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New collusion allegations

By Frank Hennessy

A retired RUC police sergeant has accused police in Northern Ireland of covering up nine murders committed by an informer to protect the flow of intelligence. The former detective sergeant says his colleagues prevented the arrest of an Ulster Volunteer Force spy who took part in at least nine killings and ordered several more. The accusations made by Johnston Brown are contained in three dossiers being investigated by Nuala O'Loan, the Northern Ireland police ombudsman. Last month the 'whistleblower' stopped co-operating with her investigators after they threatened to interview him 'under caution' for failing to prevent the killings. Brown states that it has made him question whether the ombudsman is the appropriate person to investigate this case. 'I am risking my neck by exposing wrongdoing but it seemed that I was the one being put in the dock. I am putting the matter in the hands of my solicitor.' Brown, who has 30 years service as a detective, is best known as the man whose evidence jailed the Ulster Freedom Fighters leader, mobster Mad Dog Johnny Adair. He also brought to light the man who police believe killed nationalist lawyer Pat Finucane. The individual concerned was a Special Branch agent who had allegedly confessed to the murder but had not been charged.

The deaths in which Brown believes this informer was personally involved in include: Sharon Mc Kenna, 27, a Catholic taxi driver who was shot dead at the home of a Protestant pensioner for whom she was cooking dinner on January 17th 1993; Thomas Sheppard 41, who was shot dead on March 21st, 1996; (Sheppard had been lured to a meeting in Towers Tavern, Ballymena, Co. Antrim and his murder was part of an internal U.V.F. dispute); William Harbinson 39 a Shankill Road Protestant who died on May 19th, 1997, after being handcuffed and beaten in a alley on North Belfast's Shore Road; David Templeton 43, a Presbyterian minister who died of a heart attack some weeks after a punishment beating in February 1997 (he had earlier resigned from the ministry after being arrested by customs for possession of a gay pornographic video); Gary Convie, 24, and Eamon Fox, 44, two Co. Tyrone Catholics gunned down at a North Belfast building site in May 1997 in a blatant sectarian killing; David Mc Ilwaine, 18yrs and Andrew Robb 19yrs, both Protestants who were found stabbed to death by the side of Druminure Road near Tandragee, Co. Armagh on February 19th 2000; Tommy

English and David Greer, two loyalists shot dead by the UVF during a feud with the UDA in October 2000.

The informer also ordered an attack in which Raymond McCord Jr. was beaten to death and dumped in Ballyduff quarry in November 1997. This murder was part of a dispute over drugs money. Brown went on to say that CID were hearing of this man's involvement in these murders from other informants who were working around him and with him. 'Every time we reported his actions we were taken to task for feeding information that was embarrassing a Special Branch source. Some other informants who told us about it also suffered for helping us.' Brown's dossiers indicate that there was strong competition between the Special Branch, which gathers intelligence, and the CID, which investigates crime, for control of key agents within the paramilitary groups. Brown states that he recruited three agents, each of which is the subject of a separate dossier. He believes two were 'burnt off' by Special Branch for reporting crimes by fellow agents. One fled the country and the other was jailed. 'In some cases, the loyalist paramilitaries were warned by Special Branch that these people were helping me', he said. The third informant was handed over from CID to Special Branch in October 1991, because he was a senior figure in the Ulster Volunteer Force. His information was judged 'too valuable' for CID to manage. Brown stated that when he was handling him he 'saved lives' but when Special Branch took control of him he became a killer. 'Once he started to take life you could have caught this boy real handy and I tried a few times but I wasn't allowed', said the whistleblower. Questioned about Brown's allegations, a spokesman for Nuala O'Loan said: 'We have been talking to a former police officer in relation to a current investigation and have had discussions with him about how we could interview him at a later stage. At no time did we say we would arrest him'. Brown says he now faces prosecution despite exposing what he alleges was a deliberate 'police cover up'.

The evidence for widespread collusion is now mounting steadily. Contact forms uncovered by the three 'Steven's Inquiries' show beyond doubt that there was advance intelligence that would have prevented several murders including that of Pat Finucane. It is clearly in the public interest, and not just the interest of the families who have been pressing for an inquiry all those years, that this rotten murky underworld be openly explored, and shown up for what it is.

Finucane Inquiry: more delay tactics

By Malcolm Kerins

The British government has finally announced that there will be four public inquiries into collusion by members of the security forces in the murders of Pat Finucane, Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and Billy Wright. Preliminary reports by retired Canadian Supreme Court Judge Peter Cory into the murders were published last month, after months of delay, and will form the basis for the investigations. The reports were damning in all four cases with Judge Cory finding evidence of collusion by members of the RUC, the Special Branch, MI5, the Prison Service and Northern Ireland Office, both through acts of omission and commission. The Finucane report provided a wealth of damning detail on the operations of the intelligence service, with the judge saying MI5, the British Army, and the RUC had all separately been told by agents that loyalists were targeting Pat Finucane. The judge found that MI5 had been told by one of its agents that the UDA was keen to kill Mr. Finucane. A meeting between MI5 and Special Branch concluded that the threat was very real and imminent but decided no action would be taken because intervention would compromise the security of the agent. Four years later, no action was taken when a similar report was received. Two months before the Finucane assassination in 1989, an MI5 agent reported that UDA leaders had discussed killing three solicitors, one of whom was easily identified as Pat Finucane. Once again, no action was taken to warn Mr Finucane or to intervene in any way. Judge Cory was critical of RUC Special Branch, which he said had failed in its duty to protect all individuals. He said it concentrated almost entirely on those targeted by the IRA and paid little attention to loyalist targets. Documents have indicated that in some instances Special Branch failed to take any steps to prevent actual or planned attacks on persons targeted by loyalists groups. UDA threats were ignored and the treatment of IRA and UDA targets were indicative of a selective bias on the part of the Special Branch. Army Intelligence played their part by tolerating the criminal activities of its agents. The judge said that without public scrutiny, doubts and suspicion will linger long, fester and spread their malignant infection throughout 'the Northern Ireland community'.

But serious questions hang over the British government's action in delaying a judicial investigation into the murder of Pat

Finucane until criminal prosecutions and the on-going Stevens Inquiry have been completed. (Loyalist Ken Barrett is currently awaiting trial in connection with the murder.) This delay is an absolute disgrace and clearly another stalling tactic by the British government to hide the truth. There is no justification for delaying any longer. Tony Blair has no hiding place from those who are calling for a Finucane inquiry now.



Pat Finucane - assassinated by the UDA in 1989

Judge Cory, in interviews on RTE and the BBC, disagreed with the government's decision. He argued 'This is one of the occasions where it is better for the community to proceed with the public inquiry, before the prosecution if necessary, because of the length of time that has elapsed and because of the allegations of collusion.' Judge Cory said that he did not see anything to prevent the two going together, since the North's judge-only Diplock courts meant there would be no juries to be swayed by an inquiry. He asserted that the inquiry should take place now for a number of reasons: for the sake of the Finucane family, who had been waiting 15 years; because it had been promised in the Weston Park talks; because so much time had elapsed that there was a danger that key witnesses could die; and because the criminal case could take an interminable time, with the possibility of appeals and of others being charged. He was implicitly critical of David Trimble, who stupidly suggested with House of Commons privilege that the solicitors Mr. Finucane and Ms Nelson had IRA connections. 'Nothing in the material that I reviewed indicated that they personally had links with the IRA,' the judge said. It is unbelievable the way Unionists politicians

continue to repeat the same old garbage, even when they are proved wrong.

The Finucane family, which has been engaged in litigation with the British government for many years in its efforts to secure a sworn inquiry is, understandably, unhappy with the outcome. Mr. Finucane's widow, Geraldine, described the outcome as very disappointing. She rightly accuses the British authorities of continuing to try to cover up the truth about her husband's death with their delaying tactics. His son, Michael Finucane, has cast doubt on whether there will ever be a public inquiry into the murder of his father. He alleged that the real difficulty for the British government was that his father's murder was pre-planned, ordered, and sanctioned - even in Downing Street. The British government had known about threats to his father for a long period of time. Discussions were held, decisions taken, and ultimately lives were taken. Foreign Minister Brian Cowen said the Dublin government was 'very disappointed' that an inquiry into Mr. Finucane's murder would be delayed. He said like the other three families involved, the Finucane family want and are entitled to see the timely establishment of inquiries into all of the cases, in full accordance with the commitments made by the two governments at Weston Park in August 2001.

The Cory report may be seen as a bit of a disappointment. It seems as if he has done little more than pull together information, most of it already in the public domain, and the rest given to him by the Stevens or the Port teams which investigated two of the murders. Judge Cory was not the first choice of either the British and Irish governments to do these reports. In some ways his reports will justify the claim by the Finucane family that involving him was a time wasting exercise to delay a full public inquiry. The great bulk of what we have been told is relatively unrewarding in the production of new knowledge. The emphasis therefore has to be on the disclosure of sensitive material. What is startling has been the passivity of the British government. It has spent the last year hoping against hope that Cory would not be so bad after all. Now we are told that we are soon to have a debate about the truth and reconciliation concept. But there are those in the British government who have spent the last few years resisting such a debate. The sooner the British government confronts their intolerable failure within its security system, the better.

Education system in crisis

By Ken Patterson

Once again teaching unions have highlighted the chronic problems currently present in the educational system. Due to increasing anger among parents, pupils and school managers, the recent education conferences have been dominated by the question of special needs provision.

Those who are involved in education are concerned that the needs of some of the most vulnerable in our school system are being ignored due to the serious backlog in the provision of needs' resources. There is a severe lack of facilities, staff and teacher training in providing support for pupils with extra physical or intellectual requirements. It has been reported that due to the lack of facilities for staff a great number of teachers have insufficient knowledge about the social and developmental requirements of special needs pupils.

At present there are an estimated 7,000 pupils at primary level whose special needs have been identified, but who are still waiting for special teaching; there are thousands more who haven't yet even been assessed. These include children who are blind or deaf, children in wheelchairs, autistic children, children with Down's Syndrome, children with learning difficulties such as dyslexia; those with emotional problems are virtually being ignored. Under increasing public pressure, the Education Minister Noel Dempsey, at the recent Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) annual congress in Galway, announced the creation of 350 additional teaching posts in primary schools from September of this year. The new posts will be in the area of special needs education.

This move by the Minister of additional teaching positions has been welcomed. However to address all the problems that are in the education system at present, a lot more needs to be done. It is estimated that 20% of pupils at primary level have special education needs and unless it is addressed right now, its effects will be seen in second-level schools in years to come. According to the ASTI teaching union, at least one in ten pupils in second-level education demonstrate extremely volatile behaviour in the classroom and have been assessed as urgently requiring special needs. 90% of school principals say that they have students with special needs who have not yet been assessed because of inadequate government funding.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, schools in disadvantaged areas are reported to have a higher proportion of disruptive pupils. In a particular inner-city secondary school of Dublin, the principal reported that one in five of the pupils had learning problems caused by their social background. It is suggested that this is unlikely to be such a major problem for private fee-paying schools, given the pupils economic background. Such views strengthen the argument that class inequalities still exist more than ever in this country due to the current government's social policy. Every effort must be made to promote equality of opportunity for all children. In doing so no resource should be spared to ensure that every child receives a proper education.

TUI president, Mr Derek Dunne at the annual congress, told the Minister for Education that disadvantaged children cannot be focused on in isolation from their family, peers and community. Parallel programmes must be established for parents, particularly mothers, and there must be a 'societal' response to the issue, he said. In addressing the Minister, Mr Dunne went on to say that schools could not address this problem in a vacuum. He added that proper resources must be allocated and teachers adequately trained and supported.

According to a recent ASTI survey on discipline in the classroom, there is a serious problem of unruly behaviour in many of the country's secondary schools. It stated that out of the 1,200 teachers surveyed, a third have taught classes in the past year where students were under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Among its findings was that 29% of teachers were found to have considered leaving the profession altogether, 28% have considered taking a career break. The survey revealed that patterns of indiscipline by an unruly minority are depriving the majority of pupils of the right to a full education. The ASTI identified a range of factors leading to the worsening of disciplinary problems in schools. Three-in-five teachers said unsuitable school accommodation and overcrowding was a major factor.

Suspending pupils from school is argued to be a negative solution in combating unruly behaviour in schools. Suspension has been identified as a significant contributor to students dropping out of education early, a new report has found. The findings in the report are based on interviews conducted throughout County Kildare in which

many students, parents and teachers have argued for alternatives to the suspension of pupils. Kildare was found to reflect the national average in terms of early school leaving with around 3.5% of students dropping out of education without any formal qualifications.

The report, published by a selection of education, youth and training agencies working in Kildare, concluded that for a certain number of young people the traditional school system does not work: 'They find it to be hostile, non-stimulating, over-bureaucratised and results driven. They simply do not respond to school as it is structured'. Other reasons mentioned for pupils dropping out of school included discrimination, bullying, literacy problems, teacher attitudes and learning difficulties. A range of recommendations is made in the report including a call for the establishment of a Kildare early school leaver task force.

At present Ireland's primary school classes are found to be the second most crowded in the EU. It is estimated that over 47,000 school children are being taught in classes of over 30 pupils. Many teachers are reported to be struggling to cope with such large classes. The current situation with overcrowding is viewed to be adversely affecting both teachers and pupils. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation has argued that classes must be reduced to 20 pupils and has urged the government to put improved teacher and pupil ratios to the top of the agenda. INTO General secretary John Carr has said that class sizes were adversely affecting the ability of teachers to get the best out of each child. Students are simply losing out, he said.

Commenting on the issue, the Education minister has said that due to funding issues, there were no plans in the near future to reduce class sizes. In response to this the INTO vowed that they would tap into the widespread fury among parents about overcrowded classrooms. The union has also warned the government that they will make the problem of overcrowding a key issue for the elections and in doing so make the general public aware of the false promises made by the government on this serious issue. Let's hope the politicians pay attention.

Ken Patterson is a republican prisoner in Portlaoise Gaol

Taking the bull by the horns

By Liam Sheridan

When we envisage a 32 county socialist republic, are we simply paying lip service to the idea of this new state being based on the ideals of Connolly and Marx or, as republicans striving toward revolution, do we earnestly believe that socialism will underpin any new society we create?

Over the past centuries, socialism in different guises has come more and more to the fore of republicanism, and when the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation signed their names to the words '...cherishing all the children of the nation equally' they enshrined in republican doctrine an ethos of equality and egalitarianism. Surely as their successors we should carry this mantle.

England's ignominious role on this island not only brought death, oppression and injustice: it brought capitalism - an ideology that is at the very core of its imperialism. This system is about the ruler and the oppressed, the slave and the master. This was intrinsic to the relationship Ireland had with England for centuries - our country was bound into slavery at the behest of the English, our masters. In the past eight hundred years Ireland's history has been one of wars against the occupier. For many of these years the uprisings were against not only the political rule directed from England but also against the social order the colonisers imposed which caused the destruction of the structure of Irish society and Irish laws.

Mass land confiscations, prison ships, famine, prison cells and the sword are what Irish men and women have endured for centuries. It was estimated that in 'Black '47' roughly a quarter of a million died of fever and nearly another quarter of a million died of starvation. In 1848 it was estimated that approximately 300,000 died of starvation, yet close on two million bushels of wheat were exported while people died in the fields. This was England's attitude towards its colony. Today's struggle should mirror the struggles of the past and the overthrow of the social structure imposed should be as important as the expulsion of the political order.

Is it not true that we have more in common with Cuba and those struggling for independence and liberation in Kurdistan and Palestine than we do with the those here at home who exploit Irish men and Irish women - the O'Briens, the Michael O'Learys and the Dermot Desmonds of this

world? We see parallel situations all over the globe from which we can draw comparisons, and this is why we find ourselves in solidarity with so many liberation struggles the world over. Ruthless imperialist ideology is raising its ugly head again today in the Middle East as neo-colonialism attempts to strike again for colonies to conquer.

In the Communist Manifesto, written in 1848, Marx and Engels told us that a spectre was haunting the whole of Europe - that spectre for them was socialism. Today in 2004 that spectre is still haunting Europe. In countries like Italy there is a massive

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workers' movement. Germany and France both have left wing movements and even Ireland has a rapidly growing socialist movement. How we differ with those on the left is that we have determined that the cause for the inequality and injustice in Ireland is England. What we have to do is remove the British rule that has blighted this country for centuries and with it remove the causes of conflict and inequality. Once Britain is expelled and the sovereignty of Ireland is re-established there will be an opportunity to recreate a state based on equality and justice. None of the larger political parties within the Six County statelet has socialism on their agenda. Many pay lip service to socialism (not least the Provisional movement), but there is no tangible sign of it being a real objective. Needless to say the unionist and loyalist parties have only capitalism at heart as it has benefited them through the exploitation of the Catholic working classes. Likewise, none of the larger Dublin-based political parties have socialism in their manifestos either, as predominantly it is big business that dominates these parties and determines their policy.

The greed of politicians on this isle is immeasurable. James Connolly wrote a series of articles at the turn of the last century called Labour in Irish History. In these articles he described the Irish parliaments

of the past as 'in reality, like every other that ever sat in Dublin, merely a collection of land thieves and their lackeys'. Judging by the soundings coming from the Flood Tribunal, today's politicians sitting in the Dáil are no different.

When Britain is expelled what type of Ireland will we have? An extended Free State with Michael McDowell's boot boys rounding up and harassing republicans, and a Taoiseach still cowering before the might of his Paymaster-General across the Atlantic and his bosom buddies next door? Or are we willing to take the bull by the horns and not only deal with the problems in one corrupt state but two. Today the lingering hand of sour imperialism that Britain brought to this isle and its corrosive breath still affects all sections of Irish society.

So what do we do? Do we provide for a new 32 county state under a government of the ilk of Fianna Fáil, where poverty is ever growing and a huge drugs problem in Ireland is accepted? An Ireland where we would rather build a sports complex costing €1 billion (the proposed 'Bertie-Bowl') than tackle the problems of homelessness, bed shortages in hospitals, the lack of adequate cancer services anywhere outside of Dublin, a two-tier health system and crumbling schools that are a health risk to our children? Or do we revolutionise all sectors of Irish society and create a manifestly new Ireland with equality at its core and rid ourselves of the chains that still hold us?

With the ever-widening gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' it is evident that we live in a society based on inequality and injustice. We now see the New World Order using war as a foreign policy tool (directed by the multi-nationals like Lockheed Martin, the biggest arms manufacturer in the world, and by Exxon/Esso and BP) to carve out new markets for themselves. Human life is nothing compared to the profit that is demanded by big business. We here in Ireland are not exempt from this. The flag waving and trumpeting when Raytheon opened in Derry, for example, and the Free State Government's willingness to sell its soul (in the form of Shannon Airport) for the paltry sum of \$50 million are but two examples of how easily our political masters can be bought. Its time we made a start. The Free State needs as much work as the North. The bull is there to be taken by the horns.

Liberty and Republicanism

Portlaoise POW Darren Mulholland argues that a new republican emphasis on personal liberty is needed if the Republic is to be an attractive and worthwhile goal

'Only reason can convince us of those three separate fundamental truths without a recognition of which there can be no effective liberty: that what we believe is not necessarily true; that what we like is not necessarily good; and that all questions are open.'

Clive Bell, *Civilization*

How should the state be organised? What ends should it pursue, and by what means? Important questions, but sometimes the most important questions are the ones we think about the least. We all have opinions on the matter, of course. We all live in states, and all of us have views, usually critical, on the way they are run. But we rarely stop to think in a systematic fashion about the alternatives. Most of us have too little interest in the matter to give it any serious consideration, while those of us who do are usually too wrapped up in the day-to-day realities of political activism to take the time. So we simply assume the answers, and get on with criticising the way things are now.

Republicans, unfortunately, are no exception to this rule. While we all have a clear idea of what we are against, we have very little idea, collectively, of what we are actually for. Or rather, we have a hundred different ideas, all equally vague. This, I'm sure we can all agree, is an unsatisfactory situation. For anyone interested in political change of any sort, the most important question is where you are trying to get to, not how you are going to get there. How you go about pursuing your goals is of course critical to the question of whether or not you achieve them, but the question of whether those goals are worth achieving in the first place is even more fundamental.

Republicans in recent years have often (and correctly) called for more debate and discussion on the way forward. But this debate, when it comes, usually centres on the issue of tactics: whether old organisations should be reformed or new ones established; whether armed struggle is a viable strategy in the 21st century; how new recruits can be attracted and the republican message disseminated. These are all important matters, but let us, for today, leave aside this question of tactics completely. Instead, I would like to take this opportunity to sketch out the broad outlines of one possible destination for the republican movement - what I will call, for want of a better description, a socially liberal, economically socialist republic. This is my own vision of the future, of a state worth fighting for, and I hope that others will find it attractive enough to take up its banner. But instead of simply concentrating on arguments for this position, I would like to, as it were, take the scenic route, stopping off along the way to examine some of the most important concepts we will need and the most serious problems we will face if we are to construct any viable alternative to the status quo. There are, I will argue, no simple answers to the biggest questions we face, and tough choices will have to be made if we are to proceed united.

Let us begin, then, with the possible, and proceed to the desirable.

Utopias and Final Solutions

We are all of us, to some extent, utopians. We all have a vision, however hazy, of our perfect state - the institutional embodiment of liberty, justice, piety, or whatever set of political ideals we happen

to hold dear. And the idea of a utopia, of a single perfect set of political institutions waiting to be discovered and implemented, has been a powerful force in human history. Ever since Plato first sketched out his ideal state in *The Republic* two and a half thousand years ago, men have fought and died to build their own versions of heaven on earth. At the heart of every crusade, every revolution, every people's war, is the shining vision of an idealised future. But is it a realistic vision? Utopianism has often been condemned as unworldly and impractical. Constructing a perfect state in this imperfect world of war, greed and folly is an unlikely undertaking; maintaining it for any length of time, even if we could build it once, would perhaps be even more difficult. The evidence of history, after all, is that fortune is rarely on the side of the angels.

As it happens, this is far from a knockdown argument. The utopian can simply reply that the fact that an undertaking is difficult does not mean that it should not be attempted, at least if success would make the effort worthwhile. But his problems are only just beginning. There is in fact a much more serious objection to the utopian project, the objection that the very idea of a single perfect state makes no sense. It is a testament to the emotive power of the idea of political perfection that it was not until the twentieth century that philosophers began to raise this issue, questioning for the first time the very coherence of the utopian ideal. The Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin led the first modern assault on utopianism in the 1950s, pointing out that the set of values a single ideal state would have to embody are in fact *mutually incompatible* - they could not, even in theory, be implemented simultaneously. Worse, the concepts are *incommensurable* - there is no rational way of choosing between them, or of choosing how much of one to sacrifice for how much of another. This realization, Berlin famously argued, undermines one of the fundamental assumptions of Western thought: the idea *'that somewhere in the past or future, in this world or the next, in the church or the laboratory, in the speculations of the metaphysician or the findings of the social scientist, or in the uncorrupted heart of the simple good man, there is to be found the final solution of the question of how men should live. If this is false (and if more than one equally valid answer to the question can be returned, then it is false) the idea of the sole true, objective, universal human ideal crumbles. The very search for it becomes not merely Utopian in practice, but conceptually incoherent.'*

We can illustrate Berlin's point by looking at just a small sample of the ideals most of us believe a perfect state should embody. Let us take three for simplicity: liberty, equality and justice. These ideals are usually considered as *ultimate ends*, ends which are valuable in themselves (justice, for example, is considered to be a good thing simply because it is justice, not because it makes us happy or contributes to an attractive all-over tan).

Any perfect state, we can say, must be one that secures liberty, justice and equality for all its citizens. But immediately we find ourselves with a problem: all these ideals, in their purest form, are fundamentally incompatible with one another. Justice - if we consider it as a sort of fairness, everybody getting what they deserve - is inconsistent with equality, which is everybody getting the same. And equality is inconsistent with liberty - everybody getting what they can. Liberty, moreover, is inconsistent with justice: my liberty to punch you in the face whenever I feel like it is inconsistent with

your right to be punched in the face only when you deserve it.

But this is just foolishness, the defender of utopianism may object. Of course there have to be limits on each individual ideal; creating the perfect state involves a trade-off between the good points of each to achieve the best overall whole. And this appears a reasonable position. If liberty, to take one example, is a good thing in itself, then any restriction on liberty is, in itself, a bad thing, but few will dispute that such restrictions may be justified on the grounds of some other noble end - justice, perhaps, or equality.

The problem comes when we try to draw the lines. Berlin's point was that there is no single overarching standard by which we can measure the value of each ideal and assign it an appropriate weighting in our calculations. The ideals are all *incommensurable* with one another; there is no common currency in which they can be compared, and so we have no rational means of choosing between them. We could, with the utilitarians, try arguing that *happiness* is the standard by which all ideals should be judged - that we should have as much of each ideal as serves to maximise the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But a little consideration will reveal that all we have achieved here is to add a fourth ultimate end - aggregate happiness - to the three we already had. And these are only four of many potential ideals a perfect state would have to embody.

Berlin's conclusion is inescapable. There is and can be no utopia, even in theory; there is no perfect state hiding in the ether waiting to be discovered. To use his own deliberately provocative terminology, there is simply no 'final solution' to the question of how human society should be organised. There are an infinite number of possible arrangements, and we can argue forever about which is the best, which achieves the best balance of competing values, without ever being able to settle the matter.

Making the best of a bad lot?

So where does this leave us? Should we simply accept that all attempts to better the human situation are futile, and get on with making the best of a bad lot? Clearly no. There may be no 'final solution' to the problem of organising society, no single arrangement of laws and institutions that we can decide on rationally and say confidently is 'objectively' the best. But this does not mean that we cannot improve significantly on what we have.

We all have our own private utopias, the set of trade-offs that appeal to us personally, even if they cannot be objectively justified. They may not be identical, but there is undoubtedly substantial overlap between them, and few of us are so single-minded that we would not be content with a range of different outcomes. You and I may disagree on the precise weightings we give to liberty and justice in our respective utopias, but in the interests of creating a better future for us all, I may well be content to settle for your ideal and you for mine. So the practical problem facing us is that of finding an arrangement we can all be reasonably happy with, and which is a significant improvement on the status quo.

And it seems to me that this places the emphasis on liberty, and creating a liberal society. Given that we cannot possibly satisfy everyone's desires in the arrangement of our state institutions, we must compensate by allowing each individual as much freedom as

is reasonably possible to shape the progress of their own life as they see fit. (This would be cold comfort, I admit, to those individuals who placed a low value on liberty to begin with, but sacrifices have to be made somewhere.)

What I would like to do in the remainder of this article, then, is to lay out a vision of my own 'private utopia', what I have referred to above as a socially liberal, economically socialist republic. It would be impossible here to do anything other than sketch a rough outline, but the point I would like to emphasise most, the maximisation of liberty, should be clear. That a balance must be struck

between liberty and equality most of us will agree. What I want to argue here is that the particular balance I propose is necessary if either concept is to be a meaningful or worthwhile goal. Liberty without equality is liberty for an elite alone; equality without liberty is a hell for all.

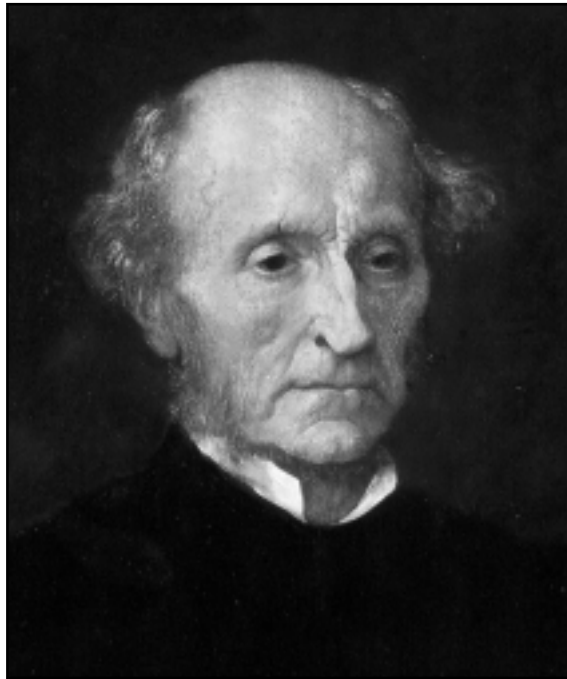
Before I do so, however, a further digression is required. I have often made use of the word 'liberty' in this discussion without pausing to explain what I mean by the term. And this is no simple matter: over two hundred distinct meanings have been recorded for the words 'liberty' and 'freedom' (which we will treat here as synonymous). A little clarification is now in order.

Of all the manifold meanings of the term liberty, two are especially significant: the concepts of 'negative' and 'positive' freedom. Negative freedom is simply freedom from constraints imposed by others, most obviously by the state. My sphere of negative freedom contracts whenever the range of choices available to me is restricted, so every prohibition by the state - the prohibition on murder, the prohibition on heroin consumption, the prohibition on parking on double-yellow lines - is a restriction of my negative freedom. The concept of positive freedom is a little more complex, but we can characterise it here as the type of freedom that is contrasted with subjugation rather than constraint. A people, we would say, is free in the positive sense if they are not oppressed by a foreign power; an individual is similarly free if he lives in a democratic state and has the power to influence the decisions that control his life.

Importantly, these two types of freedom are conceptually independent of one another - it is possible (though not perhaps plausible) to have much of one but little of the other. Consider, for example, a democratic but highly-interventionist 'nanny state' which proscribes how each hour of every citizen's life should be spent. An individual in this state would be free in the positive sense, but would have little or no negative freedom. On the other hand, consider a benevolent dictatorship run in accordance with one simple principle - you may live your life in whatever way you see fit as long as you: 1) do not attempt to overthrow the government, and 2) do not harm other citizens. An individual in this state would have a significant sphere of negative freedom (much larger than in any modern democratic state), but would not be free in the positive sense of the term.

Most of us will probably agree that a combination of both kinds of freedom is important for a fulfilling life. But the kind of freedom I am concerned with in this discussion is negative freedom alone. That is, when I mention liberty, I mean freedom from constraint, the freedom to choose the path of one's own life for oneself. Why

(Continued on page 11)



John Stuart Mill:

'When society requires to be rebuilt, there is no use in attempting to rebuild it on the old plan'

'The most glorious cause in history'

Portlaoise Gaol Easter Oration

On Easter Monday, the 24th April 1916, Padraic Pearse proclaimed the Irish Republic to the world from the steps of the General Post Office. For the first time in 700 years the flag of a free Ireland floated triumphantly over Dublin city. Various outposts had been captured and were being held. The British army had been unnerved by the amount of casualties they had suffered and had burnt down whole blocks of houses in an attempt to get a clear field of fire for their artillery and field guns. Although out-gunned and fighting numerically superior forces, the soldiers of the Irish Republic defended their positions throughout the city for most of the week. In a manifesto issued from the GPO on the 28th April, Pearse said:

'I desire now, lest I may not have an opportunity later, to pay homage to the gallantry of the soldiers of Irish Freedom who have during the past four days, been writing with fire and steel the most glorious chapter in the later history of Ireland. Justice can never be done to their heroism, to their discipline and unconquerable spirit, in the midst of peril and death. Let me, who have led them into this, speak, in my own and in my fellow commanders' names and in the name of Ireland present and to come, their praise, and ask those who come after them to remember them'.

Keeping faith with Pearse, we the Republican prisoners of war here in Portlaoise Prison, on this Easter Sunday, do indeed remember those gallant men and women who marched out to face an Empire that had held their country in bondage. Those men and women who occupied their positions did so knowing full well that it would more than likely cost them their lives, yet despite all the dangers they stood firm, believing their cause was the most glorious cause in history. In the words of James Connolly, *'Never had man or woman a grander cause, never was a cause more grandly served.'*

As we here today reflect on the events of Easter 1916, it is only natural that we compare the spirit of self-sacrifice that motivated Pearse and his comrades with that of the so-called political leaders of today. It is only natural for us to compare also the country we live in now, with the Irish Republic that was envisaged in the minds of Connolly and Clarke, McDonagh and Mac Diarmada, a glimpse of which we get in reading the Proclamation.

We, as Republican prisoners, know that

the Rising did not achieve freedom for our country. The men and women of 1916 knew only too well that their actions were merely a first step on the road to freedom. They died believing that those who would follow in their footsteps would build on their actions and complete the task they had begun. We who stand here today do so because we have travelled the road that Pearse and Connolly and those other gallant souls marked out for us.

**'We who stand here today
do so because we have
travelled the road that
Pearse and Connolly and
those other gallant souls
marked out for us'**

never lifted a finger in the struggle for Ireland's freedom. Today we are criticised by those whose only motivation is greed and self-interest. Political principles are thrown away for political power at any cost. This Easter, we will witness these same people paying lip service at the graves of those who gave their lives in the freedom struggle and we will see them calling themselves Republicans. We here today say to them that you are not Republicans. A true Republican does not jail other Republicans to help the British remain in Ireland. A true Republican does not murder other Republicans in an effort to end opposition to the British presence in the north. A true Republican does not become a British minister and help run a British colony for a British government, under the British flag. True Republicans do not establish a Free State on the blood of executed defenceless prisoners. A true Republican does not do everything in his power to maintain partition and does not allow British agents to wander through the country in their efforts to persecute genuine Republicans. We know only too well what is required of any man who would say that he is a Republican and hiding behind the tricolour will not blind us to the fact, be it done by a Free Stater in Fine Gael, Fianna Fail or Sinn Féin.

As Republicans we struggle for the total freedom of all Ireland and the establishment of a genuine Irish Republic, representative of all her people, irrespective of class or creed. We again declare today our wish, like

that of the men of 1916, to see our country ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality and Justice for all. We demand respect for the human rights of our people, rights that are trampled on at present and sneered at in their Special Political Court. We demand a Republic, whose first duty would be to provide for the welfare of its entire people, especially our children who would be provided with the means and facilities for their proper education and training as citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland. We demand a Republic where the aspirations of those who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom, would come to fruition, a Republic we can be proud of and where greed and self-interest are things of the past.

Comrades, freedom does not belong to the faint hearted. It is dearly bought, as we who stand here reflecting on the sacrifices of others, know only too well. But our cause is a noble one, as noble today as it was 88 years ago. Like those who took part in the 1916 Rising, we too have made sacrifices. Those sacrifices will have all been in vain if we become demoralised and despondent about our struggle and the part we can play in it. Our enemies hoped that by jailing us that they could destroy our cause and our belief in it. Like the murder of Pearse and Connolly and the other men executed down the years since, they think that we can be intimidated into accepting Britain's presence in our country. They are wrong. And we can prove them wrong by playing our part in the struggle, no matter how small that part is. By doing so, we not alone keep faith with the spirit of 1916 but with those who will come after us, and who will judge each us for the part we played in the struggle for freedom.

The above oration was delivered in Portlaoise Gaol on Sunday 11th April 2004 as the republican POWs paraded to commemorate the 88th anniversary of the Easter Rising

Disagree with something
you've read?

Open Forum welcomes
articles on issues of
national or international
interest.

Palestinians betrayed... again

The recent US backing for Ariel Sharon's plan to keep the illegal settlements in the West Bank, together with the rejection of the right of return to Israel of Palestinian families exiled in 1948, not only ends President George W. Bush's own much vaunted 'Road Map', it has also destroyed whatever hope there was for peace in the short to medium term.

That the plan is in violation of international law and UN resolutions matters not a jot to either the US President or the Israeli Prime Minister. Given the histories of these two men, this is perhaps not too surprising.

By any reasonable measurement, Ariel Sharon is a war criminal. Attempts were made to indict him on war crimes charges over his role in the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut in 1982 when 2,000 Palestinian refugees were killed. The action only failed because the Belgian government, under pressure from the US and Israel, changed the law which had allowed the charges to be brought. And it was Sharon's 'visit' to the al-Aqsa mosque in October 2000 that sparked the second Intifada.

President Bush's backing of the Israeli Prime Minister should come as no surprise either. It is election year in the US and with increasing US disasters in Iraq, Bush desperately needs a foreign policy success. Also, Bush is desperately trying to court the Jewish vote - traditionally pro-Israel. In some key swing states, such as Florida, the Jewish vote could make or break Bush's hopes for re-election. Being seen to be pro-Israel should play very well with the Jewish-American population who in the past usually voted Democrat. Realising this, the Democratic candidate for President, John Kerry, quickly and cynically backed the Bush-Sharon plan.

All this despite the fact that for decades, it has been the accepted international position that Israel should withdraw to the pre-1967 borders. Up until very recently, even the US State department described the settlements as 'obstacles to peace'.

The international community, including the United Nations and the European Union, has once more shown itself to be completely ineffective when faced with the imperial power of the United States: international opposition to the war in Iraq meant little, opposition to Israeli aggression, likewise. Only last month, the European heads of government agreed that, 'The European Union will not recognise any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties'. This declaration is now worthless.

As for Britain: Tony Blair, ever the lackey, quickly backed Bush and Sharon's plan. Yet again Blair ditched official Labour Party and official UK government policy on the orders of his boss in

Washington. Will Blair never tire of humiliating himself and his country?

Practically, what exactly does the Sharon-Bush plan involve? It calls for the closure of all 21 settlements in Gaza, but only four of the 140 settlements in the West Bank. Israel will still control Gaza's borders, ports, and airspace. Effectively, one of the world's most densely populated areas will become the world's largest prison,

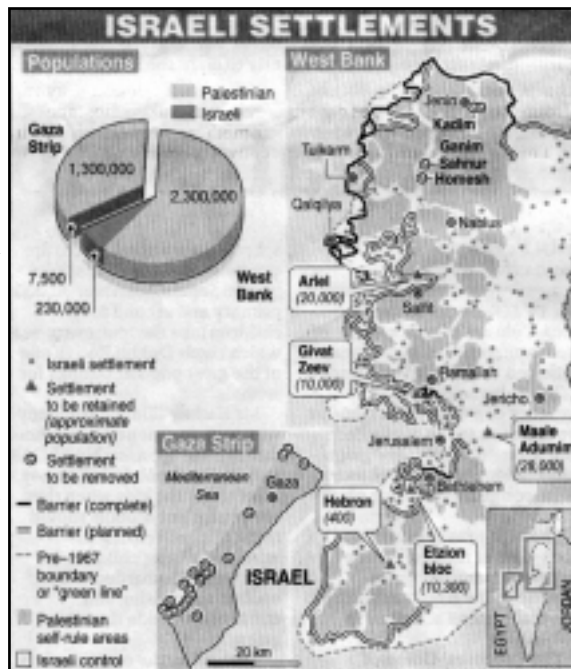
home to over one million inmates. The plan also means that, in order to accommodate the estimated 230,000 Israeli settlers, half of Palestinian territory in the West Bank will remain in Israeli hands. Over 2 million Palestinians will be squeezed into the remaining, divided and economically unviable part. A plan designed to infuriate Palestinians would be harder to conceive.

Unfortunately, the reality is that there seems to be little the Palestinians can do. Like Irish republicans, the Palestinian people are not served well by their leadership. Yasser Arafat has become a marginal figure, holed-up in his Ramallah compound. What remains of his Palestinian Authority is widely seen as being corrupt and ineffective. The alternative leadership provided by the likes of Hamas and Islamic Jihad may be more honest but their military tactics are counter-productive. The

deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians must be condemned, no matter the provocation. Besides, it only serves to harm the Palestinian cause in the eyes of the wider world.

The sad truth is that most Western media tend to become interested only when a suicide bomber kills Israelis or when the Israelis assassinate prominent Palestinians, such as the Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin. This gives the misleading impression that the conflict primarily consists of Palestinians killing Israeli civilians, and Israelis killing Palestinian militants in retaliation. Even a cursory glance at the casualty figures tells a very different story. While around 900 Israelis have died and several thousand injured, almost 3,000 Palestinians have been killed and 38,500 injured. 550 of the Palestinian dead have been under the age of 18, 360 of these aged 15 or under.

As *Forum* has stated before, the biggest threat to international peace and prosperity does not come from the likes of al-Qaeda (dangerous though they are), it comes from countries such as the US and Israel who feel that they are above international law. If a state, any state, can arbitrarily extend its borders then what is to stop others from doing the same? If Israel can, without international sanction, occupy the West Bank, then why shouldn't Iraq occupy Kuwait, or Germany occupy Poland?



Letters and articles can be sent to Forum Magazine at:

The New Republican Forum, PO Box 10, Dundalk Sorting Office, Dundalk, Co. Louth, Ireland.

Chechnya - the forgotten war

By James Burke

The fight of the Chechens to achieve independence from Russia has, of late, gone virtually unnoticed and unreported. President Vladimir Putin, during his recent election campaign, described the current Russian policy in Chechnya as 'gradual normalisation'; a process which his government hopes will be helped by the recent Russian-sponsored elections. Putin's handpicked puppet for the job of president was Akhmad Kadyrov, head of the Moscow-appointed administration in Chechnya. Kadyrov is a former anti-Russian guerrilla fighter who rallied to the Russian cause back in 1999 because he disapproved of the growing influence of radical Islamists among the rebel fighters. The few voters who turned out found that they had little option but vote for Kadyrov, as any serious rivals had been disqualified on technicalities, awarded plum jobs in Moscow, or had dropped out of the race for 'personal reasons'. Kadyrov, who has survived numerous attempts on his life, could only win a rigged election. Back in August of last year, Bislav Gantemirov, his Press Minister, was fired after he admitted that his boss would only 'get 3-5% in a fair election'. His replacement suddenly estimated that Kadyrov 'commanded 50-60% support among the people'.

The conflict in Chechnya, which has fluctuated over the years from all-out war to guerrilla insurgency, has left the country in ruins and its population traumatised. An estimated population of 921,000 in 1996 has fallen to 624,000, with many Chechens fleeing the fighting. Since 1999 it is believed that up to 12,000 Russians have been killed, along with 15,000 Chechen fighters and some 10,000 civilians. Putin, who came to power in 1999 vowing to quell the Chechen insurgency, has claimed that the battle Russia is fighting in Chechnya is part of the 'global war against terrorism'. Many, however, including members of the Russian forces stationed in Chechnya, believe otherwise. One commander of Russian Special Operations was recently quoted as saying that 'the Chechen war was really being fought for oil, arms and money'. Alexei Mitrophanov, a deputy in the Lower House of the Russian parliament, was quoted as saying, 'we're talking big money, money that's shared all the way down to mere troopers'. General Victor Kazantsev, Putin's envoy to the Southern Federal District, highlighted one example of the corruption endemic in the region

when he revealed that \$6 million had been siphoned off by officials in Moscow. It is estimated that of the \$148 million earmarked for reconstruction in Chechnya last year, only 20% actually made it into the republic.

This corruption, along with the millions made from oil and from arms, adds to the complicated nature of the conflict. Chechnya was first conquered by Russia in 1859 after decades of resistance, and became the Autonomous Republic of Checheno-Ingush in the USSR, when it was



joined with Ingushetia. In November 1991 the region declared its independence and, after it failed to quell the rebellion, Moscow entered into negotiations over the republic's future. In 1992 Chechnya became an autonomous republic in its own right, but later that year fighting broke out between those wishing independence and those who wanted to remain loyal to Moscow. Civil war ensued, with Moscow backing the anti-separatists, and the conflict reached its peak when Russian forces entered Chechnya in December of 1994. By March of 1995 an estimated 40,000 civilians had been killed and 250,000 were refugees. The capital Grozny was reduced to rubble by the Russians, and by June 1995 Russian forces had overrun most of the urban centres, forcing the Chechen fighters, led by Shamil Basayev, to resort to guerrilla warfare tactics. Russian forces suffered badly in the street fighting in Grozny and in the continuing use of suicide bombers, both within Chechnya and in Russia itself. The use of these tactics and the fact that 90% of the population is Muslim has enabled President Putin to label the conflict as part of the 'war on terrorism'. The Russian media is afraid to give any critical coverage of the conflict and the foreign media are only allowed there on closely controlled government trips, thus preventing proper reporting of

the war. Despite the Kremlin's attempts to crush the revolt by air raids and house-to-house sweeps, it has failed to defeat the Chechens. Critics of the war tell of suspected separatists being abducted from their homes in the night by armed gangs, only to be found murdered along the side of the road. A typical example is Aslan Davletukayev, a 31-year-old welder who had helped human rights groups gather evidence of Russian war crimes. His home was raided in the middle of the night and soldiers in camouflage and black masks led him away at gunpoint. His body was found in a roadside ditch 10 days later. He had been mutilated so badly that relatives barely recognised him. The men who had tortured him had broken his leg and his arm, as well as cutting half his nose off, and his body was covered in bruises and puncture wounds believed to have been made with a screwdriver. His family fled to the neighbouring republic of Ingushetia and have been living there in appalling conditions in one of the refugee camps. Now the Russians are forcing the refugees to return to Chechnya and are saying that the conflict is over, despite the fact that people are being killed on a daily

basis.

The fact that Chechnya has one of the largest oil fields in the region has added to Moscow's unwillingness to part with this part of its former empire. Given the fact that the Russian military are involved in both oil smuggling and arms deals, aided and abetted by various officials both in Moscow and Grozny, only makes settlement of the conflict more complicated. While this corruption goes on, the people of Chechnya suffer both the terrors of abductions and torture, as well as having to live in a devastated country, with little or no hope of any improvement. It is little wonder that the fighters of Chechnya will use all and any methods to end this nightmare. The similarities between this forgotten war and the war in Iraq are plain to be seen. Both are motivated by oil and the wealth obtained from it. Both are labelled as being fought against 'terrorism'. Both have left their respective peoples and country in a devastated state, with no regard for the number of people killed or injured. Human and national rights are trampled on by large and powerful states that have a total disregard for international law. Putin has been re-elected and Bush hopes for the same. If this is indeed the case, then the endless nightmares of Chechnya and Iraq are likely to haunt both of them in the years to come.

(Continued from page 7)

this 'lifestyle freedom' is so important is a matter we will come to shortly; the question of positive freedom, in contrast, we will leave for another day entirely. Let us simply assume for now that any viable solution to the problem of how society should be organised will be fundamentally democratic in nature. Few of us, after all, would be prepared to accept anything less.

Why liberty?

*'He who desires in liberty anything other than itself
is born to be a servant.'*

Alexis de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien regime*

So why is negative liberty so important? Three reasons spring immediately to mind, although there are undoubtedly others.

Firstly, most of us consider liberty as an ultimate end in itself, as something that is good *in and of itself*. No further argument need be made here to justify its value, as this is simply what it means to be an 'ultimate end', something that is not justified in terms of any other good.

But you may disagree with me - liberty, you may say, is not an ultimate end; I am simply mistaken on the matter. What reply can I offer? Unfortunately for me, my options are limited - the problem with talking in terms of ultimate ends is that they really cannot be justified on any independent basis. If you disagree, you disagree, and neither of us can prove the other wrong. As it happens, however, liberty *can* also be justified in terms of other ultimate ends - such happiness and fulfilment - with which you may in fact agree.

Let us begin by acknowledging that it is no more possible to construct a single ideal lifestyle than it is to construct a single ideal state. There are a multitude of possible lifestyles, and a multitude of differing tastes to be accommodated. And this creates a problem for any society that attempts to impose a 'one-size-fits-all' lifestyle on its citizens. '*Such are the differences among human beings in their sources of pleasure, their susceptibilities of pain, and the operation on them of different physical and moral agencies,*' noted the liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill, '*that, unless there is a corresponding diversity in their modes of life, they neither obtain their fair share of happiness, nor grow up to the mental, moral, and aesthetic stature of which their nature is capable.*'

But even if we agree with Mill that different lifestyles are suitable for different people, who should decide which lifestyle is appropriate to each? Many, both on the left and the right, have argued that people are incapable of choosing wisely for themselves (on matters of drug consumption, for example) and should be restrained from choosing 'for their own good'; the state, or the church, such people say, should choose on the citizen's behalf, and the result will be more happiness for all. But this seems, to me at least, a wildly implausible outcome. I certainly spend more time thinking about what will make me happy than anybody else, and I suspect the same is true of you. Unless we are to discount the ordinary citizen's intelligence entirely, then, we must accept that if we wish people to be happy, we must provide them with as much freedom as possible to choose their own lifestyle for themselves.

Furthermore, in addition to maximising happiness, it seems plausible to argue that a substantial sphere of negative liberty is an essential component of a *fulfilling* human life. Even bad choices are choices, and most of us would agree that there is something deeply unfulfilling about the idea of even a superficially happy life lived entirely at the behest of others.

Liberty and socialism

So let us agree that liberty is important. How much of it then should we have? The simple answer here is as much as possible: that is, we should arrange our society in such a way as to provide each indi-

vidual citizen with the maximum amount of liberty that is consistent with other people's safety and well-being. This was John Stuart Mill's recipe for an ideal liberal society, and he has left us with 'one simple principle' outlining how such a society should be regulated. This is Mill's famous Harm Principle: *The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.* That is, according to Mill, the only justifiable condition under which the state can legitimately intervene to restrict a citizen's liberty is when his actions threaten the safety of others. If you are a rational adult, then the fact that I disagree with your opinions, or am offended by your lifestyle, or even believe you to be harming yourself, is not a sufficient reason for the state intervening to silence or restrict you.

Mill's solution appears simple and attractive, at least in theory. But there is one major flaw in his theory, at least if we are concerned with maximising liberty. Consider that negative liberty is not simply a matter of how many choices are available to you, but of how *meaningful* those choices are. Some choices in life are trivial, like the choice between strawberry and vanilla ice cream. Others, like the choice between going to work at sixteen or staying on at school and pursuing a degree, are life-altering. But it seems obvious that a stable economic base is a prerequisite for making any meaningful choices at all. An individual has no meaningful choices in life if he does not know where his next meal is coming from, or how he is going to pay next week's rent. We only have to look to the ostensibly 'liberal' societies we have now to see that a liberal society without some level of economic equality is a liberal society for the wealthy alone. So if we are to maximise liberty, it seems that we must provide every citizen with a basic standard of living sufficient to make meaningful choices possible. But this will involve socialist-style intervention in the economy - intervention that cannot be justified on the basis of the harm principle.

Mill's harm principle, it is clear, is not enough. We also need an equality principle: *State interference in the economy is justified to the extent that it maximises aggregate liberty by maximising meaningful choices for all.* By the law of diminishing returns, such intervention will in practice be intervention on behalf of the poorest. If I already have €100 million in the bank, then an extra million will not increase my liberty in any significant way. If I have nothing at all, then €100 in my hand will increase my choices dramatically.

How the state should go about providing every citizen with a sufficient economic base, and what exactly that base should be, are detailed questions in their own right, and cannot be tackled here. Let us simply accept for now the principle that some level of socialist-style intervention in the economy is necessary if our society is to be deserving of the name liberal. But let us not deny here that what we are doing is restricting liberty. My liberty to offer my workers a pittance for their labour is as much a liberty as any other. But we are restricting liberty in one area, the economic sphere, to maximise it in another, the social sphere.

The result is what we can call a socially liberal, economically socialist republic. Economically socialist, because the state acts in a socialist manner to provide all citizens with the means of making meaningful choices. Socially liberal, because beyond the restrictions necessary to achieve this goal, individuals are free to live their lives in whatever way they themselves choose. How they use the means provided is a matter purely for themselves. The state's only further function (barring external defence) is the policing of the harm principle.

It may perhaps be said that we could agree on these general principles yet spend the rest of our lives arguing over the details. This is certainly true, but if we agree on the bare principles, my task here has been accomplished. My intention in this discussion has been to provide a framework for future debate; if we can agree to proceed on the basis of the principles outlined above, then I for one will regard it as significant progress.

The New Republican Forum

The New Republican Forum is a coalition of political and community activists, founded to challenge the political status quo in Ireland by providing a radical Republican alternative to the mainstream political establishment.

The New Republican Forum:

- Stands for the reunification of Ireland and opposes all aspects of British interference in Irish affairs.
- Opposes the Belfast Agreement, which subverts the Irish people's inalienable right to self-determination.
- Stands for the creation of a just society in Ireland, based on principles of equality, social justice and genuine democracy, underpinned by a comprehensive charter of inalienable human rights.
- Supports the promotion and development of Irish culture.
- Opposes the resurgence of imperialism as a political ideology, led by the United States, its allies and client regimes.
- Supports all oppressed peoples struggling for national liberation.
- Opposes any attempt by the Dublin government to aid or assist any Western military alliance.

Our aims are:

- To establish a credible Republican opposition to British rule in Ireland.
- To critically reassess and analyse the history of the Republican struggle in Ireland, and by so doing, chart a course for the future of the Republican movement.
- To establish, support and coordinate the activities of Republican, community-based and other progressive organisations, forging a basis for a new national movement.
- To liase with other progressive forces, nationally and internationally, including anti-capitalist groups, trade unionists and environmental movements, along with national liberation movements worldwide, to further the cause of anti-imperialism.
- To establish a range of independent media outlets providing Irish people with alternative sources of information on political and social issues.

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