. It's a question of the battle of freedom... I remember the British have been very cruel in their behaviour with them. I remember during the hunger strikes their position was very cruel'.

Pat Magee gained a doctorate of philosophy while in prison. That gives him no more right to speak than anyone else. But it does suggest that he is capable of articulating his position with a certain

strength of logic and clarity. Furthermore, the substance of his doctoral thesis poses a challenge to the received wisdom on republicanism as expressed through much literature. For this reason it is all the more important that his philosophical reflections are not banished to the intellectual wilderness. Maybe Mac Conghail would prefer that only those as articulate as Johnny Adair be allowed on air - a bit of fun for the interviewer and the sporting public in between races.

At his trial in ancient Greece, Socrates told his jurors in defence of freedom of expression, 'while I have life and strength I shall never cease to follow philosophy...I shall never act differently even if I shall have to die for it many times'. Had this principle been applied during Mac Conghail's control career at RTE perhaps the culture of corruption now so pervasive throughout Southern Irish society may have been challenged and thwarted. Unfortunately, unaccountable power occupied the position of the privileged and, in the manner of the bully, Mac Conghail's authoritarian ire was reserved for those he considered too marginalised to do anything about it.



# BIG BROTHER MEANS BIG

by Eugene Byrne

**N**ot since the days of Dallas has a television programme caught the imagination of the public like the recently and thankfully completed showing of the Big Brother series on Channel Four. There wasn't a pub or shop you went into or a bus on which you were travelling that somebody wasn't rushing home to watch the next series. I must admit curiosity got the better of me and I found myself tuning into Channel Four to see what I had been missing. Someone once said that a good reason for doing something twice is to ascertain if it was as good or bad as the first time. Well, after a first viewing I felt the need to put this theory to the test and indeed, discovered that it was every bit as bad as the first time.

As I sat down to watch the series in my South Armagh home, the reception on the television screen faded and became a haze when low-flying helicopters from the nearby British Army spy post on the hills of Glassdrumond flew overhead. It was at that moment, and but for the seriousness of the matter, that I found the situation almost farcical. Here I was watching a television programme where people by their own choice were being monitored for fun and entertainment while all around me in South Armagh, the populace were

forced to live under around-the-clock surveillance from approximately a dozen high rise army observation posts.

The South Armagh region is undoubtedly one of the most monitored areas in Europe. Added to these monstrosities which blight the landscape are the covert cameras hidden in hedgerows, culverts, etc. A number of these hi-tech surveillance devices have been discovered by local farmers in South Armagh. In many of these cases it is not always the obvious we have to be concerned about, there is also the question of the damage this type of surveillance can do to our health and this is a serious issue currently under investigation.

This is an infringement on privacy. The basic human rights of people are being eroded and all done supposedly in the interests of safety and the betterment of society. Most towns in the North have CCTV's installed or are in the process of doing so. Therefore, whether we like it or not hi-tech surveillance has become part of our daily life ... just like TV. However, unlike the participants in the Big Brother series we do not have a choice. We do not know who is monitoring us and whether we can trust them with our privacy. There are arguments for and against such intru-

sions into peoples' lives. It may be argued that if you are doing nothing wrong you have nothing to fear; but is CCTV really a deterrent.

Personally I don't think so. There may well be a hidden agenda for this type of Big Brother approach. It may or may not identify people in the act of committing a crime, but it doesn't stop it.

We know from past experience that the information garnered from surveillance cameras doesn't always protect the public. This was proved some years ago in Tyrone when a grandmother was murdered. Directly after the incident an elaborate surveillance camera which had been focused on the scene was discovered. It did not help to apprehend her killers or more to the point, was not instrumental in the prevention of her murder.

Nationalists and Republicans have every reason to be concerned about their security or safety especially when the RUC has responsibility for installing and monitoring CCTV's in our towns. Currently in Newry there is an ongoing debate about the installation of these cameras. In Derry City, Armagh and elsewhere it is the same. The SDLP seem to believe that the recent spate of assaults in Derry would be reduced if CCTV's monitored by the RUC were installed. Have



they so conveniently forgotten that this is the same organisation who watched and done nothing when Robert Hamill was being kicked to death in Portadown town centre. Would CCTV's have made a difference. I don't believe they would no more than a name change of the same force would. This is an issue which effects us all. It concerns fundamental rights of people and therefore it is important that the public have an input into this whole matter. It should not remain solely the decision of traders or the RUC. After all it is the general public who come under close surveillance while they go about their daily lives.

Recently pupils in England quite rightly objected to CCTV's being installed in their school toilets because someone vandalised a mirror. A line has to be drawn somewhere. This Big Brother approach is a total infringement of everyone's civil liberties. After the recent findings of the B.S.E. inquiries we know we cannot rely on those in power to reveal the truth.

Unfortunately we don't have the advantage of Big Brother's purple chair to express our judgements and opinions on matters. If we did I would safely venture to say it would be a unanimous decision as to who would be evicted and why.

# SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES OF PRISON PROTEST

By Michael White

**B**eing locked up twenty-four hours a day in an H Block prison cell creates myriad problems for any prisoner but its ten times worse if you've been on a protest for x number of years. As any experienced prisoner knows, prison is all about doing 'bird' in your head and not, contrary to widespread anecdotes, on your head. That may well be okay for those short-time men whose coats are still swinging down in reception by the time they've done their bit of whack. When it comes to survival on a long term basis, especially when you're naked in a cell and still can't come to terms with the smell of your cellmate's excrement you tend to think that things cannot get worse.

Just when you think that ... they do. Isn't it always the way of it. You haven't had a smoke for nearly a week You've just acquired some *tobac* and you think its Christmas. You have enough 'skins' and don't mind at all patiently and tediously eking out a ball of cotton fluff from your white towel ends (protesters were issued with white cotton or linen towels, which they wore around their waists). All you needed was a splanc or spark to ignite that tiny ball of cotton fluff and this is where the old saying that necessity is the mother of invention comes into its own. A device known as a 'splunker' (from the Irish word *splanc* meaning spark) must be one of the hallmarks or maybe even the epitome of prison survival ingenuity. It consisted of a lighter flint or several which was embedded into a plastic knife handle. Sometimes longer industrial type flints were smuggled in and because of their lon-

gevity these were prized possessions and were easier to operate. A spark was then produced when a piece of glass (some prisoners broke their spectacles glass) or another flint was struck along the embedded flint which ignited the fluff ball. Even more ingenious were the ways of moving stuff from cell to cell despite the fact that everyone was banged up twenty-fours a day.

'Shooting the crap' acquired a whole new meaning on the blanket. Thread was put through the hole in a button which in turn was strategically placed in the gap between the floor and the cell door. An implement, usually a spoon or comb was used to strike or 'shoot' the button at an angle across the wing floor. The trajectory was important as the same procedure was repeated by the those in the cell opposite and the lines carried by the buttons had to cross and entangle. Once a line was established communiqués and material could be passed across the wing. Prisoners in the cells nearest the grills stood at their door, sometimes for hours, ever vigilant for raids by the screws. After such operations pots of urine were emptied out onto the wing but not before the all-important task of passing *tobac* over had been completed. These were important and essential lines of communication. A relay system between cells also existed. This involved passing or swinging a pouch made from pieces of blanket from one cell to another via cell windows. Anything from food to toilet paper (mostly the former) poems is Irish/English, miniaturised copies of *Republican News*, lectures typed out on fine paper, all this and more, was passed up and down the wings and these operations were carried out both day and night.



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