

PROPOSED LITERARY AND ART SECTION

FOREWORD

The fostering and creating of a 'Literary & Art' section of the Republican Movement is now overdue with some time. As this section to be authentic had to be a product of raised, politicised awareness, it could not have been a forced creation. Certain conditions were necessary to allow for its development and now with the emergence of group rather than individual expression in this area, it would seem that we have passed this milestone. This fact and all that it entails should be realised and appreciated.

Through the points raised, one to eleven, in the attached document I have defined why a Revolutionary Movement (and ours in particular) should concern itself in this area. There is nothing new or unusual in what I have raised, progressive writers from Benjamin Franklin to Garcia Lorca have dealt with this area in one form or another and as universal timeless norms are involved, the conclusions of such people are still valid.

Nearer to the present, political movements from the Maoists to the Peronists and Allende's Forces have organised and used this area as another weapon in their struggles. Indeed the recent Nicaraguan 'Musical Troop' visitors to this country were an excellent example of how to openly reach the most disaffected elements and hence potential supporters in society while still presenting an 'acceptable face' to the establishment. This 'Politicised Art' was used very effectively by them also to gain and hold an audience for their message.

This document is not detailed enough to be authoritative or definitive, such was not the intention from the outset but hopefully it will be informative and go some way to providing a basis for discussion and ultimately, action. If it will in any way contribute to so doing, then it will have achieved all that it set out to do.

D.O'S.

- (1) A revolution as is implicit in the name seeks to revolve around or change certain dominant perceptions and by extension their effect and form in the physical world. This process once underway even without central control or direction, will continue under its own internal dynamics until a new 'status Quo' is established.
- (2) As most revolutions are born out of reaction to existing conditions, the established forms that emerge while new in appearance, will very often have the same character and content as what they set out to replace.
- (3) Even where revolution is a deliberate act, motivated and controlled by disciplined forces for the attainment of clearly defined objectives, the inherited post revolutionary situation will often necessitate at best, deferral, or as is more usual, compromise in the 'short term' of the revolutionary ideals that can be implemented.
- (4) Structures, 'power-bases' and special interest groupings, while originally conceived as a temporary expedient, tend to perpetuate their existence long after their 'raison d'etre' has ceased to exist. There are theoretical answers to this problem but the 'Cultural Revolution' experience would seem to suggest that these answers remain in this realm and do not have a practical application. Our own Irish and other people's experience also clearly indicate that a compromised revolution remains that in essence. While elements of the original revolution may continue the struggle for the attainment of its objectives, they now fight an established 'status quo' and what is in fact a new revolution.
- (5) If revolutionary ideals are to exist uncompromised during the struggle for conditions where they can be established and through the stages of their implementation following the effecting of these conditions, then it so follows that they must have expression independent of both the dictates of the struggle and of the 'real politic' situation at any given time.
- (6) It is possible to have this independent expression of the revolutionary ideals and yet full integration with the revolution 'per se' Indeed once a certain level of political awareness and raised informed consciousness is created, then it will have spontaneous expression through the ^{part} of the revolution. Far from in any way impeding the ongoing struggle or coming into conflict with the practical application of this struggle imposed by the reality of existing conditions, it can act as a mirror and beacon, giving expression in a pure form to what otherwise would otherwise remain an abstract nebulous ideal.
- (7) This 'Art Expression' of the revolutionary ideal cannot be ignored or even just tolerated as it is an integral part of the revolution ~~and~~ because of its universal forms, isolated aspects such as poetry or paintings can often be the first point of real contact and as such the initial 'face' of the struggle presented to people in quite distant countries.
- (8) Art forms irrespective of their origin or support base co-exist in a ^{larger} 'Art World' that to a large extent is self-contained.

Just as the political revolution must tolerate, mimic and participate in the world of 'real politic' to further its aims, so too the art of the revolution must parallel this course of action in its own environment if it is to gain toleration and reach outside its own imitative circle to make its statement.

- (9) In the political world revolutionaries participating may only do so uncompromised if they operate from a high level of conviction, political awareness and relative sophistication. The same applies again to the artists in their own sphere of activity. This organisation, education and co-ordination should come in the first instance from the revolutionary movement and get at the very least the same attention to detail and support as would any other facet of the struggle.
- (10) As dealt with in (6) this expression will naturally come into existence and is a normal evolutionary development. If ignored it will not penetrate the 'Art World' as a coherent whole with its own support center but rather as a fringe or appendix to established and often bogus forms. In mimicing these existing forms to gain the inertial platform it will dilute if not lose its inherent authority. At best tensions will be created between itself and aspects of the struggle, while at worst the capacity exists to seduce this art form away from its primary base and even use it against the revolution that created it in the first instance.
- (11) Based on the reasons outlined (1) to (10) I consider that it is now necessary for the Movement to organise this aspect of the struggle. The primary concern and need for action centres on the literature of the revolution, namely poetry, prose and song. The need is immediate and from the above should be self evident.

In appendix 'A' I have given a brief outline of the position of Literature re: the main revolutionary movements in this country starting with the 'Young Irelanders' through the Fenian Movement and on to the 'Nationalist' writers of the 1910-16 period. From there to the present the story is unfortunately too easily told. In 'B' I have outlined my ideas based through experience with Listowel Writers Week etc. on the likely form that would get what is proposed quickly organised and operational. In 'C' I have dealt with the potential use and interaction of this at home and abroad. Also in this area are some suggestions for funding etc.

The ideas outlined are based on what I know of the Movement and the Writer's Workshops etc. that I have been involved in but they remain ideas only, the final form, structure and content should come by in large from the North to maintain the proper orientation and politicise the 'Slumbering South'. To do otherwise would be to 'Cut the feet to fit the shoes'.

I am particularly interested in the Munster input for we have the hidden legacy of the Bardic tradition and from this should come the 'Centering' for emerging forms of Poetry in particular to give a strong, unique and identifiable Irish Character. From this base of all that is best and indeed relevant in blended Tradition of past and present, we can participate with confidence and authority in world experience.

APPENDIX 'A'

The lack of literature from the struggle has its roots in a number of areas, and while it can be maintained that this product can only come about at a certain stage of group development, it is also equally valid to maintain that it is a result of the general neglect and lack of appreciation of this area. As a '69 man I am well aware of how things were within the movement and what the priorities of its re-organisation were but there were several occasions in the mid to late seventies when action could have been taken by the then leadership and this was not in fact done.

The roots of the present problem go back to 1916 and indeed to the base of that literary movement in the 'Young Irlander's'. Here there was the presence of a young educated elite that were of the same level as their English or European counterparts. They looked to the Continent for models and were influenced by the radical writings in the decades following the French Revolution and sought to invoke a similar ethos at home. This movement rather than be an appendix to the English school cast around for a vehicle that would give them a distinctive voice and they found this in the remains of the Bardic tradition. Through the poetry forms in particular that they adopted they found an authoritative, authentic voice that served as the model down to the '22 period.

When the political movement was broken and lost its central figures this was reflected in the literary output but this continued until again organised and fostered by the I.R.B. to build emotional support for Irish Nationalism. This emotional expression came to a peak in the 'abbey years' with the input of people like Lady Gregory, Yeats. Synge, Plunkett, McDonnagh etc. On the fringes of this but fully participating people like Pearse, Griffin, Connolly etc. were attempting through politicised literature to change the emotional support to reasoned intellectual commitment.

After 1916 the latter group lost their core and the former faced with what the reality of a war to implement Irishness meant, held aloof from the struggle. This group too, quickly came down off the fence to give their support to the Free State, drawn as they were from establishment backgrounds. Since then only a handful like McBride, Mary Mc Sweeney, Padar O'Donnell etc appreciated what was happening and attempted in their own way through the thirties to redress the balance from then on.

Since then the primary articulation of the republican ideal in literature has come from writers with republican connections rather than republicans 'per se' and this is the situation to date. Indeed the Movement's own attitude to writers of 'handy but not needed and of toleration rather than acceptance' discouraged to say the least, the development of a school of Republican writing. A new approach and policy is long overdue.

APPENDIX 'B'

- (1) The immediate appointment of a small 'ad hoc' committee with expertise in this area to supervise the establishing of this section of the organisation.
- (2) a closed meeting to be arranged with certain poets writers etc. sympathetic to the Movement such as Dathi O'Hogain, Nollag O'Giara etc. to be held and the proposed project discussed so that their expertise and advice can be tapped.
- (3) Arising from this meeting a weekend workshop be organised for Republican writers, poets etc to discuss needs, potentials and suitable organisation.
- (4) Based on this a the new section as proposed could then be established and a proper organisation constituted. This could then set about broadning the base through workshops, seminars etc.
- (5) The founding of a regular separate publication to act as a vehicle for this organisation and give public expression to the literature of the struggle.

FOOTNOTE.

As we will get one 'crack' and one crack only at this it will have to be done right. If we are not aware of the potential in this area the establishment certainly are and through a series of special prizes like the 'Briggs Memorial Prize' etc. they have effectively set the ethos and so orientated the 'acceptable' expression of 'official' literature of the struggle. The organising of the largely Southern artistic establishment into a closed shop 'couple of thousand pounds a head gravy train' by Haughey some years back was for the same reason, namely the emasculation of non establishment 'Republican' voice.

Because it is will be a battle for 'hearts and minds' carried into the establishment area and the authentic voice of the struggle abroad in areas where countering it would be extremely difficult and costly, strong opposition can be expected.

APPENDIX 'C'

Following the successful launch of the proposed section steps should be taken to make it self financing. This could take the form of groups going to the States to promote a specific arts fund in addition to the normal exchange. Irish American groups in particular, even pro-establishment groups could be approached for their support as the subject is innocuous enough to defy any curtailment effort. If opposition is mounted this too could catch the powers that be 'wrongfooted'.

There must be a decent financial incentive offered in prize funds offered if there is to be real penetration of establishment control. Experience in Writers Week has shown that the first prize, to attract worthwhile response, must be in excess of £500.00. We must appeal to as wide a section of the general art base as possible to get their involvement, they are then through association liable to become politicised or at the very least to have their perceptions altered.

The rest will more or less take care of itself. There are Festivals and workshops in most major English and European centers on a regular basis. After attending the first couple there will be plenty of paid invitations to a such a group as is proposed. The potential is limitless and should be exploited.