

IRSP Speeches and Writings by Jim Lane, 1983–7

- 1. Text of interview with Jim Lane in *Starry Plough*, September 1983**
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1. Interview with Jim Lane

National Chairperson of the IRSP

(published in the party paper *Starry Plough*, September 1983)

Jim Lane is Chairperson of the IRSP. His earliest involvement in socialist republican politics was with the Unemployed Protest Movement in the mid 1950s. Jim was a member of the Republican Movement in the 1950s and early 1960s. He was a leading activist in the H-Block campaign, and was Chairman of the Cork City and County H-Block / Armagh Committee.

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Question: How would you like to see the IRSP developing over the coming year?

Answer: I would like to see greater emphasis on political education within the party. We must research, study and discuss, so as to further develop the necessary revolutionary theory which is required to bring to fruition national liberation and socialism in Ireland. Without revolutionary theory, all our efforts will be in vain. Most of our members have come to a commitment to revolutionary activity out of their experience, be it the naked oppression of British imperialist forces, or the violence of unemployment and bad conditions – North and South. We have never lacked for battlers against oppression. But we would do well to take heed of James Connolly's observation, *The Irish are not philosophers as a rule, they proceed too rapidly from thought to action*. It is not sufficient to fight courageously for a cause, it is also necessary to have clarity about the objective for which we strive, otherwise the fruits of our struggle could slip to counter-revolutionaries. If we fight for socialism today, we don't want sell-out tomorrow. Yet it could easily happen. Personally, I believe that only a party based on Marxist-Leninist principles can achieve socialism in Ireland.

Q: So much for development within the party, but what would you like to see the party doing externally?

A: The party since it was founded has been under attack from British imperialism and its lackeys. The fight to exist politically has inflicted great damage on the party and, as a consequence, has impaired our ability to more fully involve ourselves in the class struggle. It is in this area I would hope for improvement. We must strive to contribute more to the struggles of all those oppressed by capitalism. We must relate our developing revolutionary theory to practice, so as to sow unshakeable roots amongst the working class. We in the IRSP must match the heroic struggle of all those involved in the armed struggle against Britain with equal endeavours in the struggle against capitalism. We must be thick in the fight being waged on issues such as unemployment, women's rights, neutrality, wage cuts, etc.

Q: To return to your belief that only a Marxist-Leninist type party will deliver on socialism, do you see the IRSP as such a party?

A: I believe that the IRSP will in the course of time be such a party. At the recent Ard Fheis (National Congress) it was very evident that most party members are more than anxious to define their socialism as being based on Marxist-Lenin principles.

Again and again during the debate, the Marxist method of analysis was referred to. Many who contributed said that they had been assisted in their own political development by studying the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. The most important document of the Ard Fheis which dealt with the power of multi-nationals, certainly owed a lot to Lenin's work on imperialism. The Marxism of James Connolly also came in for mention and approval. I should also mention that the party includes in its course of studies for members, the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Yes, I can say I was very encouraged by the recent Ard Fheis which gave a voice to views of members from all over the country on such an important development. I believe following further discussion those party members with reservations will accept the logic of the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint.

Q: What are the differences that exist between the IRSP and Sinn Fein?

A: The essential difference is that the IRSP is primarily a socialist party, Sinn Fein is primarily a republican party. We approach matters from a different perspective. The IRSP look at a situation from a socialist viewpoint, we weigh up every aspect of a problem taking account of how it relates to our main objective, a socialist society. The interests of the Irish working class are paramount. Our reason for involvement in the national liberation struggle is because we believe the resolution of the national question is a necessary prerequisite to socialism in Ireland.

On the other hand, Sinn Fein see national independence as their main objective. Where we look at a situation from a socialist viewpoint, they would look at the same situation from a republican/nationalist viewpoint, which of course could have the effect of putting nationalist considerations ahead of the best interests of the working class. They have in recent years come to a greater understanding of the revolutionary potential of the working class and seek to harness it to further anti-partitionism. In essence, their socialism is social democracy. There is little doubt but that the majority seek a society of greater freedom and democracy than we presently have, but would stop short of the *total overthrow* of the social, political and economic system which now functions. However, I do believe that there exists in the Republican Movement a good number of revolutionary socialists, who but for historic reasons would be part of our movement today.

Q: What do you say to those who say that all nationalism is reactionary in today's world?

A: I believe the nationalism of the oppressed people of British Occupied Ireland is positively progressive because it unites them in struggle against the main enemy – British imperialism. There are occasions of course when nationalism is reactionary. Nationalism fostered by imperialist powers like Britain and the U.S.A. is definitely reactionary, because it obscures the class struggle and unites people in the service of imperialism. There is no black and white situation. To say that all nationalism is reactionary is as stupid as to say that all nationalism is progressive. I believe that all that helps the British imperialists and harms the oppressed people is reactionary and all that helps the people and harms the British imperialists is progressive.

Q: As regards the 6 Counties – how do you view the growing electoral support for Sinn Fein?

A: The results of the recent elections, was a great victory for all anti-imperialists. It clearly demonstrated the opposition to continuing British rule. I regret that greater opposition wasn't presented by a greater unity of anti-imperialists forces as was the case during the H-Block/Armagh Campaign. To our way of thinking, electoral contests such as the Westminster elections are but an opportunity we seize upon to mobilize and demonstrate our support. If Sinn Fein begin to use their

success to build an electoral machine it will have repercussions for the anti-imperialist movement. I fear many potential revolutionaries will end up servicing an electoral machine, knee deep in clientelism and all its attendant evils.

Q: The Labour Party claims to be the inheritor of James Connolly's socialist legacy. Any comment?

A: The Labour Party stands in the tradition of William Walker the Belfast gasworks socialist. They have little in common with James Connolly, the revolutionary socialist. Just let Connolly speak for himself on this one:

*Treasure ye in your inmost heart this legacy of hate,
For those who on the poor man's back have climbed to high estate,
The lords of land and capital, the slave lords of our age,
Each is your foe, foe to your class, of human rights, the foe,
Be in your thought by day and night to work their overthrow.*

(From *The Legacy* by James Connolly)

The Labour Party are today the bedfellows of the lords of land and capital. They serve as a crutch for capitalism. In no way is it in their mind to work to overthrow the system James Connolly hated so much. Truly they are capitalism's fifth column in the working class.

2. Irish Republican Socialist Party Ard Fheis 1984

**Address by IRSP National Chairperson Jim Lane (Cork)
At 34 Upper Gardiner St. Dublin 1, on 8 September 1984**

Though this gathering is constituted as an annual Ard Fheis, the 10th in our party's life, it is in many ways an extraordinary Ard Fheis. Extraordinary in so far as all sessions can only be attended by full members, associate members can attend some sessions and no visitors, whether from support groups or the media, can attend. Extraordinary also in that we are departing from the usual format and organising the Ard Fheis in a manner that will hopefully produce results relative to our present position. In the past we have had Ard Fheiseanna where many fine resolutions on policy and actions were tabled and passed. Often there were so many resolutions that a great number of them had to be left over, to be attended to by the incoming Ard Comhairle (AC). Discussion documents were presented, some good some bad. But the experience was that rarely were the fine resolutions acted on, nor was there much more ongoing discussion surrounding the documents. Yet despite unfulfilled commitments we were always prepared to go back year after year, unashamedly submitting more resolutions and papers. It would appear from this experience that our approach to an annual conference differs little from the manner in which the social-democratic parliamentary parties organise theirs. Let's face it, like them, but to a lesser degree, we too have organised to impress. To impress our new members, our supporters, our fraternal guests and whatever media person we could rope in, we try to make it the showpiece of the year. Because of this approach we have consistently failed to deal with the most fundamental issues that should attend the development of a serious revolutionary socialist party. We have failed to define our socialism and do not have a minimum revolutionary programme to offer the Irish people. Policies and the resultant activity is worthless, unless it complements a revolutionary programme – we must know and those we would hope to lead must know, what *kind* of society we intend to build and *how* we intend to build it.

This year we meet in closed session in the hope that we can break out of the old mould and really make our weekend's work worthwhile. Without the gallery of visitors, we hope the atmosphere will be conducive to the greatest and freest expression of views, encompassing not alone *criticism*, but *self-criticism*. We are going to take a long searching look at ourselves, who we are, what we are about, what we presently offer the people, how we differ from other parties. These and many other questions, we know, have been exercising the minds of party members in recent times. One other extraordinary aspect to this Ard Fheis is that this report incorporates the General Secretary's report, the party being without the services of a General Secretary for some months. But more on that later.

Ard Comhairle

The present Ard Comhairle, elected by last year's Ard Fheis, on taking office represented, in many ways, change within the party, more so because the great majority had been elected for the first time and others had but short service. Collectively, they brought to the leadership of the party, people of great enthusiasm and commitment, along with some people of experience in working-class struggle. However, at the beginning, they felt somewhat inhibited due to the fact that they did not have among them comrades with IRSP leadership experience. The refusal of party members with long

experience of party work at leadership level to offer themselves for membership of the AC at last year's Ard Fheis hindered the performance of the party in the early period of the AC's term of office. This shortcoming was further compounded when an experienced member, Niall Donnelly, who was co-opted to serve in Jimmy Brown's place, was elected National Vice-Chairperson of the party and then at the following meeting (17/7/83) he resigned from the party, making the claim that 'the party had been taken over by the gun'. I understand that this person has since joined Sinn Féin. Shortly after that resignation, another AC member, Séan O'Farrell of Waterford resigned. A comrade greatly interested and involved in trade union activity, he resigned when he became convinced that the party members had little or no interest in becoming involved working on a trade union policy for the party. In an effort to involve the previous National Chairperson, Naomi Brennan, the AC offered her the position of editor of the *Starry Plough*, but she refused and a short time later resigned membership of the party (23/11/83). Before going on to review the activities of the past year, there are a few further matters that must be referred to, as they have had considerable bearing on our performance in many areas.

The present National Chairperson was elected, in his absence, at the AC meeting that shortly followed the Ard Fheis, and when he attended the July 17th AC meeting he made clear that as he was working and living in Cork, he could only accept the position, if the AC agreed to transfer the central role to the General Secretary who was based in Dublin. The new order of organisation was accepted and Anthony Dornan as Gen. Sec. accepted the responsibility. Though lacking in experience, he entered into his commitment with great enthusiasm. He re-issued the internal bulletin, *An Sceal*, early on, had the head office put into business condition and was very successful in organising the publicity that attended the return of Margaret and Tony Hayde from Spain after British Intelligence efforts to entice them to turn informer on leading members of our movement. However, due in part to domestic reasons, Anthony Dornan resigned as General Secretary and as a member of the AC. The manner of his going, extending over a period of several months, was considered by the AC to have been disruptive.

In the early period of our term of office, the head office was staffed by Anthony Dornan and Tony O'Hara on a part-time basis. For a long time now the head office has been without proper staffing. Some Dublin members attend on a part-time basis. But our inability to pay a wage to even one trained person from within the party remains a great obstacle to efficiency.

The AC also wanted to appoint a full-time organiser, but we were without funds. We started our term of office secure in the knowledge that we were to have a modern printing machine. The money to pay for it was to be provided by supporters of the party. At the time, nothing was surer; all that remained was for the machine to be shipped from Germany and some people trained in its operation. In short, our financial backers failed us.

Lack of centralised leadership and shortage of funds are indeed additional inhibiting factors to be considered when we assess the performance of the past year.

In reviewing the past year's many internal activities, special mention must be made to the following:

Education

An education programme, which was aimed primarily at new members, was initiated. This was also drawn up with a view to the need to provide education for young prisoners. Some basic documents were circulated, such as *Socialism*, *Utopian and Scientific*, etc. plus copies of documents presented to last year's Ard Fheis on *Women*, *Multinationals* and *Neutrality*, etc. An outline study course with

recommended reading was circulated and some areas, Belfast in particular, got down to serious study. We accept that much more needs to be done, but it has to be accepted that education can only progress meaningfully when the party itself resolves some basic and fundamental positions. We must define what we mean by our commitment to socialism. Until we do that, much of our work in education will be without direction.

North American Organisation

The founding of an organisation of support for the IRSP in North America this year was a historic step forward for our party. Its formation was based on international solidarity of working class people. We received support not alone for our stand on national liberation, but also because of our commitment, however undefined, to socialism. Though we expect to get some small measure of ethnic support, we are ever mindful that the greatest amount of Irish-American support is in no way sympathetic to socialist principles. Seeking support on the basis of socialist principles is the only correct way of forwarding the area of international relations. The temptation to brush aside this principled position, to take short-term advantage of simplistic national fervour within the Irish-American community, was never given currency in our considerations. We wish the Irish Republican Socialist Committee of North America well and hope that they will also be instrumental in building up international contacts for us through the various movements that have representative bodies in North America.

Relations with Sinn Fein

In an effort to regularise relations between the party and Sinn Fein, both of whom are involved on a day to day basis in the struggle for national liberation, we wrote to Sinn Fein last autumn proposing a meeting. Our General Secretary delivered the communication personally to their head office. Following a further call, he was informed that representatives of their new AC would be in touch. The matter ended there, as we never heard from them again. This is most regrettable when you consider that at one period, following the incident at Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim, both organisations faced proscription or worse and we didn't have formal contact.

Trip to the North

In February, the National Chairperson made a week-long trip to the North, visiting party members, relatives of our prisoners, relatives of our dead comrades, as well as visiting with prisoners in Belfast and Long Kesh. A visit to Armagh Prison was not possible due to short notice. Party premises at Derry and Belfast were also visited. The National Chairperson also attended and spoke at the Easter Commemoration at the Republican Socialist Plot in Milltown Cemetery, Belfast.

Co-ordinating Bodies

Following the chairperson's visit to the North, and he reporting back to the AC, the AC sanctioned the setting up of a co-ordinating body for the North. This body will relate more to organising practicalities than to partitionist structures or historic boundaries. It could, for instance, include Dundalk, Monaghan or Sligo-Leitrim areas. It does not have an executive function. The Munster area has since set up a similar body.

The Starry Plough

Much criticism is expected for the non-appearance of the party's paper in 1984. But unless individuals and cumann approach the problem in a spirit of both *criticism* and *self-criticism*, we are going to get nowhere near a solution to the problem. Some salient facts require mention. When we

started on the new series of the *Starry Plough*, we had a special fund to cover the cost of several issues, £2,000 in all. We were sure of producing four issues and after that the returns which are always slow, we felt, would look after further issues. But a figure of money that would given the input to many political organisations to set themselves up on a steady course of publishing, given that returns were made, proved short lived for us. Very few returns were made and the well ran dry.

Membership

In an effort to improve organisation, one of the things that this AC set out to do was to bring membership within the rules of the constitution. We had to deal with a situation where people considered themselves members of the party, yet they never worked within a *cumann* or *comhairle ceanntair* structure, never paid dues or annual affiliation fees. For many, it was a feeling of belonging, attending commemorations, funerals, socials and the occasional Ard Fheis. They rarely carried out organised party work. Nobody challenged their membership, yet these people were perceived, by both members and the public, to be pillars of the party. This has to stop! Now the situation is that only those who have returned to the National Treasurer their affiliation form with payment, or where circumstances apply deferred payments, are considered members. They must also work within their *cumann* or *comhairle ceanntair* structure. Associate membership is open, subject to the approval of the AC, to those who find themselves unable to give the commitment the party requires of full members.

The net result of our year's internal organising is that we have fewer members, but we believe at this stage we will be better served by *quality* rather than *quantity*. Our members are our greatest resource, therefore it is of the greatest importance, now that we have weeded out, that we dig in roots of such strength, that nothing will shift them. We are fortunate in having some excellent facilities. I refer to our premises in Dublin, Derry and Belfast. In Cork, we are also fortunate in having the use of premises provided by the Cork Workers' Club. In maintaining our premises, the lack of finance is a great drawback. Nowadays, more than ever in the past, a revolutionary party needs a regular income, if it is to operate with efficiency. Unfortunately, because of the very high level of unemployment, which so greatly affects our membership, we are finding it next to impossible to financially maintain the party. Unless this situation is arrested, we may be forced to sell premises. This must not be allowed to happen. It is in your hands. This Ard Fheis will have to give great consideration to this problem.

The political strategy that emerged from last year's Ard Fheis, directed the AC to give the highest priority to progressing a position of neutrality, particularly as it related to links with NATO. Because of organisational problems already referred to, not a great deal of work was done in this area by the AC. Nevertheless, some good work was done by individual members and areas. The visit of USA president, Ronald Reagan, gave us the opportunity to have a meaningful input into the campaign and our concentration on the neutrality aspect of the visit did not go unnoticed in the anti-imperialist camp.

In the war of national liberation, the Republican Socialist Movement lost four brave INLA Volunteers, within the past year. Last August 1983 at Dungannon in the county Tyrone, Vol. Gerry Mallon of Keady, Co. Armagh and Vol. Brendan Convery of Maghera, Co. Derry, were killed while engaging enemy forces. Then we had the gunning down, by agents of British imperialism, of Vol. Joe Craven, Belfast. This incident occurred when Joe was on his way to the Labour Exchange to sign on. And quite recently we lost Belfast Staff Officer Paul McCann, killed in action. To their relatives and comrades in the INLA we extend deepest sympathy.

The war continues to take its toll with arrests and extended detention of many of our comrades. Despite these setbacks the IRSP remains resolute in its support for the armed struggle.

Four republican socialists, all involved in State organised frame-ups, achieved their freedom during the year. First we had the spectacle of the French Government backing away in the case of the Paris trio, Reed, Plunket and King. Then we were overjoyed when Nicky Kelly was released. Though great credit for his eventual release must go to those comrades who started the campaign early on, we must reserve the greatest thanks for the Release Nicky Kelly Committee who gave unsparingly in their efforts to secure his release.

Prisoners

At any time during the year we have in excess of 150 socialist republican prisoners in jails, North and South. In proportion to the membership of our movement this represents an unacceptable level of casualties. The use of informers has much to do with this state of affairs. Improved methods of recruitment with greater emphasis on political education provide the means of minimizing our losses.

Too much responsibility for the welfare of our prisoners is left in too few hands. The position of welfare for our prisoners in Portlaoise is particularly bad. Prisoners will in the future play a fuller role in the development of our party. Too often both we and they put too short limits to what they should be expected to do. For revolutionaries to limit their input to prison struggle would be a great mistake. But how often does it happen? The prisons must become the Universities of Revolution. Individual study is not sufficient; we must have a greater organised study. It will be up to the incoming AC to organise to this end. As there is to be a prison report for the Ard Fheis, I won't pursue the subject further.

Throughout the year, despite limited recourses, internal organisational difficulties and state repression, the party has managed to be involved in a great many areas of activity. Possibly because we have had to spread ourselves too wide at times, we have missed out on having a great impact in any area. Great credit for activity in the area of our prisoners plight must go to Belfast, Derry and the North generally. The Southern areas have done little or no work in this area. On the other hand they have been very involved in the Release Nicky Kelly Campaign. Opposition to the Criminal Justice Bill is another campaign that our members were involved in. Areas like Cork had involvement in a broad front anti-repression group called People Against Repression. Both Cork and Dungarvan were very involved with local unemployed groups and Limerick were most active in the Water Rates issue and the Divorce Action Campaign. Over in Clare, Brigid Makowski continues to be active on local issues as a Town Commissioner for Shannon. As already mentioned, most areas were involved in raising the neutrality issue within the Reagan Campaign.

New Ireland Forum, Extradition and NATO

In the past year we witnessed the cobbling together by the collaborationist parliamentary parties of a body called the New Ireland Forum. Faced with rising militancy of the oppressed people of British Occupied Ireland, constitutional nationalism sought means to redress its decline. The full force of media attention was focused on the sittings in an effort to stimulate interest. But the Irish people, and in particular those in the North, gave the charade scant attention. In fact, it didn't attract attention until such time as there appeared to be disagreement. The mouthings of Fitzgerald and his clique, with their crawling and beating of breasts in atonement, reached such a high as to give encouragement to our British oppressors to put the boot in further. Their propaganda efforts to denigrate the struggle of our people for national self-determination would do Dr Goebbels proud. It is only matched in its extent by the level of repression meted out by a government who would have the audacity to claim the heritage of Tone, Emmet, Pearse and Connolly.

The extradition this year of Dominic McGlinchey and Séamus Shannon was the culmination of years of subversion of the Irish people. We know who the real subversives are. It is those who COLLABORATE with British imperialism against the Irish people. That they could extradite, without any great furore in the Free State, demonstrates not only to us, but also to the British Government, how able collaborators they really are. That they could do so is a great indictment of the anti-imperialist forces in the 26 Counties. For decades, anti-imperialists have been content to adopt a 'blood and bandages' relationship to embattled 6 Co. comrades, instead of resolutely waging anti-imperialist struggle in the Free State. Only such a struggle gives us the opportunity to explain the true nature of British imperialism to the people of the 26 Co's. The national struggle must be made meaningful to all our people. Our party with its Broad Front policy has for years attempted to organise all anti-imperialists. There is even greater need for success in this endeavour in the light of greater unity that exists among imperialists at this time.

We believe that while Britain wages war to defend her economic and political interests in the 6 Co's, her over-riding interest always has been and still remains – *strategic*. Ireland must never become a flank from which Britain can be attacked. Economic and political factors are important, but for Britain they are subordinate to defence strategy. Since 1978-9, militarists in the Western camp envisaged a limited nuclear war, fought mainly in Europe. This has heightened Britain's interest in the 6 Co's, and for that matter in the 26 Co's as well, as they fear the USSR will use Ireland as a backdoor to launch an air attack on Britain. (I would refer comrades to our document *Neutrality*). The bottom line is that Britain desperately needs to retain NATO installations in Ireland and that any deal between London and Dublin will positively take account of this requirement. Even a 32 County Parliament is a possibility once Britain retains these vital interests.

Taking into consideration that the great majority of the members of the Sinn Féin Party are primarily anti-partitionist, they cannot be relied upon to present a bloc opposition to a deal that could appear to offer a United Ireland, but would have built in safeguards on British and European security. Especially so if there is USA involvement, as many republicans show a great affinity for the USA and much that it stands for. If a deal were on offer, overseen by the USA, the combined forces of the anti-partitionists and Noraid would swamp the opposition of the left-republicans. The failure of anti-imperialists to unite to wage struggle in defence of rights and against repression has given rise to extradition and other abuses. Failure to organise in defence of neutrality will surely be to Ireland's cost and to Britain's advantage. Our party has done some considerable work in documenting the issue of neutrality. The INLA demonstrated its opposition to NATO presence in Ireland when they bombed the NATO-linked radar station at Schull, Co. Cork. More must be done, we must step up our activity in this vital area of struggle. We must leave here this weekend resolved, as revolutionary socialists, to defend Irish neutrality against all forces of imperialism, and to the hilt. On this matter, there can be no area of compromise.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

This year we mark the 10th anniversary of the founding of our party. Looking back in objective political terms, there is little to be satisfied with. The most common perception of our party in the eyes of the people is of a party which exists as a shady political front for the INLA. In objective terms, it could be said that almost all the activities, of both the IRSP and the INLA, serve the interest of the Republican Movement. An unkind observer might be forgiven for referring to us as the 'hind tit' of that movement – an appendage. It doesn't really matter how we see ourselves. Wearing rose tinted glasses to see the situation as we would want to see it, rather than for what it actually is, doesn't help. Our greatest weakness must surely lie in our failure to move away from left-republicanism to the solid rock of REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM. There can be no way forward, no future in a political sense, unless and until, we strike boldly as a party that is primarily a vanguard working-class party. Republicanism has its roots set in bourgeois democracy. It is

illogical in this day and age to contend that Irish revolutionaries must struggle to realise a republic with the same political and economic content as that envisioned by our predecessors of 1798. At the end of the day, that is all left-republicanism means in essence, except of course for the empty rhetoric. Not to accept revolutionary socialism as a stage beyond republicanism is to suggest that the world has stood still for nearly 200 years; that economic and political conditions, along with people's appreciation of them, have remained constant; and that the needs of the people have continued unchanged.

Some time back, I heard a comrade remark that the IRSP was formed in 1974 because at that time Sinn Fein was right-wing and not advocating socialism, as it does today. In a way, unintentionally of course, that comrade was suggesting that there was no reason now for the existence of the IRSP. In short that we should liquidate and all join the Provos. That is the logic of the situation. How does our socialism differ from Sinn Fein's? We have not gone one dot beyond our position of 1974. When we attempt to, with the Sinn Fein brand of socialism, we simply make vain attempts to discredit it by criticising their methods. It is the essence of their 'socialism' we should be exposing. But we cannot do that without showing up our own of commitment to revolutionary socialism. The great contradiction for us is that we have a membership, most of who acknowledge that their socialist principles are based on the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, yet the party steadfastly refused to commit itself publicly or otherwise on this central issue. To do so would immediately set us on course to produce that long awaited revolutionary programme. It would give the people a clear choice between Sinn Fein's so-called socialism, better described as left-republicanism, and our revolutionary brand – the choice would be between REFORM or REVOLUTION. It is time we had an end to our closet support for the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. It is of course significant that we should always be comparing ourselves to Sinn Fein, rather than to the parties who claim to be the vanguard parties of the working class. We do so because most of us see them as the competition. And so they are, in the area of national liberation. But it only if we engage in that struggle guided by genuine socialist principles, rather than by bourgeois democratic ideas (left-republicanism) can we hope to win support and achieve revolution. But it really brings into sharp relief our weakness when we now see them as serious competition in the area of the struggle for socialism. Of course this would not be the situation if we as a *party* had developed our understanding of socialism beyond that which we had in 1974. But we didn't, and today we are trying like Sinn Fein to build a form of socialism that gives no credit to Marx and Engels as the great architects of scientific socialism, or to Lenin for his many-faceted work comprising an entire phase of the development of socialist ideas. We are both at the business of trying to Hibernicise socialism. Is it that we fear the alien ideology tag still?

Last year's Ard Fheis witnessed the strongest demand yet that we base our socialist principles on the teachings of the great socialist leaders Marx, Engels and Lenin. In doing that, we would be adopting the method, viewpoint and science of the working class that has been tested and developed through decades of class struggle. We would be taking hold of a tool with which we can defeat imperialism, a mighty weapon indeed in hands of the working class and its party. It is only by building a revolutionary socialist party of such firm foundations that we can define, following a thorough analysis of the concrete conditions in Ireland, a correct strategy and tactics to enable the working class to overthrow imperialism and build socialism. Since the Ard Fheis, there has been ongoing discussion within the party on this matter. It has taken place informally at cumann and AC level. The feedback is that most members believe that it is both correct and timely that we adopt the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin as the basis for our socialist principles. *This is the position that the outgoing AC recommends, to the membership at this Ard Fheis.*

In the past, opposition to such a position came from those who claimed they knew little about the teachings of these great men and said they were content to rely on Connolly's teachings as their guide. Committed advocates of Marx, Engels and Lenin encouraged these people to study their

works, but they either ignored the advice or fell away from membership. Another form of opposition came from those who consider that it bad tactics to be in any way associated publicly with either Marx, Engels or Lenin. They would claim to be influenced by their teachings, but would consider that Ireland wasn't ready yet to accept a party with such ideas. How such people pale into insignificance when compared to the United Irishmen who so publicly identified with the French revolutionaries. Or when compared to James Connolly who so often identified with Karl Marx, going so far as to claim he was 'the ablest exponent of socialism that the world has seen, and the founder of that school of thought which embraces all the militant socialist parties of the world'. It is that 'school of thought' so ably advocated by Connolly that we must now embrace. Like Connolly, we must place ourselves in line with the most advance thought of our age.

It is the sincere belief of the outgoing AC that if we weren't meeting this weekend to finally take a position on defining our socialist principles, we should be meeting with a view to liquidation. We believe there is no place for a carbon-copy Republican Movement, albeit with a more left image, but one that is wearing thinner by the day. To stay as we are, our future would see us to burying our dead, looking after our prisoners, commemorating our heroic dead and involving ourselves in the odd anti-repression campaign. We would be more like an old comrades association than a political party. We would be totally eclipsed by Sinn Fein. As it is, they would appear to be very aware of our situation and have moved in for the kill. Already they show signs of being prepared to take over the job of honouring our fallen comrades. But what they are unaware of is the awareness of our members of the problem and the efforts that have been put in place to resolve it.

Lastly to comment on the work that lies ahead. It is important to realise that this party deserves the support of all its members. All must participate in its work. It is the property of no single individual or group. When you work, you do so for the party and not for any individual or group. Too often we hear of IRSP members standing back and complaining that the IRSP didn't do this or do that. All sorts of charges are levelled against the party, very often to non-members, in a manner that one wonders why some of these people stay in membership at all. They should remember that they in common with all others members *are the IRSP* and they have the opportunity at every Ard Fheis to put forward their ideas and to use their votes in appointing the leadership. In the days ahead, we will need committed workers for the party and will be best served without 'hurlers on the ditch'. Above all if we do disagree, let those disagreements be political and not personal. **SPEED THE WORK.**

**Jim Lane,
National Chairperson,
Irish Republican Socialist Party.**

3. PRESS RELEASE

Irish Republican Socialist Party
34, Upper Gardiner St. Dublin 1, Ireland
20th September, 1984

A HISTORIC STEP FORWARD

IRSP ADOPTS THE TEACHINGS OF MARX, ENGELS AND LENIN

On the weekend Sept. 8/9th 1984, the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), at its annual Ard Fheis (conference), took a historic step forward when it adopted the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin as providing the basis for its socialist principles. In taking such a step the IRSP do not see these teachings as a collection of immutable, fossilised principles to be accepted as a faith or dogma. Studied in the light of the historical experience of the working class and related to the concrete conditions existing in Ireland today, they become a powerful weapon in the hands of the party, providing the necessary method, viewpoint and science to define the correct strategy and tactics to defeat imperialism and build socialism.

This momentous decision by the IRSP was arrived at after a considerable period of internal discussion relating to:

- (1) the experience of the internal organisation of the party since its formation,
- (2) the party's contribution or lack of contribution to the struggle for national liberation and socialism,
- (3) our failure to adequately define our understanding of revolutionary socialism,
- (4) an analysis of the Irish revolutionary tradition,
- (5) the historical experience of the world revolutionary movement under the influence of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

The most advanced thought of our age

In our deliberations, we were greatly influenced by James Connolly's advice to; "emulate our fathers and like the true men of '98, place ourselves in line with the most advanced thought of our age, drawing inspiration and hope from the spectacle presented by the world wide revolt of the workers." In his time, James Connolly, credited Karl Marx as representing such advanced thought, when he said of him that he was, "the ablest exponent of socialism the world had seen, and the founder of that school of thought which embraces all the militant parties of the world". Like Connolly, the IRSP accepts the valued contribution to revolutionary thought made by Marx and Engels, the great architects of scientific socialism. But in placing ourselves "in line with the most advanced thought of our age", the Age of Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, we were inexorably led beyond Marx and Engels to Lenin. Leninism we consider to be Marxism in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution. His contribution was so vast that it comprised an entire

phase of the development of socialist idea. His analysis of imperialism; his work on national liberation and democratic movements opposed to imperialism; his development of the Marxist theory of proletarian dictatorship; and not least his creation of the new type revolutionary party, enriched Marxism.

Revolutionary Tradition: Republicanism and Socialism.

In embracing the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, we are placing ourselves in line with the most advanced thought of our age and, as a consequence, are in line with the revolutionary tradition passed on by James Connolly. Likewise, we stand in the revolutionary tradition of the United Irishmen of '98 because they in their time stood for the most advanced thought of the age – bourgeois democracy. At that time, bourgeois democracy represented a revolutionary phenomenon directly applicable to a progressive solution to Irish ills; and as a consequence, Irish Republicanism could be defined as Revolutionary Bourgeois Democracy, tailored to complement specific needs and conditions in Ireland. However, by Connolly's time, conditions in Ireland and elsewhere had changed and the needs and demands of the people were different than they had been in '98. Bourgeois Democracy had ceased to be revolutionary; it had been superseded by Socialist Democracy which to this day dominates the stage of all human endeavour for freedom. Lenin said of this period, "It is evident that the peoples who, between 1789 and 1871, were usually the foremost fighters for freedom, have become, after 1876, under highly developed and 'over ripe' capitalism, the oppressors and subjugators of the majority of populations and nations of the globe". Irish republicanism has its roots set in bourgeois democracy. It is illogical in this day and age to contend that Irish revolutionaries must struggle to realise a republic with the same political and economic content as that envisioned by our predecessors of 1798. To propose such a thing is to suggest the world has stood still for nearly 200 years; that the economic and political conditions, along with peoples' appreciations of them, have remained constant; and that the needs of the people have continued unchanged. Yet the failure of Irish separatist parties and movements to move to a stage beyond republicanism (bourgeois democracy) to REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM means, in objective terms, the acceptance of such an illogical proposition. Attempts to coat this position with a veneer of left-wing rhetoric, does little to improve the situation; rather, it has the effect of sowing confusion among potential revolutionaries. In essence, left-republicanism and the various forms of Hibernianised socialism, at the end of the day, equate with bourgeois democracy.

We demand revolutionary change to our economic and political conditions, not reform. Only revolutionary socialism with its principles based on the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin, enriched in the Irish situation by James Connolly, offer the solution to the problems besetting Ireland today.

The non-revolutionary left in Ireland

There are several parties and organisations in Ireland today who would claim to be in the tradition of the United Irishmen and James Connolly. They, like the IRSP, would claim to be basing their principles on the most advanced thought of our age. But it must be borne in mind that not alone were the United Irishmen advancing the most revolutionary ideas for a new society, *they also used revolutionary means in attempting to implement them.* Apart from how the IRSP may differ from such parties and organisations of the 'left' on the end product, *only the IRSP is committed to revolutionary means to achieve the end.* On this count, such parties and organisations fail to achieve the necessary criteria demanded of revolutionaries.

The IRSP not alone rejects the peaceful transition to socialism through, parliamentary means, but alone among the parties advocating revolutionary socialism, we support the armed struggle against

British imperialism unequivocally. We do so because we believe the resolution of the national question to be a necessary prerequisite to socialism in Ireland. Armed now as we are with the powerful weapon of Marxism-Leninism and committed as we are to the greater ideological schooling of our members and followers, we intend to dig roots so deep among the working-class that it will prove impossible to dislodge us. *It was indeed a momentous decision, a historic step forward, when the IRSP adopted the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin.*

Jim Lane,

National Chairperson, IRSP, 20 September 1984.

4. TA POWER REMEMBERED

When Thomas ‘Ta’ Power was released from prison on 22 December 1986, he was a man with a mission. He had set himself the task firstly to help resolve the problems besetting the Irish Republican Socialist Movement and, secondly, to join with other comrades of like mind in the building of a revolutionary party, a communist party. Before the laying of firm foundations, he considered it necessary to clear the ground, sort out the weeds and get the correct mix; hence his immediate commitment to resolving the contradictions existing at the time.

In advance of his expected release, Ta committed some of his ideas to paper. The weeks following his release, rather than being a period of rest, were spent meeting the people, explaining contradictions, pointing to past errors, and always insisting on the necessity to build for the future on firm foundations, rather than compromising for short-term advantage. For those who met and debated with Ta, he was indeed a breath of fresh air, displaying a vitality and zest for the work ahead that served as an inspiration to us all, particularly to those who had grown somewhat weary of the mindless bickering of recent times. Here was a man with a breath of vision who, all believed, would in time leave an indelible mark on our movement. From Belfast to Cork, we all rejoiced at his homecoming and we gladly looked forward to working with him. But our expectations were short lived. On 20 January 1987, less than a month after his release from prison, Thomas Power, revolutionary communist, was slain at the Rosnaree Hotel, Drogheda, Co. Louth. He died while on the business of attempting to resolve problems which he saw as an impediment to the development of the Irish Republican Socialist Movement as a revolutionary party. Having come up against, unresolved contradictions, he favoured the ‘parting of ways’. He went to make peace and met death. The assassins’ bullets robbed us of this fine comrade.

We are fortunate that Ta took the time to begin to commit his thoughts to paper. Two essays written by him were presented to the IRSP shortly after his release and they were supported by hours of discussion. Though prison essays are nothing new, Ta’s essays are indicative of a welcome trend developing within the prisons in recent times. In the past when prisoners found time to review the republican struggle it was only to judge the policies and tactics employed. Now an increased number of prisoners have begun to examine the basis on which the struggle for freedom is being waged and, more importantly, there is the demand that ‘freedom’ be defined. Empty rhetoric has lost currency. James Connolly’s comment that, “THE IRISH ARE NOT PHILOSOPHERS AS A RULE, THEY PROCEED TOO RAPIDLY FROM THOUGHT TO ACTION”, has sunk home to many. Ta Power realised that without a theoretical base there can be no revolutionary movement. Without this base we, workers and exploited, will forever be cannon fodder for petit bourgeois idealists at best, and for imperialists at worst.

In his essay 'An Historical Analysis of the IRSP: its past role, root cause of its problems and proposals for the future', Ta Power set about in a correct manner to achieve the resolution of problems by going back to the origins of the movement and tracing developments from there. He never pretended that this essay was anything but an outline and in his discussions with comrades he capably demonstrated his ability to go into various aspects of the essay in greater depth. 'Contradictions' his second essay, and his 'Analysis', were intended by Ta to encourage other comrades to contribute to a debate as an alternative to proceeding "too rapidly from thought to action."

Ta's 'Analysis', with its brief background of the Republican Movement in the '60s and early '70s, is extremely useful to those who seek to understand how and why the IRSM evolved. However, because of the nature of his essay, his background material is brief and therefore limits a proper analysis. It is necessary therefore to expand the readers insight into the historic roots of recent Irish republicanism in general, and its attitude towards communism in particular.*

Simply put, the movement that Séamus Costello and his comrades split from, by this time the Officials, was not a revolutionary socialist organisation. It was not a revolutionary socialist movement gone wrong. That is not to say that there not some genuine Marxist-Leninists in it struggling for a way forward. The IRSP was, as Ta said, formed by republicans, socialists and trade unionists, not by revolutionary communists. The values of the movement that they emerged from were brought with them, to a large extent, including the prejudices, habits and traditions. Ta Power's essay on 'Contradictions' highlights the problems we have encountered because of this legacy.

The essential message that Ta gave us through his essays was that it is time to leave behind bourgeois nationalism. It is time to climb to a new level by setting about the construction of a genuine revolutionary socialist movement – a movement which firmly recognises the primacy of class politics. If Ta had not been struck down as he was, he would be to the forefront in building this movement. His death itself serves as an indictment of bourgeois nationalism, as those who gunned him down were practitioners of this ideology. They proved the necessity for solid revolutionary theory to direct the revolutionary practice.

**Jim Lane,
Former 1983-85 Chairperson of the IRSP,
December 1987**

[This piece was published in the December 1987 supplement to the *Starry Plough*. I had also forwarded an article on the republican movement and socialism, covering the 1950–70 period. It was published alongside my comment on the death of Ta Power. In 1989, that latter article was updated and published as a pamphlet by the Cork Worker's Club and titled *The Republican Movement and Socialism, 1950–70*. JL]

Link

<http://cedarlounge.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/the-republican-movement-and-socialism-1950-70.pdf>