

Fourthwrite



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PARLIAMENTARY PLOT MAY BE UNRAVELLING

Sinn Fein's plans in jeopardy after suspension of Executive

No matter how one cares to interpret the much referred to TUAS strategy, Sinn Fein is now following with determined commitment the much trodden course toward parliamentary politics. For the past decade or more, party leaders have been guiding the Republican Movement away from armed struggle and toward parliamentary engagement and ministerial responsibility. Old Provos may feel uneasy but the new quartermasters value votes rather than semtex.

The Provisional movement has changed its strategy, composition and outlook over recent years. Many IRA personnel frankly admit in private that both the war (and their capacity to wage it) is over. In its place is a qualitatively different calculation. Sinn Fein no longer supports armed struggle as the only certain means of breaking the British connection. Instead the party leadership places great store in the unproven claim that demographics

are moving inexorably toward a nationalist majority within the North within the next 15-20 years. - 2016 the year of victory!

Dubious strategy flows from dubious assumptions. And so republicans are asked to acquiesce in the strategy of acquiring parliamentary office, which in turn they believe shall lead to the northern state being reformed from within and transformed from without through cross-border quangos. These twin pressure points they say, shall lead to the North becoming gradually but irreversibly detached from the British State and moved into a position of political union with the rest of Ireland.

Sinn Fein has held tenaciously to this view in spite of criticism from other republicans that war or no war, reforming the six-county state will at best only ever lead to a more stabilised and durable Northern state. Moreover they insist that Sinn Fein participation in a Dublin government will take the party to that destination already reached by the Workers' Party.

For a period Sinn Fein could cloud its outright parliamentarianism behind the whiff of sulphur but now

the radical balloon may be about to be pricked. Outmanoeuvred by Trimble's UUP on the 'Guns or Adams must go' issue, the Sinn Fein leadership's life support machine - The Executive - is now suspended. Denied administrative power, Sinn Fein's position in the North may soon become like that of Plaid Cymru prior to the formation of the Welsh Assembly.

Alternatively, if the Provisionals surrender as much as one bullet they shall retain their strategic shape at the cost of what is in essence their soul, for Unionism will have proven itself capable of dictating terms. And rather than 'A Nation Once Again' resounding throughout the country the refrain may be 'they sold their souls for Merces and Rolls and Ministries of Health and Education'.

One unnoticed casualty in all of this has been the intellectual authority of the Sinn Fein leadership. So often endorsed by ard theiseanna and the IRA, Sinn Fein's grand strategy is now in doubt and the leadership's judgement open to question. Thinking republicans must inevitably fill this intellectual vacuum or Irish republicanism shall wither and fade away.

EDITORIAL

REPUBLICAN DEMOCRACY

The Irish Republican Writers' Group, small in number, is an amalgamation of people inclined towards radical politics. It includes both those who oppose the Belfast Agreement and those who support it. As a body it's defining comment on republicanism is simply that it must be extensively democratic. In this sense it advocates intellectual democracy and rejects the Michael Collins tradition in which an elitist leadership-club alone has the right to provide intellectual and political guidance.

Ideas are the most important of weapons. In the midst of the decommissioning furore we should pause to reflect on the retention by the Workers' Party of all its weaponry. Who in the London, Dublin or Belfast establishments really cares? The Workers' Party kept all its guns, including those used to shoot John Taylor. It has long since abandoned the ideas that may have acted as a base for the formation of a radical anti-systemic bloc.

The Irish Republican Writers' Group encourages republicans and others to write on republicanism and related issues. It can never seek to determine what they write. For this reason the columns of *Fourthwrite* shall be open to all. As the writer Des Wilson argues, democracy stands to gain when people are told more rather than less. But telling them more of the same by restricting the columns to writers of one perspective is authoritarian and aimed solely at control. In this spirit *Fourthwrite* welcomes contributions from those profoundly opposed to republicanism such as the Unionist Steven King. Tone's philosophy of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter has no meaning if the sole Protestant views are those we happen to approve.

Likewise, for republicans vehemently opposed to perspectives held by any of the Writers' group participants, *Fourthwrite* is open to them also. Democratic republicanism and the conformist culture of obedient silence are mutually exclusive.

Let us be done with censorship

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Farewell Tom Williams

The Irish Republican Writers' Group is a body open to any republican thinker who believes in the unfettered expression of republican ideas.

The purpose is to facilitate discussion and analysis of republican ideas. Of primary interest are those ideas which deal with strategic matters and which address the question 'what is to be done?'

However, this paper is open to all republican ideas and related contributions, regardless of the field - political, cultural, social or economic.

Republicanism in the 21st Century

by Tommy McKearney

It is an unfortunate reality that many republicans consider their sole political objective to be that of breaking the Union with Britain while others think that supporting armed struggle is of itself somehow the essence of republican fidelity.

To say that republican Ireland has always sought to break the connection with Britain and has often resorted to force in order to do so is a statement of fact and not of principle. Factual observation however can never take the place of political theory or critical reflection. The person who only seeks to break the union with Britain is simply a nationalist. The person who attempts this solitary objective by force is at best an armed nationalist.

Nationalism unlike republicanism is generally more concerned with symbols than with substance. It is moreover, an exclusive rather than an inclusive ideology. Irish republicanism, if it is not to be swallowed up by nationalism, must root itself in a radically progressive theory and system of government. Democratic republicanism states that the people alone must be able and free to determine how their state shall be defined and governed. In order to do so in Ireland it has long been necessary to break free from the influence of Britain. That is the republican logic for breaking the connection.

Let us be clear though, republicanism is not like a simple chemical formula where all components are forever constant. There is no "canon law of true republicanism". It must be a living, vibrant philosophy or it becomes a stagnant mantra. Previous generations of Irish republicans have outlined

programmes that were contemporary to their era. Tone, Davis, Connolly were people of their time and acted accordingly. That they were correct in that epoch cannot mean that they have left us with all the answers to the present period.

The true test of an effective radical political philosophy is its ability to adjust to changing events without mutating into a contradictory parody of itself. Irish republicanism at its best has been radical, democratic and revolutionary. Irish republicanism must again face that challenge and answer the questions posed not by its enemies (or indeed by Sinn Féin) but by the demands of the present day.

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For Irish republicans, the urgent task now is to reassert a political position in a context relevant to the 21st century and to search out and identify the tactics and strategies necessary to implement a freshly constructed platform.

Too many dictatorships have masqueraded as republics for us to make a simple equation between democracy and republicanism. Moreover, "democracy" has been invoked by too many unscrupulous agencies for it to be accepted without a rigorous definition of its content.

Where do we stand for instance on the issue of absolute and uncompromising democracy? Are we content to confine democracy to electoral participation or are we capable of expanding it and clearly defining it to include practical economic, social and intellectual democracy? Are we able to create a social order that provides for the poor, the young, the old and the weak? Are we able to produce a foreign policy that is genuinely ethical and not designed to lean on the whims of the regulators of modern global capitalism?

Are we capable of realising that we must make a positive step and commit our republicanism to a realistic course for achieving these objectives and not settle for making the same type of aspirational wish list that many other parties have but never intend to effect. Above all else, are we willing to accept that at all times the people are sovereign? If so, we'll have for the new century, republicanism capable not just of creating a political platform to inspire and motivate another generation but to effect these objectives.

Tommy McKearney is a former political prisoner and a founder member of the IRWC.



Not a proud record

by Stephen King

The Republican project as prosecuted by the Provisionals lies in ruins.

There is now no attempt to distinguish between Catholic, nationalist and republican. Far from being even a source of embarrassment, it is a determined policy of the Adams faction. There is no conversion strategy aimed at Protestants and dissenters, only a questionable conviction that Catholic birth rates will break the connection with Britain, such is the poverty of ideas.

Behaving as Catholic sectarians, the modern-day woodkerne, would be excusable, in a sense, if it was any more successful. In spite of the undoubted sectarian nature of the campaign - Kingsmill, Enniskillen, Teebane, Frizell's fish shop - the claim to be the effective defenders

of the Catholic population is a poor one. The British Army and the RUC saved many more lives than did the Provos.

Neither truly republican nor truly Defenderist, the Provos have had two successes. They have succeeded in grabbing a slice of the Stormont action - and on the evidence so far - used it for good Catholic purpose.

More disturbingly, they have produced a new class of the permanently enraged demanding Catholic power. When this new breed's great expectations are disappointed and Ulster remains stubbornly apart, the seeds of more mindless violence will germinate.

The truth, carefully glossed over, is that the Provos failed to win a de-

gree of cross-Border harmonisation equivalent even to that in the Frameworks Documents.

Moreover, by refusing to acknowledge the relative failure of the campaign by its own lights - or face up to its total disproportion to the sins visited on republicanism, by decommissioning, the Adams strategy of winning power North and South and using it to republican ends is in tatters.

Three thousand five hundred dead, a new Stormont, a cross-Border food safety promotion agency and the Union in place. A record to be proud of. I think not.

Steven King is a member of the Ulster Unionist Party and acts as advisor to David Trimble

ETA and the armed struggle

by Rogelio Alonso

active civil disobedience and other steps which would help to achieve unity with other nationalists.

The massive demonstrations against ETA held in Spain and the Basque Country in the aftermath of the renewal of the campaign of violence may not deter the separatist group. Nonetheless the lack of support for armed struggle by the Basque people is a fact that ETA itself has clearly admitted, as illustrated in a document signed in 1997 by five leading members of the organization. The document written by the prominent José Luis Alvarez Santacristana (Txelis) stressed that armed struggle suffered from social and political unpopularity and was contrary to the will of the majority of the Basque people. Consequently it demanded the end of violence.

The signatories proposed a "deep political debate" within the move-

ment to discuss the way forward. They recognized the right of the Basque people to take arms to defend itself against the state, but asked: "Is armed struggle beneficial and necessary in order to achieve social justice and political freedom for Euskal Herria?"

They went on to say: "In the light of the results achieved in the last years we have no doubt that armed struggle has become an obstacle to achieve unity within the nationalist left, to obtain wider self government and to unite the fight for self determination".

The document stated that it was not right "to infringe general ethical principles" over and over again, so it put forward new methods such as

A year after, in the autumn of 1998, ETA declared a cease fire. Although this step implicitly recognised what had been outlined in the document quoted above, Txelis was expelled from the organization. The necessary self criticism was thus suppressed, eliminating what could be seen as a threatening expression of dissidence if armed struggle returned. Are these not self defeating exercises for Basque nationalism?

Dr Rogelio Alonso, is a Spanish journalist and writer



Towards 2016

by
Henry Patterson

Henry Patterson, Professor of history in The University of Ulster, examines the claim by Gerry Adams that there may be a united Ireland by the year 2016.

Watching the TV coverage of Martin McGuinness smiling ecstatically from behind his desk on his first day as Minister of Education a reworking of some well-known lines of T.S. Eliot uncharitably came to mind: 'This is the way a quarter of a century of armed struggle ends-not with a bang but with a simper'. No doubt this is just the sort of comment which the leaders of republicanism would expect from someone defined by *An Phoblacht* as an 'enemy of republicanism'. Yet while a critic of the republican tradition I would be the first to recognise the truly historic achievement of Gerry Adams who has done more than any other republican leader apart from Eamon de Valera to reconcile subtly all but the most intransigent idealists to a settlement which contains nothing that can realistically be seen as even 'transitional' to a united Ireland.

In his recent speech to supporters in the United States Mr. Adams informed them that there was absolutely no reason why the celebration of the 1916 Rising in 2016 should not take place in a 'united and independent Ireland'. Typically, he phrased this in possibilist terms that subtly transferred the blame for any failure on to the shoulders of his audience. If republicans applied themselves in the correct way then he, who had got the measure of the Unionists and the British in face-to-face engagements, was there to assure them that unity was achievable. Of course how the structures

set in place by the Belfast Agreement would lead to unity was not specified - it was declared to be 'implicit'. Yet what he was doing here is not a simple confidence trick, it was slightly more complex. It is 'implicitly' saying that the republican leadership has created the conditions which would allow republicans, if they developed these possibilities 'correctly', to realise the traditional goals of unity and independence. If, come Easter 2016, Northern Ireland was still a part of the UK or, as seems more likely, a semi-independent bi-national statelet, then it will be republicans who have let Gerry Adams down and not some final negative judgement on his achievements.

The UCD political theorist Jennifer Todd has criticised republican critics of the Sinn Féin leadership for not appreciating that, rather than transforming repub-

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licanism into constitutionalism, they have simply transformed the ideological repertoire of republicanism. They have subordinated the

traditional and, in the short-term, unrealisable goal of unity to a second order of priority in favour of 'radical egalitarian democratic transformist principles'.* But what is not at all clear is what these principles are. The ones mentioned by

Dr Todd: cultural equality including the Irish language, radical reform of the police, total demilitarisation of British army presence and strong north/south links (the north-south links in the Belfast Agreement are not particularly strong) will represent change and some more employment prospects for the burgeoning Catholic institutional class but do not even approach the lower slopes of Mount Transformation.

In the States Mr Adams was dismissive of Fianna Fáil as a possible coalition partner because the last budget 'disadvantaged the disadvantaged' (Irish Times 14 January 2000) Yet, any objective study of public policy in the south would show that Fianna Fáil's sponsorship of a 'social partnership' approach to economic and social policy, whatever its limitations and failures, puts it somewhat to the left of New Labour which will be setting the budgetary framework for Sinn Féin ministers for most of the next decade. Where this will put what Mr Adams calls the 'republican labour' approach of Sinn Féin to government is not clear. Unfortunately given the absence of anything approaching a class dimension to Sinn Féin's analysis of poverty and inequality in Northern Ireland, 'republican labour' will probably end up meaning more jobs for the Catholic petty bourgeoisie.

Note Jennifer Todd, 'Nationalism, republicanism and the Good Friday Agreement' in Jennifer Todd & Joseph Ruane (eds) After the Good Friday Agreement; Analysing Political Change in Northern Ireland, (Dublin: UCD Press, 1999) p.58*

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*Brendan
Hughes*

Q/ After such long term involvement in the republican struggle do you feel a sense of satisfaction at the way things have turned out?

A/ No. I do not feel any satisfaction whatsoever. All the questions raised in the course of this struggle have not been answered and the republican struggle has not been concluded. We were naïve ever to have expected the Brits to get on the boat and go. But the things that we cherished such as a thirty-two county democratic socialist republic are no longer mentioned.

Q/ The former republican prisoner Tommy Gorman in the *Andersonstown News* bewails the absence of radical republicanism and has questioned if it was all worth it. What is your view?

A/ Let me answer it this way. When I came out from jail in 1986 having spent more than twelve years there I found work on a building site on the Falls Road. Some of the people I thought I was fighting for were now seeking to exploit me. I recalled my father telling me stories about earlier campaigns when republicans such as Billy McKee came out from jail and being employed by Eastwoods for peanuts. And there I was decades later digging holes for the same peanuts.

Q/ But there are many who feel it was worth it.

A/ True. But amongst their number are those who have big houses and guaranteed incomes. Of course it was worth it for them. I recall going to the Republican Movement and asking that it highlight the exploitative cowboy builders on the Falls Road who were squeezing the republican poor for profit. The movement censored me and refused to allow me to speak. Once they published a piece that I wrote - or should I say did not write as the thing was so heavily censored as to be totally unrecognisable from the article I actually wrote. Some of the cowboy builders had influence with movement members. Whether true or not, there were many whispers

A Dark

Interview
by
Anthony
McIntyre

doing the rounds that these members were taking backhanders and so on. In any event this led to a vicious circle in which money created power, which in turn created corruption and then greed for more money. Dozens of ex-prisoners are exploited by these firms. They run the black economy of West Belfast simply to make profit and not out of a sense of helping others.

Q/ Is the future bleak?

A/ People are demoralised and disillusioned. Many are tired but it would still be possible to pull enough together to first question what has happened and then to try to change things.

Q/ But has Sinn Féin not been sucked so far into the system that any salvaging of the republican project must now look a very daunting task?

A/ While I am not pushing for any military response, our past has shown that all is never lost. In 1972 we had to break the truce in order to avoid being sucked in. In 1975 the British came at us again. And from prison through the Brownie articles written by Gerry Adams we warned the IRA that it was being sucked in. We broke the British on that but it took hard work. And now they are at it again. And it will be even harder this time. Think of all the lives that could have been saved had we accepted the 1975 truce. That alone would have justified acceptance. We fought on and for what? -

View of the Process

Brendan Hughes, former leader of the IRA in Belfast and OC of republican prisoners through the "Blanket" protest in Long Kesh, was interviewed by Anthony McIntyre for this magazine. Brendan believes that the current political process is not everything that he would have asked for

what we rejected in 1975

Q/ What do you feel when you read that Michael Oatley (formerly of MI6) expresses support for the Sinn Fein leadership, and that David Goodall, who helped negotiate the Anglo Irish Agreement in 1985 said recently that it is all going almost exactly according to plan?

A/ These are the comments of men supremely confident that they have it all sewn up. What we hammered into each other time after time in jail was that a central part of Brit counter insurgency strategy was to mould leaderships whom they could deal with. So I get so demoralised when I read about this. I look at South Africa and I look at here and I see that the only change has been in appearances. No real change has occurred. A few republicans have slotted themselves into comfortable positions and left the rest of us behind.

Q/ Has the nationalist middle class been the real beneficiary of the armed struggle?

A/ Well, it has not been republicans - apart from those republicans eager to join that class.

Q/ It seems that the social dimension is your real concern regarding republican direction?

A/ No. There is much more than that. It has been the futility of it all. From a nationalist perspective alone what we have now we could have had at any time in the last twenty-five years.

But even nationalist demands don't seem to matter any more. And in the process we have lost much of our honesty, sincerity and comradeship.

Q/ But could it not be argued that this developed because people are war weary?

A/ In 1969 we had a naïve enthusiasm about what we wanted. Now in 1999 we have no enthusiasm. And it is not because people are war weary - they are politics weary. The same old lies regurgitated week in week out. With the war politics had some substance. Now it has none. The political process has created a class of professional liars and unfortunately it contains many republicans. But I still think that potential exists to bring about something different. And I speak not just about our own community but about the loyalist community also. Ex-prisoners from both and not the politicians can effect some radical change.

Q/ Do you sense any radical potential amongst loyalist ex-prisoners?

A/ Yes. Very much so. Not only are they much better than the old regime, they have experienced through their own struggle the brutality, hypocrisy and corruption of the regime against which republicans fought for so long.

Q/ What are your views on the Good Friday Agreement?

A/ What is it? Have we agreed to the British staying in the six counties? If we listen to Francie Molloy that is what republicans have signed up to. The only advantage is that unionism has changed. The landed gentry has been smashed but only because of the war, not the Good Friday Agreement. Overall, the facade has been cleaned up but the bone structure remains the same. The state we set out to smash still exists. Look at the RUC for example.

Q/ Do you sense that Sinn Fein is going to settle for something like disband Ronnie Flanagan?

A/ Would it really surprise you?

Q/ Do you sense that the republican leadership fears or despises democratic republicanism?

A/ The response to democratic republicanism has always been pleas to stay within the army line. Even doing this interview with you generates a reluctance within me. The republican leadership has always exploited our loyalty.

Q/ What do you say to those people who are unhappy but are pulled the other way by feelings of loyalty?

A/ Examine their consciences. Take a good look at what is going on. If they agree - ok. If not then speak out.



Every picture tells a story

by Kevin Bean

Kevin Bean is a long time student of Irish politics and is the author of several works on the subject of Irish republicanism

We have all felt the hands of history weighing on our shoulders lately. It has become a media and political cliché to talk about dramatic changes and unique opportunities, but whatever language we use to describe the process it is clear that there has been a fundamental shift in republican politics in the late 1990s. The pictures of Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brun sitting at the first meeting of the new executive tell their own story.

Republicanism has evolved from an ideology and organisation whose politics are based on a mass revolutionary movement and armed struggle to a conventional political party whose goals are the preservation of a bureaucratic structure and adaptation to the status-quo. As Francie Molloy conceded, republicans 'are really prepared to administer British rule in Ireland for the foreseeable future. The very principle of partition is accepted.'

If the evidence is clear on what is happening, the debate on why it is happening has not yet really started. Some republican critics see this process as a betrayal inherent in the fatal embrace of 'politics' and the abandonment of abstentionism; other radical critics see the degeneration of republicanism as an inevitable process with parallels to the rise of Fianna Fail. Still others focus on the alleged opportunism and careerism of the current leadership as an explanation for this ideological shift.

One of the ways to understand this process is not to focus on the individual characteristics of the leadership but to look at the growth of the Republican movement as a bureaucratic institution. The development of a system of interests that provides the basis for a political bureaucracy can be seen in the emergence of an apparatus of MPs, Assembly Members, councillors, community activists and community organisations.

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These structures can act as gatekeepers and centres of social power that under-pin republican activism. Not only do they provide a political base, but they also have a significant role in channelling EU and British

government funding to the most deprived and socially disadvantaged Nationalist areas.

British counter-insurgency strategy, political initiatives and socio-economic policies have also been crucial in containing militant republicanism and influencing the shape of the movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

During the 1980s the Thatcher government used high levels of public expenditure as part of a strategy of conflict management and containment with the long-term aim of using social and economic change as a way of 'normalising' the conflict and incorporating sections of the nationalist population into the status quo. These developments contributed to a 'managerial' socio-political consensus based on a new middle class who could act as potential leaders and buffers between the state and republican working class communities.

One of the most striking features of these developments has been the emergence of a new Catholic middle class; many of the new Sinn Féin middle rank leadership and Sinn Féin's new electoral support come from this group and they clearly have had an impact on republican thinking. With so many middle class Catholic careers dependent, directly or indirectly, on the state and its levels of public expenditure it would be unusual if this did not influence the political outlook of wide sections of the nationalist population.

These British government strategies also had an impact on sections of the nationalist working class; one essential effect was to strengthen the tendency towards a narrow local community activism and wider bureaucratisation process within republicanism.

The 1980s and 1990s have been a series of publicly financed initiatives targeted at lower income groups and the unemployed. This funding was channelled through community groups as a means of placating and controlling potentially volatile social groups.

This strategy of political and social control drew on the rhetoric of overcoming social exclusion and alienation and was an Irish variant of a tendency towards the integration and incorporation of potentially destabilising social groups by state in Western societies in the 1980s and 1990s.

EU and British government funding has encouraged the growth of a network of community, local enterprise, women's groups, training and education and ex-prisoners' organisations as a channel for distributing funds, resources, employment and opportunities. Because of the dominance of republicanism within the communities which are the targets of this spending, and through republican community activism and elected office, these strategies have brought the movement directly and intimately into the embrace of the funding mechanisms and quangos of a state which militant republicanism was once pledged to overthrow by force.

These types of relationships are not unique to the North; but similar patterns can be seen throughout the Western world. What makes them significant here is the base they provide for a stabilisation of the conflict, built on accommodation between alienated communities and the state, and with the republican movement acting as a channel of influence and an agent of mediation.

It may overstate the case to say that high levels of public spending and the growth of the community sector have blunted the cutting edge of political militancy and channelled energies into localised cultural and community projects, but these factors have contributed to the incorporation and institutionalisation of the republican movement.

Republican leaders have become conventional politicians, drawing on clientalist political structures, which represent and lobby the state on behalf of a section of the nationalist population. The nature of the republican movement and its transformation from a revolutionary instrument to a bureaucratic interest group will ensure that Sinn Fein will continue to develop as a party of government, both North and South. Despite the talk of a 'transition to a transition' and 'the underlying dynamics' the new political dispensation in which Sinn Fein is enmeshed is designed to maintain and consolidate the status-quo, not overthrow it.

Republicanism is well down the road of incorporation and integration trodden by other revolutionary parties in the twentieth century. There will be a growing gap between the official, traditional aims proclaimed at Bodinstown and Milltown cemetery and the realistic, everyday politics practised at Stormont and in Leinster House. The needs of the organisation acting as an institution will predominate: pragmatic accommodation will remain the order of the day.

Gerry Adams will follow the path of Eamonn De Valera and Proinsias De Rossa, not because of some personal weakness or lack of principle, nor because of some 'original sin' within republicanism, but because of this process of institutionalisation. One Sinn Fein Assembly member recently said 'we're all Sticks now'; and now we have the pictures of Martin Mc Guinness and Bairbre de Brun smiling at the Stormont cabinet table to prove that they are.

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IRWG WEBSITE

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homepage.eircom.net/
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Letter in Irish Voice

Napper Tandy's column "Daydreamin' Fenian" (Jan. 5-11) muses that NT "would love to constructively discuss a dissenting view, one based on rational thought and not 200-year-old dogma, a false sense of machismo or schoolyard taunting, put out by anyone who claims to be against the current direction or republicanism." Look up "Republican Writers Group" on-line at [http://
homepage.eircom.net/
~repwrite](http://homepage.eircom.net/~repwrite) where informed critics share their thoughtful, considered insights about the current evolution of republican theory and practice. Perhaps Napper might ponder the thoughts expressed by the RWG, since he—like many of us—has been searching for "commentary that might actually present a coherent opinion" about why principled opposition to today's Sinn Fein policy persists.

Seaghan O Murchu

Los Angeles, California

[http://
homepage.eircom.net/
~repwrite](http://homepage.eircom.net/~repwrite)

Complacent Convenience

by Ciara Ni Tuama

Many arguments in support of the current peace process and Assembly point to the benefits now enjoyed due to the halt of the armed struggle. And there have been many benefits, if one thinks that American capitalism is a good thing. Keeping people fat, dumb and happy is one sure-fire way to ensure support for a reverse in ideology, and the best way to undermine support for socialist change. And one could argue the British have found the best way to keep people fat, dumb and happy (and to turn them into apathetic voters, if they continue to vote at all): have Sinn Fein do the job for them.

Are the goals of Sinn Fein to achieve, ultimately, a united Ireland (note: no longer to achieve an Irish Socialist Republic)? Or is the goal of Sinn Fein to be the biggest party in Ireland, partitioned or not? Sinn Fein's strategy is not the strategy of a Movement; it has not been such for a long time now. Sinn Fein's strategy is that of a political party, and as such everything it does is predicated on the notion of how to ensure success, both long term and short term, for the party, not for the nation.

To achieve success Sinn Fein recognised early on that they must jettison the revolution, and their connection to it. That does not mean however that they have been quick to stop manipulating the revolutionary cachet that came with their connec-

tion; to the contrary, that was their ticket into power, and that has been their big-stick bargaining chip throughout these years of negotiations. Of late it has been the only thing separating them from the SDLP in their turn towards constitutional partitionist-nationalism.

So how has Sinn Fein persuaded their Republican supporters to back them in their change of ideology? How will they continue to hold onto that support when the IRA begins to decommission? It has been a process of inoculation, conducted through a choreographed ballet of leaks and denials. Sinn Fein has always been famous for its doublespeak; it used to be the British and Unionists who complained loudly about their deftness with words. Adams is a modern day de Valera, using his words with mathematical economy and calculation. Few Republicans thought the day would come when it would be Republicans themselves at the receiving end of that doublespeak: "to remove all guns from Irish politics" sounded so noble when first uttered. Now it is just another example of the writing on the wall. When Martin McGuinness tells us that the peace process boat will not crash upon the rocks of decommissioning, we can believe him. It is no coincidence those statements came out prior to the latest Sinn Fein delegation to the United States. One can

well imagine McGuinness uttering those same words to White House staff as he made his first visit there as a British minister, thereby ensuring it would not be Sinn Fein to blame for any further stalling, but the Unionists, if they are not satisfied with the first few guns handed over.

With the process of inoculation also comes the tactics of complacency. Having used the last 5 years to wean people away from their memories of loss and of living with armed struggle, and taking advantage of pushing the hard-liners out of the party and the Army, Sinn Fein now graces the media with their ministerial presence; soon people will get used to seeing them as mere politicians. It will become the everyday, background, something to tune out. This complacency stops people from questioning why the Republican leadership is in the pay of the British government, as it will lead to apathy. As long as people can continue to enjoy their new-found 'freedoms,' who cares about revolution? What was it all about, anyway? Who wants to wake up from the dream?

And what of the revolution? What happens to the true believers? Do they always have to be used by those calculating enough to manipulate them 'for the greater good'? Perhaps the 'Republican leaders' of today are no longer worthy of believing in, but the ideals of Republicanism still are. This is not the first time those who believe have been betrayed by their leadership. It will not be the last. When de Valera stayed in America, soliciting American funds and being winned and dined, he stayed at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, in a suite of rooms that went for \$20,000 for three months. Jim Larkin, in America, lived in a one room flat that rented at \$60 for three months. Where does the current Sinn Fein delegation stay when they grace New York and Washington?

Ciara ni Tuama is a writer and composer of poetry

A conjunctural analysis of Irish republicanism, emphasising the internal and external structural factors at the root of the political dynamic of the republican movement, while of great explanatory power, has neglected an important aspect of republican ideology; the importance given to history and past events. How does a conjunctural analysis explain why past history is so important in republican discourse (references to past events such as 1798 or 1916, as it is expressed for instance in commemorations, murals, articles, speeches, etc.)?

An outsider could have the impression that Irish republicans are above all people who are "living in the past", a sect of "true believers" who are obsessed by history, a cult wor-

Apostle Paul, it is absurd to say that republicans over the last thirty years have been re-enacting the battles of 1798, 1848, 1867, 1916, etc. because of their morbid obsession with the past. History is always made within a specific tradition, and it is only through this tradition that individuals are able to give meaning to present struggles though using past events.

The workers' movement for instance, gave meaning to socialist struggles by relating them to a tradition that started with slave insurrection. It is no wonder that the Bolshevik Revolution related itself to the Paris Commune. In a similar vein, the republican movement understands its actions historically by relating them to the whole tradition of resistance to

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'history as progress' is blind to. For Benjamin, revolutionaries should pay attention to the past. Benjamin's thesis is that struggles against injustices of the present are also, at the same time, struggles for the redemption of all past injustices. Not only do insurgents find inspiration in their struggles by remembering their enslaved ancestors and the suffering of the past generations (the memory of the past injustices is an important factor which motivates revolutionaries); but through their struggle to end the injustices of the present, they also avenge the injustices of the past. Revolution of the present society is also the redemption of past oppressions.

It may seem somehow quite far-fetched to argue that the IRA volunteer planting a bomb or preparing for an ambush is also fighting for the redemption of the victims of the Famine. But a great principle of Gadamer's hermeneutics is the importance of the 'efficacy of history' in influencing social action. The actions of the republican movement do not happen in some kind of historical-temporal void. They take their historical meaning by placing themselves within the "tradition of the oppressed".

Liam O Ruairc is a student living in Belfast and a contributor to the IRWC

TRADITION OF THE OPPRESSED

by
Liam O'Ruairc

shipping "martyrs" who died a long time ago; and that republican actions are explained by this obsession. If at the level of structure the memory of past has little or no explanatory value, at the level of agency, it helps to grasp how the social actors give meaning to their actions, and understand their place within a specific temporal-historical framework.

Just as it would be ridiculous to explain the French Revolution or the Reformation as the outcome of the behaviour of neurotic individuals obsessed by the Roman times or the

British rule in Ireland. Broadly speaking, republicanism is related to what Walter Benjamin called 'the tradition of the oppressed' and their struggles. (But this does not mean of course that the struggle of the present-day IRA is necessarily of the same nature and taking place in similar conditions than those past struggles)

Some ideas of Walter Benjamin's are of great help when trying to understand the place of memory within republican thinking. His 'Angel of History' is horrified at all the injustices of the past, to which a view of

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Mark Hayes, academic and author, attended the recent ceremony in Milltown cemetery, Belfast to mark the reinterment of IRA volunteer Tom Williams

On Sunday 23rd January thousands of Republicans gathered in West Belfast to pay their respects to Tom Williams the IRA man executed by the British after a shoot out with the RUC in 1942. After a prolonged campaign Williams' remains were transferred from a prison plot in Crumlin Road jail to consecrated ground in Milltown cemetery. It was a historic day.

The Republican community, its bonds forged in years of adversity,

Where Adams' comments lacked some resonance, however, was in regard to the current "peace process". There is no doubt that the leadership of the Republican movement is committed to the peace process, and this commitment has been reflected quite clearly in their practical political input over the recent years and months. Yet the fundamental question remains - can the leadership deliver tangible results via this process in terms of traditional Republican objectives?

process work and there is no doubt that compromise is a prerequisite for sustainable peace, but long-held Republican principles have been abandoned along the road. Indeed Adams has recently spoken of the possibility of a united Ireland by 2016.

Given the way the peace process has developed, such statements can only be described as wishful conjecture, Republicans may have to come to terms with the unpalatable truth,

Farewell Tom Williams

by Dr. Mark Hayes

paid its respects with great dignity, and Joe Cahill, who was arrested along with Williams, provided an emotional tribute to his former comrade. Gerry Adams also spoke to the assembled crowd and undoubtedly struck the right note when he spoke about the "equivalence of grief" and the "wounds yet to be healed". Indeed Adams was correct to identify a sense of moral superiority among Republicans, particularly Williams, in the face of those who sought to "criminalise" or "demonise" them; Such sentiments were unquestionably heartfelt and well-received.

The IRA created the space for a genuine peace by calling a ceasefire in the first instance, and Sinn Féin has responded positively by making every effort to accommodate Unionists and the British government. Unfortunately, a sober analysis of the specific terms of the Good Friday Agreement and the spurious emphasis on "de-commissioning" illustrates quite clearly that the "process" has developed a momentum the dynamic of which cannot be effectively controlled by the Republican leadership. Honourable people have tried to make the

that the aspirations for which Williams and many others fought and died, (that "certain day" which Williams so eloquently spoke of) will not be the end product of the current process. When the inherent weaknesses of the contemporary strategy have been evaluated and assimilated, and while rejecting the facile "solution" of the unreconstructed militarists, the Republican movement may have to re-articulate its political demands in a qualitatively different way. The most recent developments indicate some obvious miscalculations.

Irish Republican Writers Group

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