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INTERVIEW

EXCLUSIVE

WITH

CATHAL

GOULDING

One of the most comprehensive interviews conducted with an Irish Republican leader over the past years is published in this issue of "Eolas". The interview with Cathal Goulding comes in response to a request by "Eolas" magazine to the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, who arranged the interview. All or part of the interview can be published with acknowledgement and credit to "Eolas" magazine.

INTRODUCTION

Cathal Goulding, now in his forties, has been a member of the Republican Movement since his youth. Of a working class family, his father and mother were active Republicans during the War of Independence and the years following. Cathal, himself, was interned at an early age, by the Fianna Fail De Valera Government, in the Curragh Camp from 1940 to 1945. He was one of a small number who after their release attempted to re-organise the shattered republican organisation of that period. Arrested at the initial reorganisation meeting with some others he spent another year in jail.

From 1947 until 1953 he played a leading role in laying the basis for the fifties' campaign of the I.R.A. He was arrested in 1953 in England and sentenced to eight years imprisonment for his part in an arms raid on a British Army Training School at Felstead, Herts., England. On his release in 1959 he became active once again in the struggle that was then taking place. When that phase of the struggle ended in defeat and when the release of all prisoners had been secured he turned to an examination of the reasons for the failures of the past. He was one of the main architects and forces behind the drive to assess and learn from the past.

His speech at Bodenstown, traditionally a place and time for major republican statements, in 1967 marked the real beginning of the New Departure. Here he stated the need for the I.R.A. to have a Political, Social and Economic Programme as much as a military programme. As part of the new policy he was among those who met in County Derry in 1967 and pledged the total commitment and support of the Republican organisations to the Civil Rights cause. Under his leadership the I.R.A. developed from a narrow nationalist militaristic organisation into a conscious Socialist Revolutionary organisation.

In this interview with "Eolas" magazine Cathal Goulding traces the development of republican policies over the past years and in doing so answers the important question as to why the Republican Movement was unable to succeed in the past despite the fact that its members were prepared to make any sacrifice for it. He sets out concisely, comprehensively, what is required to make a successful revolution in Ireland and assess the successes and failures of the recent past.

Eolas: *The role of the I.R.A. changed significantly during the past decade. What can you tell us about that change, what inspired it? When did it begin?*

C.Goulding: Well, I think, one could say that questioning, examination and assessment began as soon as the fifties campaign ended. And it was not confined to the campaign - it covered the role of the Movement since 1916. One thing was clear: the I.R.A. had become remote from the people. The people respected the I.R.A., stood and cheered from the sidelines but they were, definitely, spectators, not participants in the struggle against British Imperialism. The mistakes of the past had been political rather than military.

The weaknesses were identified in this way:

1. The Army had no solid political base among the people.
2. It had no clearcut ideology which could define for the people what the struggle was all about.
3. The Army had concentrated its attacks on the British Military Occupation of the 6 Counties, to the exclusion of direct assaults on the British Political Administration in the 6 Counties or on the British Economic and Cultural penetration of both the 6 and 26 Counties.
4. Free Statism had been left free of both military, political and economic assaults and was merely attacked for its failure to take the 6 Counties and for its coercion of Republicans.

Free Statism, after 50 odd years is now a clearly defined pseudo-Nationalist/Catholic/Capitalist philosophy rooted in Griffith and de Valera and happy in its British designed geographical area.

By 1963 the strategy of the future had taken shape. It was decided, not to organise for a campaign in the Six Counties against the British Occupation Forces, but to organise for a revolution in the whole country against all the forces of British Imperialism and native Gombeenism. Our objective was to be the Re-Conquest of Ireland, not simply to place an Irish Government in political control of the geographical entity of Ireland but to place the mass of the people in actual control of the wealth and resources of the Irish nation and to give them a cultural identity.

Eolas: *How was this objective to be achieved?*

C.Goulding: Through Economic and Cultural Resistance by the people to British Imperialist penetration and exploitation and to the enslavement by the gombeen men; Political action by the people to defend their rights, to achieve specific objectives or simply to demonstrate their strength and power; Military Action, when necessary, to back up the peoples' demands, to defend the peoples' gains and eventually to carry through a successful national liberation struggle.

Eolas: *How did they set about their new role in Irish politics?*

C.Goulding: The first lesson was to organise and resist. Campaigns were carried out with varying degrees of success on a number of political issues - housing, land, fisheries, civil rights and repressive legislation - and, in most, Republicans were associated with other groups who shared their objectives. Organisation and resistance represented not just an aim but an achievement.

Eolas: *What was the attitude to parliament and the authority of any or all of the three parliaments which claimed the right to govern this country?*

C.Goulding: It was laid down that whether Republicans fought elections and took their seats or not, there was no question, there is no question, and there will be no question of recognising the legitimacy of the authority of these parliaments. The Westminster Parliament has no shred of authority, and never had, to legislate for any part of this country. The Belfast and Dublin Parliaments are both puppets of Westminster set up by Act of the Westminster parliament and not by the will of the Irish people, North or South. Both these parliaments protect the British Imperial interest and the interests of the Tory Ascendancy class, the Castle Catholics, the horse Protestants and the native gombeen men.

It is the task of Republicans to establish the authority of the common people in a united socialist republic in which the brotherhood of man will make religious differences irrelevant. It is their task to continually expose all three parliaments that legislate for Ireland to show the working people that their interests are not served by the charade that goes on in the assemblies.

Eolas: *How much success, if any, has been achieved so far?*

C.Goulding: Much revolutionary effort has been put into the various campaigns of Economic Resistance and Political Action and certain limited successes have been achieved. Thus, far, however, each activity has been carried out in isolation and those engaged in them do not see themselves as part of a national revolutionary struggle. The first task for the seventies must be to knit them all together so that all radical groups within the nation can work as one and fight as one for the Re-Conquest of Ireland

Those who think that political means alone are sufficient for the Re-Conquest of Ireland are closing their minds to the lessons of history, not alone in Ireland but in every other country struggling for national liberation. If freedom can be won without violence then by all means let us win it that way, but, let us not allow victory to be snatched from us by those who will have no scruples about the use of violence when they see power and wealth and privilege slipping from their grasp. In this context I need only refer you to what happened in Greece, in Africa and to what is happening now in Chile with the takeover by the right wing elements using the armed forces and assisted by the U.S.

History proves only an armed, determined people will be listened to with respect. While Britain claims the right to legislate for Ireland and upholds that claim by armed force, then Irishmen must be trained and ready to resist her claim by armed force. The I.R.A. in the 70s, with its new political consciousness, remains an army, trained, disciplined and determined. But it is now a revolutionary army, an army of the people, capable of developing and exploiting a revolutionary situation for the benefit of the people, knowing when to fight and when to melt away. It is no longer an army of militarists, rigid and inflexible, and geared only for a military campaign against British Forces in Ireland. It has learned the bitter lessons of such campaigns. An elitist force, divorced from the struggles of the people, but calling on the people to support it, can never win.

Each such campaign ended in total defeat and at the end of each campaign Ireland was less of a nation than before. We can no longer afford such defeats. To be victorious, a struggle for freedom must be a struggle of the people. The role of the I.R.A. is to assist the people in what is their liberation struggle. This concept of a people's campaign for the Re-Conquest of their country rather than an armed campaign against British Occupation Forces is the key to the fundamental difference between the I.R.A. and other elements.

Eolas: *When you speak in this way about an armed campaign you imply disapproval of the Provisionals' bombing?*

C.Goulding: Nothing could be more contrary to the revolutionary strategy of the Republican Movement than the indiscriminate bombing and burning campaigns of certain elements. It is completely sectarian in that most targets are Protestant owned and seems designed specifically to alienate the Protestant people from the struggle for justice of their Catholic fellow-citizens. It is anti-social in that a number of targets are co-operative shops or stores and is thus designed to alienate workers.

It is totally irrelevant to the peoples' struggle as the targets for attack are neither Military, Government or Capitalist and seem to follow no pattern or policy beyond sustaining a campaign of sorts. To the militarist, sustaining a struggle

becomes more important than achieving victory and it is apparent now that there are sinister elements at work who are leading some sincere people by the military nose to utter defeat.

Eolas: *How do you see the struggle developing in the South?*

C.Goulding: The Republican policy in the 26 Counties even more clearly emphasises the new revolutionary strategy of the '70s. The enemy is not just British Forces in the North. The enemy is the exploiter and oppressor of the Irish people. It is British Imperialism, Unionism and Free Statism. All must equally be fought and all must be fought in the same manner - by the organised resistance of the people with the constant leadership and assistance of Republican revolutionaries.

Every agitational struggle must be carried through by the people concerned. The homeless must be organised to fight for houses; the unemployed for jobs; and the landless for land. When their struggle brings them face to face with superior force of the Landlord, the Capitalist, or the State they know they can call on a Revolutionary Army for assistance. Then the I.R.A. will give whatever help the people think is necessary to ensure victory. But they must never act on their own initiative without the knowledge of the people involved. A Revolutionary must remain only sufficiently ahead of the people to give them leadership but never so far ahead as to become isolated from them.

It is apparent that even the most successful military struggle in the North in isolation cannot result in the establishment of an Independent Socialist Republic. The best that could be achieved is to put the North into the hands of Fian-na Fail or of the Cosgrave Free-State type of politician.

The most vital thing, we believe, is to develop a popular struggle in the South to complement the struggle in the North so that there can be a fusion of the people of both areas in opposition to the Establishment of both areas: Those who say that Revolutionary activity in the South is a stab in the back; to the fight in the North are ignoring the lessons of our history and assisting the 26-County Establishment to maintain their power. It is all too clear that the stab in the back will come from the Dublin Government when the opportunity presents itself.

To safeguard the struggle in the North it is therefore essential to mount a massive campaign in the South to oust the collaborationists. The economic condition which Republicans predicted as a result of the Common Market are now upon us. Closures of factories are coming thick and fast, hundreds of workers are being made redundant owing to the full effects of the E.E.C. being felt by Irish industry, and small and medium sized farmers are being driven from their holdings by social pressures and falling incomes.

Eolas: *But, now Ireland is in the E.E.C., what do you propose to do about it?*

C.Goulding: The Republican Movement is committed to continued opposition to the E.E.C. which we see as the Imperialist umbrella under which workers will continue to be exploited. The E.E.C. is designed to strengthen the control of monopoly capital and to weaken further the power of the workers. This as I have said we are pledged to resist with all the means at our disposal. This will continue despite the fact that the majority of the people have been deceived into voting in favour of membership. We believe that, in view of their experience of the EEC, they should now be given a democratic choice.

Now is the time, therefore, to organise workers, unemployed, farmers, homeless etc., to agitate for their right to control of the wealth they create. They can only exercise that right by taking power from those who now exploit them. The Irish Republican Army, in North East Ulster as well as in the rest of Ireland, believe that the mass of workers and small farmers must organise behind revolutionary leadership if they are to rescue themselves from a system within which few prosper and the many are impoverished.

It is the opinion of Republicans, a conviction driven in on their minds by the facts of life around them that capitalism and imperialism constitute a system of exploitation and injustice within which the mass of the people know no real freedom.

Eolas: *But unemployment, emigration, bad housing, low wages, and rising prices persist. There are still repressive laws; there are still the poor, the under-privileged and those who might as well be disenfranchised for all the value their votes would appear to be?*

C.Goulding: The Irish Republican Army can see no permanent solution of these and other social evils except by the transfer of power over production, distribution and exchange to the mass of the people. The power to produce what the many require exists; its organisation and distribution presents no insoluble difficulty. But the vested interests of a privileged minority are across the road and progress is impossible unless the people are prepared to clear away these obstacles.

These interests that deny their rights to the many are those on which Imperialism rests. Touch or threaten these privileged interests and the whole force of British Imperialism is invoked for their protection. Thus it is that revolutionary Republicans see and say that the emancipation of the mass of the Irish people is impossible without breaking the connection with Imperial Britain and with the system she has imposed on Ireland, North and South.

The Irish Republican Army believes that only the mass of the Irish people, Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter, aided by

a conscious revolutionary organisation can defeat the forces of repression and reaction. A struggle waged for on behalf of the interests of the people must involve the mass of the people if it is to succeed.

Eolas: *You do not, then, look upon the struggle in the Six Counties as a military struggle alone?*

C.Goulding: It cannot be too often emphasised that the present struggle in the North is not simply a military struggle against the British Army in spite of the Provisionals' attempt to make it so but of an oppressed people against their oppressor. The main brunt of the struggle has been carried with magnificent strength and courage by the common people. It is the working class and their families who suffer the constant harassment, terror and murder, and it is they who are the backbone of the resistance.

Eolas: *But examination and questioning continue, inside the Republican Movement?*

C.Goulding: Yes indeed, for it is necessary in the midst of the turmoil in the North to re-examine our objectives and our tactics in order to ensure that pressures of events do not in any way divert us from the revolutionary road on which we have embarked.

The declaration in 1967 by the Irish Republican Army that the Objective of the Revolutionary Movement must be the establishment of a Democratic Socialist Republic was the first full explicit statement by the revolutionary movement of the Ireland of tomorrow. The statement was the culmination of many years of debate and analysis among the revolutionaries as to the causes for the continual defeat for the revolutionary forces in Ireland.

The Democratic Socialist Republic was not a new vision for the Irish Republican Army for as far back as the thirties the best elements of the revolutionary movement had this vision of a United Democratic Socialist Republic. Unfortunately at that time certain backward elements were able to isolate the revolutionary leadership within the movement and succeeded in leading the Irish Republican Army into the area of armed struggle only. The opportunities at that time, a time of crisis in world capitalism and of rising revolutionary consciousness among the workers, were lost and the establishment in Ireland, North and South, were able to deal with the Republican forces who were totally committed to armed struggle to the exclusion of all other forms of struggle.

It was not until the sixties, that, through a deep examination and analysis of the causes for defeat, we were enabled to return to the true path of revolution. Accepting completely that as our enemies will resist in arms, final victory can only be accomplished by armed struggle, we have realised that armed struggle on its own, or as an end in itself, is doomed to failure.

Eolas:

This springs from your conviction that war is merely an extension of politics and that without political structure and intent fighting is pointless and wasteful?

C.Goulding: Yes, our purpose was and still is to create a mass movement against oppression and exploitation - a movement of workers and small farmers to overthrow the twin forces of oppression and exploitation in Ireland - British Imperialism and Capitalism. The Irish offspring of these are the Orange/Unionist regime in Belfast and the Taca/Fianna Fail/Fine Gael regime in the South.

It has never been and is not now our intention to build a Movement to launch a purely military campaign against British forces in the North. We have seen the failures of past campaigns based on military action only and have set our faces against such campaigns which are doomed to failure. We do not see, nor do we want a repetition of the fifties. Our purpose is to unite workers throughout Ireland behind the struggle for the reconquest of their country from British Imperialism and Capitalism and to lead them to a realisation that until power is passed to the hands of the common people in a Socialist Republic, bigotry, hatred and divisions on religious or ethnic lines would continue to be promoted. There will be no peace, no freedom, no justice, until workers unite in brotherhood to claim their inheritance.

Eolas:

What role or position do you see the Civil Rights campaign having now?

C.Goulding: During the course of the Civil Rights struggle in 1968-69 the Irish Republican Army vigorously resisted all pressures to promote strife and used their influence to ensure that all civil rights protests would be peaceful non-sectarian demonstrations. Republicans supported the Civil Rights Movement because they agreed with the democratic demands being made. They also saw the importance of the Civil Rights protests in building the solidarity, strength and power of the common people.

Victory for the people on Civil Rights issues we knew would inspire them to further battles on the social and economic front. It was in this second stage of the struggle that Republicans saw the greatest prospect of uniting Catholic and Protestant workers. We believed that the struggle for civil rights would become a struggle for class rights: That all Irish workers would become dissenters. We set fire to the northern Tories in the full confidence that the blaze would cross the border and burn up corruption from Belfast to Cork. Our plans therefore did not provide for the launching of a military campaign against British forces although the Army Council was at all times aware of the possibility of aggressive attacks being made on the people. Our military policy at this time was clearly stated to be one of using physical force only in defence of the people or their rights against aggressive attack. We always recognised that forces of establishment would use aggression against people, therefore, there would always be a need for armed defence.

Eolas: *What way do you view the setbacks, if any, of the past few years?*

C.Goulding: The past years, despite all the major assaults made on the republican movement have seen progress made in organisational terms, in political consciousness among members and in influence among the Irish people. There have been set-backs certainly, but these were due in part to the failure to maintain our course as originally set. It has been clearly demonstrated now, I'm sure, that the tactics and strategy as decided upon in the middle sixties was and is correct. More and more I am convinced that our members see it this way and that the Irish people are also recognising this fact. No doubt about it people, the best of people, are at times inclined to get depressed and want to quit mostly I think because they are affected by their immediate surroundings and happenings.

Some unfortunately, cannot see beyond today, they have no long term or revolutionary perspective. But from my experience and that of many others involved in the struggle in Ireland, or for that matter the revolutionary struggle throughout the world, the lack of a true republican outlook and revolutionary vision, impatience or tiredness should not, must not and will not be allowed to hinder our development or to alter our basic policy and strategy.

Eolas: *Could you give a brief summary of the policy of the Republican Movement?*

C.Goulding: A summary of our policy and position would be as follows:

We are a Socialist Republican Organisation; the aim of our movement is a Democratic Socialist Republic of all Ireland. The methods we have chosen for achieving our aims included Education, Organisation, Political and Military action and requires involvement in all the organisations of the people.

Republicanism is secular and anti-sectarian, therefore, we see it as a priority to work for the unity of the working class as a primary prerequisite for the winning of our objective. We are realists and while recognising the history and current attitude of the Northern Protestants, we as Republicans cannot, at any time regard them as our enemies. The idea of winning the Protestant working class to the Republican Socialist position, which I admit, is in conflict with the more recent traditional and historical stance is not a utopian dream.

The examples even in this century, 1913 and the 1930s are an indication of what is possible given the right circumstances, the correct organisation and ideological forms or approach. Above all a divided working class will always fail to achieve its objectives, and therefore it is up to us, as the revolutionary organisation, to find the correct way to win the Protestant and, I might say, the Catholic working class to the revolutionary objective.

Another point I would stress is that the struggle is nationwide, 32 Counties; in the education of our members and the

people we endeavour to explain the current situation, the causes of the various economic and social evils, to lay the blame where it properly lies - with the capitalists and imperialists. In our publicity and activity we continually stress the oneness of the struggle North and South, the need to keep in mind the fact that revolution in one part of Ireland is an impossibility, that the revolution, in fact, is only possible with the development of the struggle on all fronts in both the six and twenty six counties.

It is well to remember that the N.L.F. concept I mentioned earlier remains a major weapon yet to be forged. Our analysis of Irish history, and of the role of Free Statism, Unionism and British Imperialism remains valid. We recognise the new face, the new dimension of Imperialism, which is now a fact in all Ireland, and which must be fought on all and every occasion and opportunity. We are convinced that we must continue to link the National and Social issues if we are to make progress.

Fundamental to our programme is the tactic of fighting for reforms, to help build people's awareness of their own strength, to help them win victories on the issues that most affect them in their daily lives, to show them who their real enemies are and in this way bring them to the realisation that the whole structure of society has to be changed.

Following on this, as part of our programme, is the policy of helping to build separate organisations for all of these issues, such as housing, unemployment, civil rights and so on and then in turn relating them to our own movement which must be the vanguard revolutionary organisation giving leadership and direction to the people on the need for change and then, as I said, the realisation that the whole corrupt apparatus has to be swept away North and South, and replaced by Socialism.

Eolas: *Can you explain how this programme operates?*

C.Goulding: Republicans, have over the past year, put into effect historic decisions by fighting realistic electoral battles - on the EEC, the 26 Co. Dail, local government in the Six Counties and now the Belfast Assembly. Let us be quite clear about the reasons for fighting these elections. Let no-one be under any illusion about our attitudes to the bodies to which we seek election. Our reasons for fighting are clearly based on the view that we cannot engage in political struggle and leave the enemies of the people in uninterrupted control of political weapons that can and must be used in the people's interest in our overall struggle.

The overall struggle goes on; we fight on all fronts, in the factories and houses, on the streets and on the forums of debate, wherever advantage is to be gained in our drive for the establishment of a socialist republic of 32 Counties. We have put forward and are putting forward revolutionary policies which are perhaps new to many of the people, but in doing so we recognise that political education is part of our struggle, a vital part, and that we are winning still greater support for the movement and understanding of its aims and objectives.

So, while we realise that the bodies to which our candidates have been elected or seek election are neither Republican, Socialist or Democratic, we acknowledge now only the tactical value of extending the struggle by using every political weapon but also the practical effects on education and organisation which participation is achieving. We have shown in these elections that we have a substantial and growing support for our policies right across the 32 Counties.

We are putting to the enemies of the Irish people the only real revolutionary challenge and putting to the people the only real possibility of radical change. Such elections or assemblies are not going to solve the people's problems. They are but a phase in the continuing struggle of the Irish people for ownership of their land and control of their destinies. We intend to remain in the vanguard of that struggle.

Eolas: *What is the position then on what is termed the 'cease-fire'?*

C.Goulding: The decision taken in May 1972 to cease aggressive Military action still stands as was pointed out just recently in a statement from the Secretary of the Republican Publicity Bureau. It was clearly pointed out in that statement that the ceasefire is a tactical decision, that there was no intention now or at any time to support the Provisional Alliance bombing campaign or to begin a campaign on lines similar to 1956-62.

The policy which has been adopted of defence and retaliation is implemented wherever and whenever possible. It was also stressed that none of this rules out the possibility of the Army Council initiating military action on any occasion that it might deem necessary in pursuit of either short term objectives or the long term goal of a Democratic Socialist Republic.

Eolas: *Finally, after four years of intense struggle, where to from here?*

C.Goulding: There is no going back now. The Republican Movement demand is for the total withdrawal of British Troops and administration from Ireland. There will be no compromises here. This must be clearly understood especially by the lickspittles in the South of Ireland who have no demands to make on Britain but who are simply standing by to give their stamp of approval to whatever political solution Britain might wish to impose on Ireland.

The Republican Movement shall continue to organise the people for revolutionary struggle in all parts of Ireland despite any pseudo solutions put forward by Britain and dutifully accepted by her Belfast and Dublin puppets.

So long as Britain maintains control the demand must be the implementation of the Civil Rights programme including the dismantling of the Orange/Unionist structure; a Bill of Rights to guarantee civil and religious liberty and immediate repeal of all repressive laws and the release of all those imprisoned. Above all, republicans believe that the real and fundamental talks on the future of the Irish Nation must take place within Ireland.

Talks must be opened between the Catholic and Protestant working class; between Trade Unionists and small farmers; between the Labour Movement and the Republican Movement; between the North and the South; between the Gaeltacht and the Galltacht. It is here that the foundations of unity of the Irish people can be laid and not in talks with Britain nor in talks between the Tory establishments in Dublin and Belfast.

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