

# SECTARIANISM

## Strategies

- Establish a Centre for Citizenship and Reconciliation.
- Develop programmes of public education.
- Conduct research into the themes of citizenship and reconciliation
- Publish research findings at popular academic levels
- Participate in the media
- Facilitate intercultural dialogues
- Host conferences and contribute to relevant conferences elsewhere.
- Develop international links with similar centres in Europe and beyond.
- Participate in transnational debate on problems of citizenship and reconciliation in divided societies.

*If you would like to aid in this crucial campaign please contact:*

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**FOCUS ON**

# SECTARIANISM

**THE PERNICIOUS DIVISION IN OUR SOCIETY**



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IN MAY 1972 THE Official IRA declared a ceasefire. The decision followed the disastrous and senseless bombing of the British Army Paratroopers Headquarters in Aldershot in February 1972. The decision to place a bomb at the particular place arose out of the desire to exact revenge on the Paratrooper Regiment which had been to the forefront in the murder of the fourteen Civil Rights demonstrators in Derry in January 1972. The victims of the Aldershot bombing – a priest, a gardener and five cleaners – were it is clear men and women who were as innocent as those murdered in Derry on Bloody Sunday 1972.

The reason for choosing Aldershot was based on information that the bomb would be directed solely at British Army Paratrooper Officers who were feeling secure and removed from the violence in Northern Ireland and would be made to feel some of the death and destruction that the people of Derry and many other towns and cities in Northern Ireland were experiencing every day. When the time came for the bomb to be placed the bombers disregarded all this and instead chose an easy target – the dining area of the barracks, with-

out regard as to who would be frequenting this particular area. The bombers, it was concluded, were more concerned about their own safety than the lives of innocent people and their actions placed the Officials for the first time in the category of a terrorist organisation.

The tragedy of the Aldershot killings brought about a wide and deep discussion within the Official IRA as to its future activities and its purpose, as a revolutionary organisation. Some elements most especially those led by Seamus Costello wished to pursue an activity of no warning bombs and indiscriminate killings. An example of Seamus Costello's mentality at the time of the Aldershot bombing was to claim despite no evidence – that thirteen British Army Paratrooper Officers had been killed in the bomb – he refused to accept that Aldershot was a disaster and as events in later years proved, he had learned nothing from Aldershot other than to try and compete with other terrorist organisations.

The result of the discussion within the Official IRA was the far-reaching decision to call a ceasefire in May 1972. It took some time before the decision was fully accepted and implemented resulting in 1974 in the expulsion of Seamus Costello and a

WPI National  
Treasurer

**SEAN  
GARLAND**

reflects on  
Official IRA  
ceasefire  
of 1972  
and its impact  
since on events

small number of malcontents which led to the founding of the IRSP/INLA and the murder of members of the Officials, Sean Fox, Paul Crawford and Billy McMillen. One of the most important and positive effects of the Official IRA ceasefire decision was the historic speech by Tomas MacGiolla in Carrickmore, Co. Tyrone in July 1972. In this speech Tomas analysed the political situation, dealt with the historical aspects of the struggle, reaffirmed the principles of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly, pointed out how the reforms of the Civil Rights Association could become revolutionary in character if implemented. As he pointed out at Car-

rickmore the Civil Rights Association had already achieved tremendous victories.

In an epilogue to the Carrickmore speech written in 2000, Tomas MacGiolla stated, and I quote "By 1972 we had come through four dramatic years of revolutionary activity in the Civil Rights Movement with the constant tensions within Republicanism, Unionism and Nationalism. We had suffered the enormous trauma of August 1969 with the Battle of Bogside followed immediately by a deadly pogrom carried out by the B Specials, with full co-operation of the RUC, against the nationalist people of West Belfast resulting in enormous destruction and death. This caused a huge upsurge of emotion and anger among the Catholics of the North and the general population of the south, directed against the Protestant and Unionist people in general. Yet before that autumn was over we had the great triumph of seeing almost total victory for the Civil Rights Campaign.

The Special Powers Act was struck off the Statute Books; the B Specials were disbanded and abolished forever; the RUC were reformed and appeared unarmed on the streets of Northern Ireland; the Housing Executive was set up



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ending discrimination in the allocation of houses. Other issues such as job discrimination, electoral reform etc remained to be dealt with, but the British Government had made major concessions which had left the Unionists in a state of total division and confusion.

However at the same time members of the Dublin Government were engaged in talks with sectarian individuals in Northern Ireland with the purpose of creating a split in the Republican movement and also in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. In this they got full support from right-wing militants in the South who were active members of the Republican Movement and totally opposed to the Civil Rights Campaign and to the socialist position adopted by the leadership of the Republican Movement at that time.

With offers of money and weapons the Fianna Fail Government succeeded in setting up an organisation which soon became known as the Provisional IRA. Once they launched their bombing campaign in 1970 all the successes of the Civil Rights Movement were overturned by the British Government. The RUC were

rearmed, the Special Powers Act was replaced with even more draconian legislation and the UDR was set up to replace the B Specials.

In addition to having to suffer the Provisional bombing and shooting campaign in the summer of 1970 the people of the Lower Falls also had to defend themselves from the invasion of the Falls by 4000 British troops. Our members led the people's resistance and also had to defend themselves. Not one Provisional made an appearance during that British attack, the purpose of which was "to finish off the Officials".

Then on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1971 internment was introduced and our members once more had to defend themselves. The escalation of RUC and British Army activities and the Provisional car bombings of towns and villages led eventually to the massacre of 14 unarmed civil rights marchers in Derry on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972. This led to further emotional trauma and further response.

We now felt that we were being dragged into a morass not of our own making which was in fact in direct conflict with our own political and ideological position. After much discussion a ceasefire was called in May

## British Government had made major concessions which had left the Unionists in a state of total division and confusion

1972. We began to get back on the road we had planned. Thus Carrickmore 28 years ago.

Almost 50% of the population weren't even born then. The years '68-'72 are ancient history to them. The only life they have known is a life full of conflict, injury and death. But now the hope is that terrorism is over and people can get on with 'normal' lives. So the 'victory' after 25 years of 'armed struggle' is 'peace' – that is the ending of 'armed struggle'. What a waste of years, what a waste of lives! As I pointed out in Carrickmore in 1972:

*"The destruction of Stormont has been hailed by the Provisional Alli-*

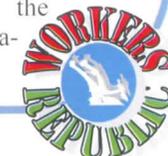
*ance and their supporters as a grand achievement. What precisely has it achieved? Are the working class people of this part of the country not suffering the viciousness of imperialism as they were before? Are there more jobs, more opportunities, more equality?"*

Then I went on to state firmly and clearly:

*"Understanding the justified and unjustified fears of the Protestant class we have correctly decided that a form of government will remain in the Six Counties, but it must be a Government based on the democratic demands of the Civil Rights Association".*

This became our constant and unswerving policy in all the years since then – a Devolved Government and a Bill of Rights. All the militarists, British, Provisional and Loyalist have now at last agreed that this was the only sane and sensible policy and all have signed an agreement to establish a Devolved Government at Stormont and implement a Bill of Rights. It's called the Good Friday Agreement.

The main thrust of the speech in 1972 was to empha-



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size the revolutionary effect of the purely reformist demands of the Civil Rights Association when it united the people in mass struggle; to reject as counter revolutionary the imposition of an elitist military force which pushed the Civil Rights Association off the stage, smashed the mass struggle of the people when it was on the point of total victory and, by promoting sectarian confrontation and slaughter, set back by 30 years the possibility of uniting Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter which should be the bedrock of Republicanism.

We still have much to do. Immediately we must push for the implementation of a Bill of Rights – not a Human Rights Convention. But a Bill of Rights specifically designed for the sectarian ridden state of Northern Ireland. We must continue the constant struggle against sectarianism, racism, and all kinds of bigotry and discrimination. Finally we must continue to hold fast to Tone's dream of uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter under the common name of Irishman. Or as Cathal Goulding said:

*"The struggle for civil rights should become a struggle for class*

*rights, so that all Irish workers would become Dissenters".*

As the great Dean Swift said in 1724, *"The public are at the mercy of the wicked, since the wicked are always watching for the opportunity to practice their avarice and malice".*

## How true today.

So where do we stand today, 37 years after the Official IRA ceasefire of May 1972? The main terrorist organisations have accepted that terrorism has and will not achieve anything. The division of the people – sectarianism in Northern Ireland has not ended. The creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly and executive based on sectarian quotas with each religious/nationalist/loyalist grouping looking after the sectarian interests of their people will not end sectarianism. Some elements mainly disaffected Provisional IRA members, plus Ultra-Leftists / Trotskyists and Loyalists factions still do not accept that terrorism is a cul-de-sac leading to prison, death and continued division. The prospects of the Northern Ireland Executive moving out of their respective sectarian camps are at this point in time and for the foreseeable future next to nil. Recent figures indicate that Northern Ireland society is more deeply divided than ever before.

Each  
religious /  
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Northern Ireland is destined to remain a divided sectarian anti-democratic society unless we can build a democratic convention which can intensify the process of uniting and mobilising workers in their interests. For the Workers' Party which has consistently spelled out what is required to advance to a democratic society the task remains. To build a broad coalition of democratic forces; to abolish sectarianism in the schools, in employment, in housing, in the minds of the people.

We are a long way from the Republic of all Ireland and we are a longer way from an All Ireland Democratic Secular Socialist Republic.

In his Carrickmore Speech of July 1972 Tomas MacGiolla stated and we conclude this piece on his speech by quoting one of the most telling and lasting points of that speech "People have talked about the Provisionals trying to bomb one million Protestants into a republic; but they would not – could not – and no-one can – and no-one as far as we are concerned would try to bomb them into a socialist republic. That would be the ultimate contradiction and the ultimate stupidity. We need those million Protestant workers on the workers side in the Irish revolution".

For over two centuries the issue of nationalism in Ireland as it is presented by the ruling class has distorted Irish politics. After the Act of Union of 1800, which made Ireland a subject province of England, the leadership of the nationalist movement in Ireland was captured by the arch-reactionary Daniel O'Connell and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy. For instance we find that today after decades of murder and terrorism the very manner in which commentators/historians/politicians can use the words nationalism/republicanism in the one sentence without qualification is either ignorance or deliberate obfuscation designed to give a cloak of respectability to a malign doctrine. Nationalism allied to



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religion in many countries, not just Ireland, has become a monster which feeds on hate, bigotry, intolerance resulting very often in genocide. In our own time we have witnessed the tragic results of blind nationalism allied to religious hatred from the activities of sectarian elements in the two communities in Northern Ireland. Sadly, last week on Sunday 24th May 2009, we have once again seen the results of sectarianism as was demonstrated in Coleraine, County Derry, when a Loyalist mob murdered a Catholic community activist, Kevin McDaid, who sought to protect his family. This particular murder which arose out of Glasgow Rangers football team winning a Scottish Football title over Glasgow Celtic Football team epitomises the cancer that is sectarianism when two competing tribes are only concerned to put one over on the other side.

Despite this murder and continued acts of sectarian violence we are determined to intensify our struggle against the perverted ideology of nationalism allied to religion which is at the core of sectarianism and which has trapped the Catholic and Protes-

tant peoples of this island for centuries. As we have repeatedly said democracy, genuine democracy, in which the people participate at every level of society and hold their elected representatives to account, not just every five years but on a regular basis in democratic councils, is an essential prerequisite in a modern democracy.

The struggle for democracy is a continuing one and indeed it goes back centuries. One of the foremost advocates for a truly democratic society was Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*, which was one of the finest and clearest expositions of democracy. The anniversary of Thomas Paine's death will be commemorated next week by the newly formed Thomas Paine Memorial Society. Paine, an Englishman, made the famous remark

*"where freedom is not there is my country"*

and he demonstrated this in practice through his active involvement in the American War of Independence in which he played a most significant part and also in the French Revolution where he was respected and admired for his wonderful work in defending the Revolution. In England he was part of the Democratic Movement which sought to establish a democratic society in Britain by abol-

## The perverted ideology of nationalism allied to religion is at the core of sectarianism which has trapped the peoples of this island for centuries

ishing monarchy and privilege of the few. His comrades in that struggle included Lord Edward Fitzgerald, a member of the Society of the United Irishmen, and William Blake the radical poet, who was the man who warned Paine he was about to be arrested and this warning enabled Paine to flee to France where he was welcomed and once again became fully engaged in the development and defence of the French Revolution.

It is somewhat ironic that today over 200 years after the French Revo-

lution which brought so much hope to downtrodden and oppressed people all over the world, the struggle for democracy, power to the majority of people, is still to be attained. Nevertheless despite many failures to achieve democracy we have learned many lessons. Central to our struggle as we have so often pointed out is the unity of the working class and the development of class consciousness.

We cannot repeat too often that a fundamental to building a strong Workers' Party is class consciousness, the recognition that this society is dominated by the few who exploit the many. The enemy is capitalism not the fellow worker, in the words of James Connolly the capitalist of my own country is my natural enemy just as the workers of other lands are my natural allies. Billions of Euro have been handed to bankers to bail them and their developer friends out whilst workers who have lost their jobs have in many cases also lost their homes. To pile insult upon misery thousands of workers made redundant have to wait weeks, in some cases up to eighteen weeks to get any unemployment benefit for which they had paid for many years whilst employed. We have learned recently that tens of thousands of workers in the



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building industry, and in many other areas of the economy, have lost their pensions for which they have contributed over many years. In some instances employers have stolen the money which workers entrusted to them to provide for their pension fund. Who will compensate these workers?

The Government has already stated it is not willing to have a pension protection scheme. Yet they had no hesitation in surrendering to the bankers' and developers' demands to save them with billions of taxpayers' money. The demand of the entire trade union movement must be to safeguard workers' pension rights.

The events over the past two years demonstrate to millions of people throughout the world that capitalism is flawed and will only survive so long as workers and their families tolerate exploitation by a small group of bankers, developers, speculators who are best described as parasites. We recognise that capitalism will survive the present crisis. But in saying this we are not disheartened or pessimistic for the future. We recall Engels introduction to "Class strug-

gles in France" by Marx in which he stated:

*"A New Revolution is possible only in the wake of a new Crisis. It is, however, just as certain as this crisis"*.

The Official IRA's ceasefire of May 1972 was, as many independent observers agree, a major and significant step in the development of the peace process. The members of the Official IRA, recognising the need for such an initiative, had to once again demonstrate discipline and integrity in upholding the decision.

Despite being castigated and maligned by Provo fellow travellers and the Nationalist Provisional IRA, supported and attacked as we stated by Ultra-Leftists, they held the line and proved under the leadership of Cathal Goulding, that theirs was the right way forward. Over the years since then there have been dramatic and indeed fundamental changes in our approach to struggle. Cathal's point, which I quoted earlier from Tomas Mac Giolla's epilogue of 2000 and which I believe is worth repeating is a fundamental point:

*"The struggle for Civil Rights should become a struggle for class rights so that all Irish workers would become Dissenters"*.

Class struggle is our most important weapon and the most effective

part of that weapon is class consciousness - always remember we led the way and despite the betrayal and defections since May 1972 we have retained our core values which have and will sustain us in the coming years. We face a powerful enemy who will give no quarter and we on our part must be equally determined to build a powerful united working

class movement which will achieve the aims and objectives of all those who have from the United Irishmen of 1798 down through the centuries never lost sight of our goal a society in which the vast majority, the working class, will have the power and will have the full benefits of their labour.

*From a speech by Sean Garland, Dundalk, May 31, 2009*

## OVERCOMING SECTARIANISM CITIZENSHIP AND RECONCILIATION

### Background

THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT of 10 April 1998 was an historic achievement. It won the support of a majority of political parties, including those that were traditional enemies. It also won the support of a substantial majority of citizens, north and south. The Agreement promised the dawn of a new political era. Among other things, it appeared to resolve long-standing constitutional disputes between unionism and nationalism. It initiated institutional and structural changes within Northern Ireland, between north and south, and between Ireland and Britain.

Implementing the Agreement has not, however, been a straightforward task. Conflicting interpretations of its meaning are apparent among its supporters, and a significant number of unionists along with a smaller number of so-

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called dissident nationalists oppose it. No doubt formal relations between traditional foes are now more civil than they have been for thirty years. But formal civility does not disguise the considerable mistrust that continues to exist between unionists and nationalists.

This mistrust has political and cultural roots. It is linked to the ongoing reality of sectarian attitudes that have persisted in post-agreement Northern Ireland. These attitudes are obviously reflected in disputes over marches, symbols and police reform, and the administration of justice. But they also appear in a variety of everyday practices that sustain cultural, religious and political divisions. For many citizens who entertained high hopes of the Agreement leading to a recasting of sectarian mindsets, the disappointment has been that at the level of attitudes so much remains unchanged. Unaltered sectarian practices, beliefs and dispositions pose a formidable challenge to realisation of the kind of new society that the Agreement anticipates.

## Rationale

We are determined to respond to this challenge. The rationale of our response may be summarised in four points:

### **It is short-sighted not to challenge sectarianism directly**

The institutional and structural changes introduced through the auspices of the Agreement need supplementing. It is not enough to hope that these changes in themselves will be sufficient to effect an eventual transformation of sectarian attitudes. Indeed,

without being explicitly tackled, sectarian attitudes have potential to undermine institutional/ structural changes. There is an unhelpful tendency in Northern Ireland to ignore this discomfiting potential by reifying traditional sectarianism as "culture". The point is that if sectarianism is culture then it is a malign culture: one whose beliefs, attitudes and practices must be scrutinised and challenged.

### **It is important to understand why sectarianism is a menace**

It is a menace principally because it poisons relations between members of different traditions; it stultifies the creation of a decent society for all citizens; and it lends spurious justification to odious practices, including murder. In identifying the menace of sectarianism the ambition is not to obliterate cultural differences between citizens. Cultural plurality is an undeniable feature of human experience, and love of one's culture is an entirely appropriate emotion. The problem arises when this love takes extravagant and exclusive forms, which deny our common humanity and work against the possibility of members of the same society sharing a common citizenship. Sectarianism, like its near relation racism and xenophobic nationalism, involves intolerant attitudes and actions that exaggerate and exploit our differences. It creates antagonistic divisions in its extreme preoccupation with its own religious/cultural political interests and sense of superiority.

### **Citizenship is the political category that provides the best antidote to sectarianism**

Thinking of ourselves as free and equal citizens enables us to appreciate what we share in common despite our differences. It encourages us to cooperate for the sake of creating and sustaining a society we can all share and

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participate in. Its inclinations are inclusive rather than exclusive; it fosters respect of difference; and it emphasizes our mutual indebtedness.

## **There are practical steps that can be immediately undertaken to oppose sectarianism in the name of citizenship**

These include speaking out against sectarian atrocities and practices, conducting an advertising campaign to promote civic values, advocating the benefits of dialogue, supporting all positive initiatives in the workplace, in trade unions, in sporting organisation, community organisations and so on.

## **Centre for Citizenship & Reconciliation**

But given the seriousness and extent of the problems caused by sectarianism, there is a need to counteract them in a sustained, systematic way as well. In particular, we think there is a compelling case for establishing a Centre for Citizenship and Reconciliation as a centre of excellence that points to positive alternatives to sectarianism. Three points should be emphasized:-

The predominant concern in Northern Ireland during the “troubles” was to

work out effective strategies of conflict resolution that could facilitate the achievement of peace. In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, the maintenance of (most) paramilitary ceasefires, and the decommissioning of some paramilitary weapons, there is a case for shifting concern to the task of reconciliation. This is a different task from that of conflict resolution and the strategies of the latter are by no means appropriate or adequate to its discharge.

A Centre for Citizenship and Reconciliation would be in a position to develop international links and draw on the experience of other divided societies. It would facilitate dialogue at transnational, as well as at local, levels and would facilitate academic and popular research and publications that could make very important contributions to sorting out our problems.

A Centre for Citizenship and Reconciliation would be unique. In liking the concepts of citizenship and reconciliation, which we think is indispensable, it has a distinctive rationale. It not only differs from that of Centres of Conflict Resolution but also from that of other Centres of Reconciliation (in Ireland and internationally) which do not have an emphasis on citizenship.

We envisage a Centre for Citizenship and Reconciliation having the following objective, strategies and funding needs.

## **Objectives**

- Contribute to the transformation of sectarian attitudes.
- Contribute to the cultivation of common ground among citizens.
- Deepen understanding of entailments of citizenship and reconciliation.
- Encourage respect of cultural, religious and political difference.

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