

**seamus costello**



**1939~1977**

**irish republican socialist**

# seamus costello



1939~  
1977

POLITICAL  
BIOGRAPHY

And Tributes  
from his friends  
and comrades

Published by:

**The Seamus Costello Memorial Committee**

*‘He saw clear and far, and dared greatly. He dared to take up the unfinished task of James Connolly. Singlehandedly, as republicans and socialists all around him deviated into reformism and one-sided concentration on the class or the national struggle, Seamus Costello gave clear leadership on the unity of the anti-imperialist and socialist struggle and on the need for a revolutionary approach. He had the socialist vision — ‘WE ARE NOTHING AND WE SHALL BE EVERYTHING’ — which the establishment recognises and fears.’*

*James Daly,  
Oration at the funeral of Seamus Costello, October 8, 1977*

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## Introduction

**By Nora Connolly O'Brien**

I REGRET THAT I never had the honour of meeting Seamus Costello in person. But I have heard a lot of his speeches, and I admired so much all that I had heard about him. So it was a great horror to hear that he had been shot.

I had so much hope in him. To me, he expressed himself so much on my father's line of thought that it was evident that he had been a thorough reader of all James Connolly's writings.

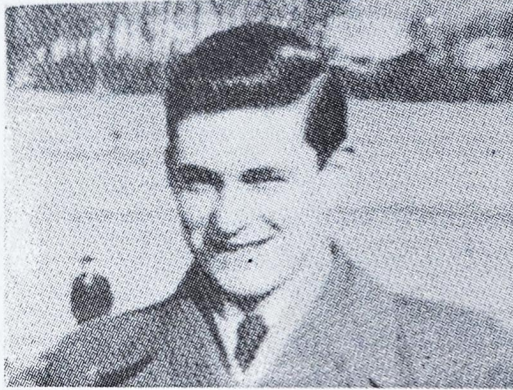
He seemed to be the leader who would bring about an organisation such as my father wished to bring about. Of all the politicians and political people with whom I have had conversations, and who called themselves followers of Connolly, he was the only one who truly understood what James Connolly meant when he spoke of his vision of the freedom of the Irish people. In him, I had hoped at last after all these years, a true leader had come, who could and would build an organisation such as James Connolly tried to do.

I dislike very much to have to use a phrase that is a cliché — to say that he is "a great loss". But there has been no greater loss to those fighting the same fight. Seamus Costello's death was a loss to the cause of Irish freedom.

As Seamus Costello was a true disciple of James Connolly and his teachings, I can only hope that among those who were associated with him and who learned from him, there will be another disciple to take his place and build an organisation among the workers and people of Ireland that will be bound to bring Ireland James Connolly's and Seamus Costello's vision of freedom.

## The Boy General

By a former comrade in the Curragh



**While interned in the Curragh with other Republican activists, Seamus Costello, because of his youth and obvious leadership talents, was given the name of "The Boy General".**

One of the few in '56  
 A youth only, you struck  
 Defying the hated enemy.  
 You passed for the last time  
 Through prisons and prison-camps  
 Perfecting your education and your trade  
 By experience, ever to be repeated.

In the hard, quiet years, you slowly unfurled the Starry Plough  
 And finally nailed it to the masthead  
 Fighting in the streets and Council Chambers for the workers.

And when the guns spoke anew  
 You were again, as always, in danger's gap  
 Surviving the hate of capitalist and imperialist  
 The parting of brothers and ex-comrades' murderous bullets,  
 To die in a quiet street, cut down by an unknown hand.

'Boy General' you will always remain now,  
 No age, no passing season will ever touch you.  
 The cold and silent grave and our memories  
 Will guard you forever in your strength and prime.

‘We would regard ourselves as being in the same tradition as James Connolly. Connolly’s identification with the 1916 Rising was a clear cut recognition of the connection and the links between the national struggle and the class struggle. Connolly identified himself completely with the rising. He led the rising in Dublin city, and he had as allies the Irish Volunteers, led by Eoin Mac Neil who was a very reactionary nationalist. Connolly didn’t see any contradiction as a socialist or as a Marxist in that, because he recognised that the struggle against imperialism in Ireland had to be won before we could have any kind of socialist republic, or any other kind.’

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## Costello

### A biographical and political analysis of his life and achievements

SEAMUS COSTELLO was born in Old Connaught Avenue, Bray, County Wicklow in 1939. He attended Ravenswell National School in Bray. In 1950, at the age of eleven, he moved with his family to Roseville on the Dublin Road in Bray. There were nine in his family, Seamus being the eldest.

His first interest in politics came when he read of the arrest of Cathal Goulding in Britain in 1953 following an arms raid on the Officers Training Corps school at Felstead in Essex. Costello subsequently “devoured” newspapers, according to his family, and at the age of 15, on one of his many visits to Croke Park, he bought a copy of the *United Irishman* and immediately applied to join the republican movement. However, he was told to “come back next year”. Costello did and was accepted into the ranks of the IRA and Sinn Féin.

The first Sinn Féin cumann was started in Bray in the same year, comprised mostly of members of the Dun Laoghaire cumann, their activity confined to *United Irishman* sales. However, it wasn’t long before it was being sold in every area in Co. Wicklow.

During the campaign of 1956-62 Seamus, at the age of 17, commanded an active service unit in South Derry, their most publicised actions being the destruction of bridges and the burning of Magherafelt courthouse. Those under his command described him as strict but radiating confidence. Once while resting in a safe house a grenade exploded and set off the full magazine of a Thompson machine gun. Miraculously no one was killed. Seamus took the brunt

of the explosion and was knocked unconscious. He received back injuries, lost half a finger and was moved back to Dublin for treatment.

He was arrested in Glencree Co. Wicklow, in 1957 and sentenced to six months in Mountjoy. On his release he was immediately interned in the Curragh for two years. Seamus, as a prisoner was described by fellow internees as quiet, rarely joining others in playacting, preferring deep discussion and reading. He was a member of the escape committee which engineered the successful escape of Ruairi Ó Bradaigh and Daithi Ó Connell amongst others. He is remembered by one internee reading Vietnamese magazines and it impressed Seamus that peasants badly armed but with a deep political ideology could defeat their enemies. In later years he always referred to his days in the Curragh as "*my university days.*" He took part in the critical analysis of the 50's campaign, agreeing that it had failed due to lack of popular involvement as distinct from popular support.

On the ending of internment in 1959 Seamus assisted in the re-organising of the Republican Movement or as he put it "*the cars started flying around again.*"

In 1962 he took up a job as a car salesman and, indicative of his drive and strong personality had little trouble in becoming salesman of the year of his firm. He successfully fought an attempt to sack him because of his political affiliations by threatening to stay outside his firm's offices every day until he was reinstated.

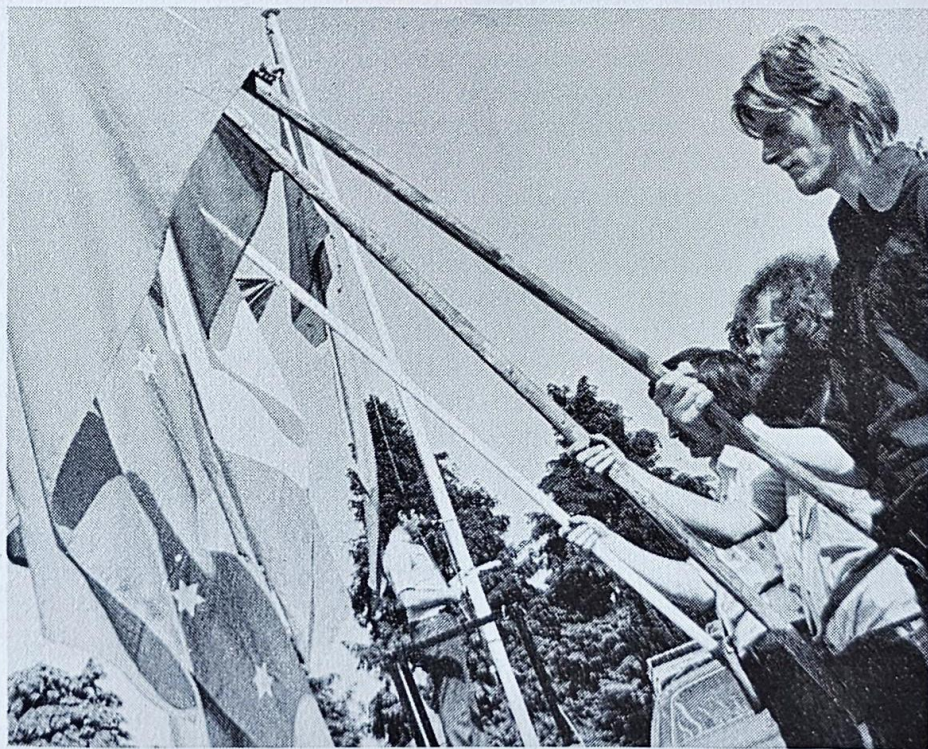
Meanwhile he began to build a strong local base in Co. Wicklow. He maintained that republicans should build a strong home base and that these could then be linked up together at a future date. He also became full time political organiser for Wicklow at this period and developed a strong link with every conceivable organisation in Wicklow that dealt with the interests of the working class. He managed to involve the Bray Trades Council in the 1966 Easter commemoration and helped found a strong Tenants Association in Bray. He also became involved with the Credit Union movement and farmers' organisations. During this period (1964) he married a Tipperary woman Maoilíosa who became active in the republican movement.

In 1966 he gave the historic oration at the Wolfe Tone commemoration in Bodenstown which marked the departure to the left of the republican movement, the result of years of discussions within the movement ably assisted by Seamus. "*We believe that the large estates of absentee landlords should be acquired by compulsory acquisition and worked on a co-operative basis with the financial and technical assistance of the State . . . our policy is to nationalise the key industries with the eventual aim of co-operative ownership by the workers . . . nationalisation of all banks, insurance companies, loan and investment companies . . .*"

But Seamus always maintained not only the right to use armed force but the necessity for workers to be armed and this remained his position up to his assassination. *“The lesson of history shows that in the final analysis the Robber Baron must be disestablished by the same methods that he used to enrich himself and retain his ill-gotten gains, namely force of arms. To this end we must organise, train and maintain a disciplined armed force which will always be available to strike at the opportune moment”*. (Bodenstown 1966).

He pushed for Sinn Féin to contest the local election of 1967 in selected areas and he stood with Joe Doyle in Bray. Indicative of his organisational abilities is the fact that not only were Sinn Féin the only political party to canvass every house in Bray but they won two seats on Bray Urban Council, one on Wicklow Co. Council and collected more money during the election than they had actually spent during the campaign.

At council meetings Costello and Doyle always put their cumann's views in accordance with what had been decided at their meetings. A strong attempt was always made to involve the people's organisations in any controversy or local issue. Seamus headed huge deputations of local organisations to council meetings and demanded they be heard.



*Seamus Costello speaking at Bodenstown*

He demanded the public not be barred from council meetings. So insistent was he that unsuccessful moves were made to have him removed from the council. He became involved in all local problems; housing, road repairs, water and sewerage, access to local beaches, land speculation, etc. and such national issues as ground rents, the anti-EEC campaign, anti-repression campaigns, natural resources, the national question, etc.

Meanwhile Seamus and Sinn Féin continued to build their strong links with local bodies always striving to show them their own strength while getting overall republican socialist policies across.

In 1968 he stood in a by-election in Co. Wicklow, polling an impressive 2,000 plus. He was instrumental in getting Sinn Féin to subsequently drop its abstentionist policy. Seamus remained a revolutionary, maintaining that parliament should be used, but totally rejecting that there was such a thing as a parliamentary road to socialism. He was cool-headed enough to realise this while others claimed it was sacrilegious abandonment of a republican principle. He was not an opportunist as he undoubtedly could have had a ministerial position in any government had he been willing to abandon his revolutionary politics. He stood again unsuccessfully in the general elections of 1973 and 1977.

County Wicklow he felt was Ireland in miniature. *"It has within its borders all the problems common to a nation — small farmers trying to eke out a living on poor mountain farms; inadequate housing, and industrial workers with a depressed standard of living"*. (RTE election broadcast March 1968).

Seamus was one of the original promoters of the civil rights strategy on the national question. He pushed hard for the establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association to involve the mass of the northern workers in the struggle. But he was a genuine republican who rejected the Anglo-Irish treaty and partition, and so did not hold the treatyite position held by many civil rights leaders that the South of Ireland was a democracy and that, on the national question, what was needed was a "democratisation of the North", a Bill of Rights and other liberal reforms in the six-county area, within the framework of a stable United Kingdom.

Those who held this position logically accepted the right of the British government to put down subversion within its borders. The only qualification was as long as this did not involve such denials of civil rights as internment without trial. But since they held that a campaign to end British rule in the six counties would alienate Protestant workers, they regarded the national liberation struggle as divisive of the six-county workers, and so, in effect, as a greater enemy than British rule, and indeed responsible for the repression. They have

therefore not campaigned against the present British repression in the six counties or in Britain.

Seamus's response to the argument about the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle alienating Protestant workers was trenchant: "*The British presence in Ireland is the basic cause of the divisions between the Protestant and Catholic working class in the North . . . It is the principal obstacle preventing the emergence of class politics in Ireland.*" Referring to Connolly's controversy with the pro-imperialist William Walker of the ILP in 1912, whom Connolly described as a "*gas and water socialist,*" Seamus described those who abandoned the national struggle in favour of a joint campaign with loyalists on "community issues" as "*ring-road socialists.*"

In fact while the beginning of the civil rights movement saw some Protestant and liberal involvement, the Orange card was soon played. The civil rights struggle raised the national question because the sectarian Stormont government treated it as a rebellion and responded with the traditional colonial reaction so well described by James Connolly: "*The Carsonites say that their fathers were planted in this country to assist in keeping the natives down in subjection, so that this country might be held for England. That this was God's will because the Catholic Irish were not fit for the exercise of these responsibilities and powers till this day. Therefore, say the Carsonites, we have kept our side of the bargain; we have refused to admit the Catholics to power and responsibility; we have manned the government of this country for England; we propose to continue to do so, and rather than admit that these Catholics — these 'mickies and teagues' — are our equals, we will fight in the hope that our fighting*



*Seamus Costello addresses an International Labour Movement Delegation to Ireland in 1976*

*will cause the English people to revolt against their government and re-establish us in our historic position as an English colony in Ireland, superior to, and unhampered by, the political institutions of the Irish natives."*

When the nationalist population of the six counties defiantly resisted the Stormont repression and fought the local forces of "law and order" to a standstill, the Stormont government had to call in the British government and army to suppress the insurgents. At first, the British government, which for a long time had no direct involvement in six-county rule, attempted a civil rights reform, but with significant concessions to loyalism, such as the replacement of the B Specials by the UDR.

But the imperialists quickly saw that illiberal government and social discrimination were necessary features of six-county government because it was the last corner of colonial rule in Ireland — a colonial rule which had always required coercion Acts. A striking example of this change of heart was the change in attitude of Lord Scarman who, during his tribunal hearings, expressed the liberal's shock at such scandals as the Tynan B Specials' outrages, but whose report, delayed for years for political reasons, finally falsified the August 1969 events, misdescribing them as a reaction to armed subversion.

History repeated itself. The British government showed on Bloody Sunday in Derry its determination to shoot peaceful civil rights demonstrators off the streets, and the peaceful civil rights leaders capitulated. Later the British government unleashed the loyalist terror campaign against random Catholics.

Seamus acknowledged and adapted to the changed situation. He had adopted the legitimate demand for civil rights as a tactic in the struggle for a socialist republic, but as a genuine revolutionary he did not see such a reform as an end in itself, or as a "stage" which must be gone through even at the cost of holding back the struggle for national liberation.

Seamus stayed with what became known as the Officials when the republican movement split in 1969-70. He did not want a split, and did all in his power to prevent it. Even after the split he continued to attempt to heal it, working closely with intermediaries.

One reason for the split was the question of recognition of courts and parliaments. For him, this was a question of tactics, to be judged in the light of circumstances. He did not accept the treaty and partition in principle, but he believed that those who genuinely wanted to overthrow the treaty institutions and achieve the Irish socialist republic could safely and usefully recognise them on a *de facto* basis.

His attitude to the civil rights movement showed how principled he was in going beyond such tactics when the situation changed, and he

*‘Any revolutionary movement that cannot defend its own membership, and cannot demonstrate its capability of defending its own membership, goes out of business anyway. We are in business as a serious revolutionary organisation and we are not going to be put out of business by anybody. The IRSP is organised and it is here to stay.’*

— Seamus Costello, March 1975

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would have adopted the same stand when the situation called for a revised attitude to recognition of courts and parliaments.

The other main reason for the split was the relation of the class and national questions. The change in policy in the republican movement from 1965 had seen the movement’s involvement throughout the 32 counties in popular struggles, such as housing, ground rents, fisheries, industrial disputes etc. Military actions had been taken in some cases: against foreign (mainly German) land owners in the midlands, against a lobster boat, the *Mary Catherine* (“*to protect the Irish shellfishing industry*”), against buses carrying scab workers in Shannon, against a mine in support of strikers, against land speculators, Rachman landlords, etc. These actions were not meant to be a substitute for involvement in the national question but part of the same struggle.

Seamus believed at all times in the right to armed struggle for national liberation and a British withdrawal, but he saw it as a struggle that must take place side-by-side with the class struggle in the entire country. He rejected anything which confined the struggle — particularly the political, agitational and propaganda struggle — to the six counties. This included not only the doctrinaire “Bill of Rights” position which ruled out national liberation, but also the federal tendency in the Provisionals which was used by the British and Fianna Fail inspired promoters of the reactionary, pro-loyalist “solution” of an independent Ulster. He was the only leader of national importance who totally opposed unprincipled talks with loyalists on any agenda other than a 32-county socialist republic, and he totally rejected six-county “independence” as contrary to republican socialism.

His concern for anti-imperialist unity, the linking of the class and national questions, and the primary importance of Irish national independence, unity and sovereignty was expressed at the foundation of the IRSP and was one of the main forces behind the anti-imperialist unity talks which took place throughout 1977. He rejected the economic argument that imperialism was an economic phenomenon, and he placed political independence and sovereignty as a prime factor in his strategy. He expressed this in the resolution adopted by the IRSP which proposed to the broad front delegates:

*“That the Irish anti-imperialist front rejects a federal solution and the continued existence of two separate states in the six and twenty-six counties as a denial of the right of the Irish people to sovereignty and recognises the only alternative as being the creation of a 32 county democratic republic with a secular constitution.*

*“That the Irish anti-imperialist front demands the convening of an all Ireland constitutional conference representative of all shades of political opinion in Ireland for the purpose of discussing a democratic and secular constitution which would become effective immediately following a total British military and political withdrawal from Ireland.”*

The Officials began to abandon militant actions in the South and eventually in the North with the ceasefire of 1972. Seamus maintained before his assassination that he should have broken away at this stage and not waited until 1974. The two years in question were taken up with Seamus fighting a rearguard action to have accepted policy implemented while a section of the leadership implemented their own policies oblivious to Ard Fheis wishes. Disillusionment set in in the rank and file with many dropping out while a witch-hunt began of all dissidents, orchestrated by this clique in the leadership. Eventually Seamus was charged with irregularities at the 1973 Ard Fheis and tried by Sinn Féin. He was found not guilty. However, the Official IRA tried him on similar charges, with the exact same evidence (ensuring Costello's witnesses didn't turn up) and found him guilty. They dismissed him “with ignominy.”

Meanwhile Sinn Féin suspended him, despite their having found him not guilty. He was refused permission to stand in the local election of 1974. Costello knew he was finished with the Officials and stood as a independent Sinn Féin candidate as he began to organise the setting up of a new party that would entwine the class question and national question as one struggle. He topped the polls for Wicklow County Council and Bray Urban Council where he was immensely popular, being a member of the Wicklow Agricultural Committee and president of Bray Trades Council. The leadership of the Officials were dismayed by this victory. He was nevertheless dismissed (“general unsuitability”) from Sinn Féin at the Ard Fheis of 1974, memorable for its undemocratic procedures (delegates refused entry at the door because they supported Costello etc.).

In December 1974 Seamus along with other disillusioned republicans and socialists, many with years of involvement in the republican movement at leadership level and with a deep involvement at local level, formed a new political party. There immediately followed mass resignations from all over the country, North and South. Entire cumainn came over. And so was born the Irish

Republican Socialist Party, named after James Connolly's party of 1896.

There had existed a minority opinion in the leadership of the Officials at the time of the Provo split who felt that Provos should have been crushed. The growth of the Provos merely strengthened this opinion. The Officials decided to employ this tactic against the IRSP and picked Belfast to launch their campaign of murder, driving the IRSP into hiding. Seamus, who always had a deep appreciation of the damage of "feuds", as the Officials' campaign was being called by the media, and the demoralisation it would cause throughout the anti-imperialist movement, sought mediation with the Officials who refused. Eventually, Michael Mullen, head of Costello's union, the ITGWU, acted as mediator and the Officials called off their murder campaign, mainly due to their bad showing in the Galway by-election and the Northern Ireland Convention election. The "feud" had

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*'I owe my allegiance only to the working class.'*

— *Seamus Costello*



*Seamus Costello addresses a meeting outside Bray Council Chamber following his removal for "undesirable conduct"*

seriously affected the growth of the IRSP and stopped most resignations from the Officials. Three IRSP members were dead and scores injured. Indeed a bloody baptism for the IRSP.

In the 26 counties the State was bent on destroying the IRSP culminating in the arrest of Costello along with over 40 IRSP members, supporters and relatives in April 1976. Nine were severely tortured and six framed with the robbery of a train in Co. Kildare. Costello pushed the IRSP to sue the State and brought Amnesty International's first involvement in Ireland when they demanded "*a full and independent inquiry*" in May 1976 into the arrest of IRSP members and their ill-treatment.

Seamus always maintained that there existed a State conspiracy to smash the IRSP and the IRSP has ample evidence to prove this charge.

During Seamus Costello's leadership of the IRSP, he was attempting to build a strong republican socialist party that would entwine the national and class questions as one struggle. He sought to involve the IRSP in all the struggles of the Irish people; trade union work, housing, fisheries, the struggle for women's emancipation, the national question, the struggle of small farmers, tenants, the cultural struggle, sovereignty, the struggle for control over our natural resources and the struggle against repression etc.

He could speak to Dublin's unemployed, Derry's harassed population, or Wicklow's farmers, and reach them all. No struggle of the working class was too insignificant for his involvement and despite his national commitments, his organisational duties as full time IRSP political organiser, he always found time to honour his commitment to his constituents in Co. Wicklow.

At the time of his assassination he was a member of the following bodies: Wicklow County Council, County Wicklow Committee of Agriculture, General Council of Committees of Agriculture, Eastern Regional Development Committee, Bray Urban District Council, Bray branch of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, Bray and District Trades Union Council (of which he was president 1976-77), the Cualann Historical Society, chairman Irish Republican Socialist Party. From the period between 1964 and 1974 he held the positions of Adj. General, Chief of Staff and Director of Operations in the Official IRA and the position of vice-president of Official Sinn Féin.

## Tribute to a Comrade

By J.G.

The wind it blew cold that October  
as I watched the sad cortege depart,  
And I knew the bright sunshine of springtime  
ne'er would ease the dead chill in my heart.  
As I slowly came down from that chapel  
and we went, oh, so slow, to his grave,  
'twas for us this great lover of mankind,  
For us always, his lifetime he gave.

His brilliance shone forth like the morning  
As he rose up to champion the weak,  
And our jailers in this island dungeon  
cowered when Costello dared all to speak.  
For his was the voice of the worker,  
and justice for all was his creed,  
And he told us "Arise in your greatness",  
and conquer their world full of greed.  
Not bigots nor hate can divide us  
When you fight for the flag of the Free,  
Not murder or armies defeat us, when  
we strike out for Men's Liberty.

*(continued)*



*Seamus Costello's funeral as it reaches the  
Church in Bray*

And his voice it came back from the coffin  
As I shouldered it close to my cheek,  
“Go on — ever onward my comrades,  
’til we build up that Nation we seek,  
and no power in this world here can stop you,  
The assassin has failed, can’t you see.  
Remember as you bury my body,  
My spirit as always is free,  
and I stride along there beside you  
as you march on to man’s destiny.  
And remember I was happy to trade it,  
My life for your liberty.”

It was cold when we buried that hero  
And many’s the heart cried with pain,  
for we knew as we buried Seamus Costello  
We’d not see his likes e’er again.  
But his words seemed to ring in the morning  
as we slowly departed his grave,  
“Remember you were born to be free men  
Not quisling, not lackey, not slave.  
And my work in this life was an honour,  
so take up my struggle with pride.  
Doing that, this cold day is beaten,  
and I, Seamus Costello, have not died.

## Seamus — The People's Councillor

Tony Gregory

SEAMUS COSTELLO personified more than any other Irish man or woman, at least of our generation, the Irish republican socialist — the revolutionary activist who organised and worked in tenant associations, trade unions, housing action committees, and cultural organisations. Elected to represent the people of his native Wicklow, he helped to lead and shape the republican movement into a significant left-wing militant organisation.

It would be misleading to give a narrow account of Seamus's role as councillor, because he acted it out in a wider context of revolutionary politics. His activities as councillor must be seen in the context of his revolutionary role and against the background of the development of the republican movement in Wicklow prior to 1967 as well as the internal changes in the republican movement between 1963 and 1967.

In 1954, shortly before the armed campaign of the late 50's there was, as Seamus himself put it, "*absolutely no republican organisation in Co. Wicklow*". The first Sinn Féin cumann was started in Bray in May of 1955. It had six or seven members, most of whom had been members of the Dun Laoghaire cumann. Its only activity was the sale of the *United Irishman*. "Of the new members who joined at that time along with the others who came in during the 50's campaign, not one was drawn from a traditional republican background". They had no preconceived ideas about revolutionary political action.

As the northern campaign waned, the movement in Bray showed signs of disintegration. By the end of 1962 there were four or five active members, and this small group set itself the task of "putting the organisation on its feet". By the middle of 1963 "we had about a dozen very active people".(1)

Between 1963 and 1967 the republican movement underwent a radical change in outlook, policies and activities. Seamus Costello was one of those most directly responsible for that change, and Wicklow was to become a proving-ground for the new radicalism.

Seamus had participated in the disastrous armed campaign of the 50's. He had joined with great enthusiasm in a military adventure which he believed would inspire the Irish people to take up the fight once more against the British occupation of the northern six counties. But he was soon to realise that heroism and self-sacrifice were not enough. The campaign fought in the mountainous border regions did not have the desired result. People throughout Ireland were more concerned with the pressing social problems of the day, with increasing unemployment and mounting emigration.

Seamus continued to accept that the fight against the British was correct and necessary, but he now realised that it would not be won by a small though gallant band divorced from the vital social issues of the day. He now saw that there were many strands to the anti-imperialist struggle and many related links to liberation. To hold the national question as being above all other issues, was to isolate oneself from the Irish people and to make defeat inevitable.

To make progress from military failure and disillusionment, it was necessary to involve the movement in the issues that affected the mass of the people, civil rights in the North and social equality in the entire country. To build that movement was their new task, their way forward.

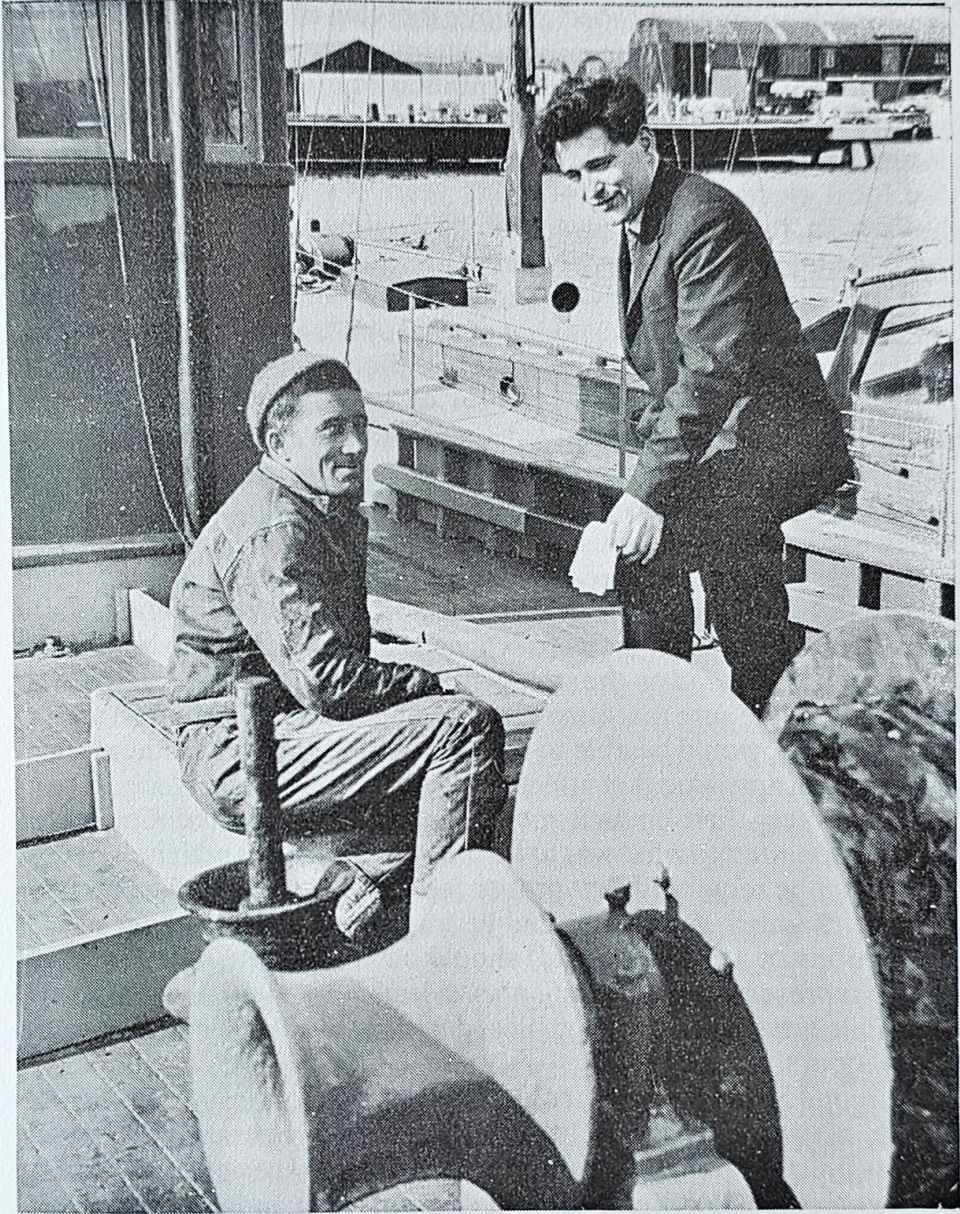
"Above all others, Seamus Costello was responsible for ending Sinn Féin's parliamentary abstention policy, setting the party on a relatively democratic road and having it registered as a regular political party".(2)

But from the very beginning he argued that the new parliamentarianism must at all times be allied with militancy: "*To imagine that we can establish a republic solely by constitutional means is utter folly*", he said.(3)

There were many who did not share Seamus's deeply-held convictions: some would have "no truck with socialism"; others blinded by military failure and personal disillusionment were shortly to turn their backs on the national question and to reject militancy in any shape or form. The former were to form the Provos and the latter to degenerate into Sinn Féin the Workers Party. Seamus was to steer a principled course, and was never to lose sight of the convictions espoused by so many at that time.

There was one fundamental way in which he differed from the rest of the movement's leadership. He was not content merely to preach the theory, he also implemented it to the letter. He was soon to practise what he preached: he organised tenants associations, housing action committees, community pressure groups; he was active in his trade union and was to be elected president of the Bray Trades Council.

During that period of intellectual turmoil and soul-searching within the movement, Seamus and his handful of comrades began in earnest to reorganise in Wicklow. Between 1964 and February 1966, they re-established the Easter commemoration there for the first time since 1924. They established their first links with the trade union movement and got one member elected to the Bray Trades Council, representing the W.U.I. The new policy within the movement led to a growing awareness of the necessity for involvement in the work of other organisations.



*Seamus talking to a trawlerman in Arklow Harbour during the 1968 election campaign*

“This new policy was brought a step forward in February 1966, when the Sinn Féin cumann called a public meeting of all council tenants in Bray for the purpose of forming a tenants’ association. The immediate result of this meeting was the formation of a very active association with four or five Sinn Féin members in key positions on the committee. It also had a favourable effect from our point of view on the course of the local elections in the following year. We also strengthened our links with the Bray Trades Council by inviting them to officially participate in the 1966 Easter commemorations. They agreed to march and they appointed Roddy Connolly, son of James Connolly, to speak on their behalf. By the beginning of 1967 our organisation in Bray was well poised for the local government election contest”(4).

The Wicklow Sinn Féin election programme reflected this new social consciousness. Seamus led and organised an extremely efficient four-week campaign, distributing 75,000 pieces of literature, 3,000 posters, with 15 people working every night. Sinn Féin was the only party to canvass every house and hold numerous public meetings.

Seamus afterwards listed the reasons for their success. Among them was that “we made no secret of the fact that we were a revolutionary socialist party and that we were prepared to give leadership both in the council chamber and on the streets. We made it plain to the people that we would make sure that Bray Urban Council would be democratised, and that they would be able to make their presence felt in the council chamber on any issue that affected their welfare”(5).

At his very first council meeting, the newly elected Councillor Costello pointed to what was to be the kernel of all his activities in that role when he requested that proper facilities be made available in the council chamber so that the public in general (and as issues arose, delegations of affected people) should have complete access to their public representatives. Seamus was to lead in many such delegations, and while he remained a councillor, decisions were never made behind closed doors.

A second Sinn Féin member had been elected for Bray. This was Joe Doyle, who at least ensured that all Seamus’s proposals would reach discussion stage. There were to be many such issues even in his first year as a councillor; supporting community demands for pedestrian crossings; requests for more efficient water supply; repairs to roads, etc. However, the overriding issue of that first year was, of course, housing. Seamus knew its importance and wasted no time in acting. With the Bray Sinn Féin cumann he organised a Housing Action Committee and was elected its chairman. He led the homeless into the council chamber and demanded the declaration of a housing emergency. For the first time ever, there were members of the gardai and Special Branch present in the public gallery. Sinn Féin pickets

were placed on the council and Seamus proposed that legislation be sought to requisition vacant houses for those on the waiting-list. He called for the serving of compulsory purchase orders on lands owned by the Loreto Convent.

His efforts on behalf of the homeless attracted many young people into the Sinn Féin organisation and also provided badly needed solidarity for the struggle of the Dublin Housing Committee.

Other issues he raised were the call for the municipal control of the Bray amusement arcades (which were bringing big profits to a small group of people) and, of course, the national anti-EEC campaign.

It was some time before many of his fellow councillors were to come to terms with having such a radical and effective activist in their midst. By the end of his first year, one of his more conservative fellow councillors was to say of him: "*Every resolution of Councillor Costello is aimed to stir up trouble*". He stirred up trouble again and again whenever an issue arose that affected the interests and welfare of the people who had elected him.

In May 1968, he took another step forward to use his position as councillor to highlight injustice and issues not directly affecting his constituents. When the E.I. dispute in Shannon broke, he introduced a resolution calling on the Government "to bring in legislation to compel all foreign industrial firms to recognise the rights of trade unions and to condemn the attitude of the American E.I. company". This resolution was denounced in the Bray council as the "latest of Seamus Costello's troublesome motions with subversive intentions". Seamus, of course, recognised the obvious limitations of such resolutions, and he was, in another role, engaged directly in more militant action in defence of the rights of the Shannon workers. Many believe that this was the high-point of the movement's turn to the left. Certainly, this was "parliamentarianism allied with militancy".

In March 1968, Seamus had received 2,009 first preference votes in a Wicklow by-election. According to an Irish Times correspondent at that time, he was "*more socialist than the socialists*" — this referred particularly to the policy in his election manifesto calling for the division of large estates among small farmers. He was continually hampered and badgered over the abstention issue — one of the reasons he was to press home within the movement for the reversal of the abstention policy, which was to lead to the split and the formation of the Provisionals in 1969. The election result was a major vote of confidence in his efforts as councillor.

He continued to give dedicated leadership to his constituents, on any issue that concerned local people. When residents objected to a slaughterhouse, he brought them into the council and demanded that their views be listened to. In August 1968, he began the highly

publicised campaign to defend the freedom of access to the beaches at Brittas Bay. This received popular support and led to clashes with hired security firms and the gardai, and ultimately to the arrest of Seamus and his supporters. The issue was eventually resolved in the courts and an acceptable compromise agreement reached.

The North began to overshadow events, and following the Derry march on October 5th, Seamus called on Bray council to "condemn the brutality of the RUC in suppressing the civil rights march". In December 1968, at the General Council of County Councils, he had a motion down attacking the Government's Criminal Justice Bills. He continued to push social issues, and in January 1969, he called on the Bray council to demand "the release of Denis Dennehy", then in prison arising out of the Housing Action campaign in Dublin. He pointed out that on the 50th anniversary of the first Dail, the celebrations were marred by the imprisonment of a man whose family had been denied a home of their own.

In June 1969, Bray Urban Council was replaced by a Government nominated commissioner, but Seamus retained his right to attend meetings and challenge decisions as he saw fit. When the council was reconvened three years later, Seamus Costello was elected "chairman of Bray Urban Commissioners", or in effect Lord Mayor. He held that position with dignity and achieved such popularity in that period that when the local elections were held again in 1974 he was elected at the head of the poll in both Bray and Wicklow. In an editorial comment in a Wicklow People election special the following tribute was paid to him:

"Seamus Costello has been involved in many clashes at council level and has stood out again and again in his defence of the working class people".

He very often stood alone against the entire council, when, for example, he joined with the officials in opposing the granting of planning permission for the construction of private houses in areas of great scenic value. At one stage there were 34 appeals to the Department of Local Government, and of those Seamus had lodged 24.

He continued in this vein up to the day he was assassinated. In a tribute to him at that time it was truly said that "no struggle of the working class was too insignificant for his involvement, and despite his national commitments, his organisational duties as full-time IRSP organiser, he always found time to honour his commitment to his constituents in Co. Wicklow".

As a councillor, his achievement was to show clearly at local level how revolutionary activists could organise politically to build a mass movement which people would support — or in a word, to accomplish

what he had set out to achieve, *to point the way forward* for all those who seek the republic of Pearse, Connolly and Costello.

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*‘I knew Seamus from the time he was sixteen years of age. Even at that early age his potential for leadership was very evident. He had a passion for Irish history and his idols were Michael Collins and James Connolly. He had the rare combination of idealism and pragmatism — in fact he was down to earth and very practical in his dealings with people. Seamus was in fact the most sincere person I have ever had the pleasure to know.’*

— Father Piaras O Duill

*‘He was killed by someone who hated truth, because more than anything else Seamus loved truth. His countenance bore the illuminated fervour of Pearse. His qualities of precision and leadership were obvious to anyone who met him even once.’*

— Joe Stagg, Irish Civil Rights Association,  
speaking in New York, October 1977.

## Emerging Leader

### Eamonn Mac Thomais

IT WAS IN THE early fifties that Seamus came along to me at the Easter commemoration concert in the Gaiety Theatre and he asked to join the IRA. I asked him how old he was, he said he was fifteen. So I said, look son, you are too young. Join the Fianna. No, he says, I want to join the IRA. Well, I said, Come back in a year's time and we'll see what we can do for you. So I thought that was the end of him, but lo and behold a year passed by and the next Easter commemoration concert in the Gaiety he walked up and looked at me straight in the eye and says "*Do you remember me?*" I said I did all right. Well, he says "*I'm sixteen now and I want to join the IRA*". He was a very striking looking young fellow. Jet black hair, very good looking, inclined to be thin and lanky at that time. Unusual from the ordinary run-of-the-mill fellows that joined the IRA. Most lads who joined the IRA were 19, 20, 25 or even 30 years of age, so a sixteen-year-old was something of a seven-day wonder. However, he did his twelve weeks course on the recruit staff of the IRA and was transferred into a unit and was fairly active in it.

Several months later we organised a week-end camp on the mountains and the Special Branch looked as if they were moving in, so we decided to get all the stuff away. Someone said we had a van. Now, motor transport was very hard to come by at that time and the fact that we had a van was another seven-day wonder. I said O.K., where's the driver? Who walked up but Seamus. Seamus was not only the driver but it was his van. It was used by his family to deliver the milk in Bray — and deliver guns on week-ends. So from that day on, Seamus was always in on the organising of the parades and meetings, and getting the stuff to and from places.

The time Joe Doyle was in jail in England, Mrs. Doyle sent for me and told me there was a man in Bray — she didn't know who he was — who was collecting a lot of money for the Cumainn Comhaire and was spending this money in the pub. He was boasting in the pub that he was drinking IRA money. So I decided to get someone to find out all about him, and Seamus Costello was given the job. Within about a week he had a report for me — exactly who the man was. He was a bus driver in Donnybrook, he had the number of the bus he drove and the time he left Donnybrook garage every night. So we picked him up and, well, I suppose the rest of the story is history. But the Cummainn Comhaire got back their money. Mrs. Doyle was very pleased and so was everyone in Bray.

This had a great boost for the movement in Bray from the point of recruiting. A number of people came forward. It added a great prestige to the movement, and I think looking back on the issue, it was wonderful how Seamus was able to organise the whole thing out, exactly who he was, and not only that but the exact moment we could pick him up on the road.

He was a very determined person, great ability to organise, totally dedicated. That was the thing about everybody in those years. It was seven days a week, and 24 hours a day. I think someone put it in a nutshell when he said that you were an IRA man even when you were asleep in bed. And Seamus was one of those.

He moved from the Army into Sinn Féin circles and became very active in Sinn Féin in Bray. This was long before he came up to the Ard Comhairle of Sinn Féin and standing for elections. He was always in the two organisations, which again was unusual. Most people were either in Sinn Féin or in the IRA but Seamus was in both. In the 1956 campaign he was involved in the preparation. The idea was to build in a supply of arms for easy availability to the columns. In this, like in all his work, he was meticulous, every detail checked and nothing left to chance.

He was arrested and interned in the Curragh. Here as ever he was extremely active. He wasn't in jail at all — he was in a university. He organised classes and gave lectures. When he wasn't engaged politically, he was helping to dig the tunnel. I didn't take part in any of this activity. I used to lie on the bed and read. He was always 'on' to me about the Legion of Mary. He'd come and sit on my bed, begging to be told stories of the Rising and other bits of history.

For a long time I would take no notice. I would go on reading until eventually I'd get so annoyed, I'd tell him to so-and-so off with himself. Now, he'd say, do you hear the Legion swearing, and he'd fall all over



*Speaking at a  
Sinn Féin Ard-fheis in 1971*

the bed laughing. He never tired, he had boundless energy — always active.

In the 1967 local authority elections he stood as a Sinn Féin candidate both for Wicklow County Council and for Bray Urban District Council. One Sunday morning I spoke at seven after-Mass meetings all over the county. We came back through Bray and there was Seamus on a platform holding forth. He asked me to speak. At this stage my voice was only a whisper and I told him it just wasn't any use me speaking as no one could hear me. Ah, well, he says, I'll tell you what you'll do. Here is a page of the register, you can do a bit of canvassing. This was typical of the man. He spared no one, not least himself. The movement was what mattered, nothing nor nobody else.

In the early sixties Seamus had risen very high up through the ranks, and was in the leadership capacity. He became very popular and had a large following. He was very highly regarded. He was a very forceful speaker, very determined. He was a socialist to his fingertips, and all the work in the sixties in connection with the workers and in the Arigna mines, the ground rents, the evictions, the housing action committees, Seamus was involved in all this.

He stepped out into military circles, into leadership. At the 1966 Easter commemoration parade from St. Stephen's Green to Glasnevin he was Chief Marshall. There were thousands of police — the spectators were outnumbered by three to one and the parade was outnumbered by about ten to one. The police had told us the IRA flag must not fly. Seamus said, yes, that's O.K. We are not to fly the flag, very good, that's O.K. He got out ten or twelve of the tallest fellows to line the front and another ten or twelve to line the back, and he put the blue IRA flag in the centre, and he says: "*Now here is the order — this flag is getting to Glasnevin cemetery, I don't care how it is getting there, but there it is getting*".

It was a running battle from Suffolk Street corner to Glasnevin, but the blue flag of the IRA was carried all the way through the streets of Dublin that day. Baton charge and counter charge and counter baton charge took place. Several people were arrested, but the flag got to Glasnevin. That was the type of determination which characterised his whole life.

Someone asked me a couple of years ago, what sort of a fellow is this Costello? The split had occurred and of course Seamus and I were in opposite camps. So I thought and I said, well I'll tell you what sort of a fellow Costello is. "*If you are living in Co. Wicklow, the finest man to represent you would be Seamus Costello, because if there was anything wrong with your tap, or your light, or the rain was coming in through the roof, Costello is the man*". He had a way of getting things done for other people. He was always in the constituency, driving around in the

car. No matter how trivial it was, he was always at hand to help other people. The whole motivation of his life was doing something for the movement.

We did split. In the Intercontinental Hotel, as the split came, I got up to walk out, and as I got to the door, he caught me by the arm, and he said, "*Not you Eamonn, don't go*". I said, "*I'm sorry Seamus, I have to go*". I walked out. It was a very sad occasion, a very moving occasion — a movement split to smithereens that we had spent our whole lives trying to build — all of us thinking we were doing the right thing.

I didn't see Seamus for a long number of years after that. One day not so long ago I was going down the quays, a car shot out and nearly knocked me down. I looked and saw Seamus. He lowered the window and smiled. I said, you wouldn't knock me down. Ah no, Eamonn, he said, I wouldn't knock you down. We had a short chat. I asked him how the wife and kids were getting on, how he was doing himself. Ah, he says "*still at it, doing a bit*". That was the last I saw of Seamus Costello.



*‘My father told his court martial that the British had no right in Ireland. Seamus Costello felt the same way. He was the greatest follower of my father’s teachings in this generation and I hope that his example shall be followed and that his vision for Ireland will be realised in this generation.’*

*— Nora Connolly O’Brien speaking at his graveside.*

*Nora Connolly-O’Brien speaking at Seamus Costello’s funeral*

## Man of dedication and determination

### Niall Lenoach

IT IS A DIFFICULT and disheartening thing for anyone who has worked with Seamus Costello or admired him to accept the finality of his death. Like James Connolly, Seamus was cut down in the prime of life with 20 years of revolutionary experience and hardship behind him, but with an irrepressible dedication and energy to carry on with the struggle, to learn new lessons and to break new ground.

In the years since his death I have spoken to many of his former comrades who worked with him in the 50's campaign and in the subsequent reorganisation of the republican movement. Without exception, regardless of political or personal divisions, they have all said that from the beginning they felt that Seamus had leadership qualities. He had the decisiveness and clarity to understand a political situation, and, let it also be said, he had the necessary ruthlessness to carry through his ideals against all the odds. The first big decision for him came in 1959 at the age of 19 when, having spent 2½ years in prison and internment camps, he declined to take the easy way out, to say that he had done his bit for Ireland and get on with living his own life. He had decided that the system was rotten and needed changing. There were no half measures. He had entered on a life-long commitment.

The state of the republican movement in 1962 with the ending of the 50's campaign was one of total disorganisation and demoralisation. Many simply drifted away to ordinary jobs or emigrated, feeling that all the years of hardship, imprisonment and slow patient work had come to nothing. The sales of the *United Irishman* had fallen by 80% since the high point of 1956. To people who had grown to regard the republican movement as the guardian of all that was good in the Irish political tradition, the early 60's were a disheartening time. In the South the multinationals were coming in at a big rate, attracted by tax concessions and massive grants. Fianna Fail were dropping their Republican rhetoric.

Instead of bleating about partition, Lemass began to tell the Irish people that in time the border would simply wither away. Those who talked of the republican tradition and British imperialism seemed an isolated and irrelevant fringe.

Seamus did not drift away but began to look at the problems of the republican movement in relation to the changing political situation. Their main conclusion was that the 50's campaign had failed because it had failed to gather mass support. They realised that it took political activity to get people out on to the streets, that emotional sympathy or pub republicanism are no use unless they are channelled in the right

direction by political direction. Seamus and his comrades were increasingly influenced by James Connolly, because Connolly had realised that military means alone were not enough, that the armed struggle must be combined with the political and social. In 1966 he set the direction for the new left-wing turn of the republican movement at the Bodenstown commemoration. *"We believe that the large estates of absentee landlords should be acquired by compulsory acquisition and worked on a co-operative basis with the financial and technical assistance of the State . . . our policy is to nationalise the key industries with the eventual aim of co-operative ownership by the workers . . . nationalisation of all banks, insurance companies, loan and investment companies . . ."*

The housing agitations in Dublin, Wicklow, Dun Laoghaire and Sligo, the ground rents agitations, the union struggles, all played their part in attracting new blood to the republican movement. In the years which followed, Seamus built up Wicklow Sinn Féin from scratch, starting up tenants associations in Bray, starting up agitations about land and access to beaches. But however deep his commitment to building a local organisation, however deep his commitment to fighting for the rights of the workers of Bray and Wicklow, Seamus resisted the temptation to become a parish-pump politician. At an official Sinn Féin seminar on local elections in 1973, he warned potential councillors against the danger of becoming social workers. The job of a revolutionary councillor was to mobilise people, to give them political guidance.

While he played a key role in moving the republican movement to the left and towards greater involvement in the everyday struggles for decent housing conditions and a living wage, he never lost sight of the fact that at the end of the day republican socialists would have to follow in the footsteps of James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army. While being active in the Wicklow County Council, the ITGWU, the County Committee of Agriculture and numerous other political bodies, he retained his position as Director of Operations of the IRA. When calling for a move to the left at Bodenstown in 1966, he added that *"in the long term, the lessons of history show that the robber baron must be disestablished by the same methods that he used to enrich himself and retain his ill-gotten gains, namely, force of arms. To this end we must organise, train and maintain a disciplined armed force which will always be available to strike at the opportune moment"*.

In common with others who later set up the IRSP, Seamus stayed with the "Officials" when the split in the republican movement came because he believed they offered the best hope of developing into a revolutionary movement in the tradition of James Connolly. But over the years it became clear that the majority of the leadership of the

“Official” republican movement were moving away from the ideals of republican socialism towards a labour party type reformism. In contrast to James Connolly’s position, they insisted that there could be no progress on the national question until the Protestant working class had been converted to socialism. Instead of implementing their own democratically decided policy on the national question, they chose to engage in talks with the sectarian murder gangs of the UDA and UVF. Seamus characterised this pathetic reformism as “Ring Road Socialism”.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party was launched in December 1974 under the slogan “For National Liberation and a Socialist Republic”. It was a very difficult time. With the upsurge of republican feeling following Bloody Sunday, the Coalition stepped up torture, repression and black propaganda in an all-out bid to eradicate republicanism. Many people who had been active had become completely disillusioned because of the setbacks and splits of the previous years. In the North the long years of strife had also taken their toll. From the beginning the new party came under ferocious pressure North and South.

It is a measure of Seamus Costello’s dedication and single-mindedness that he was able to face the task of building a new organisation from scratch. With characteristic decisiveness he went on the offensive when things were at their worst. When the Coalition moved to destroy the IRSP through the train-robbery frame-up, he was largely responsible for bringing Amnesty International in to investigate the activities of the “Heavy Gang”. At a time of deep disunity among the republican and left forces in Ireland, he took the last great political initiative of his life by launching the Broad Front, aimed at uniting the broad cross-section which supported the basic demands on the national question.

Seamus could be described as a “hard-man” in the best sense of the word. He sincerely believed in what he was doing and was determined to achieve it against all the odds. And yet, in spite of his strong personality and convictions, he was never a bitter man. On a personal level he retained a lot of respect for some of those he had worked with in the Officials, but for him the decisive factor was that they were politically wrong.

The people who plotted Seamus Costello’s death were sure it would finish the movement he founded. But just as his death has left a mark on us, so has his life and example.

## A Leader of National Stature

### Gerry Roche

THE HISTORY OF '98 is written all over Co. Wicklow and Seamus Costello absorbed and revelled in the stories of the Wicklow '98 men. It was from Bray that Seamus set off to fight the British occupation forces in south Derry as a young lad, and it was to Bray he returned after his internment.

Seamus once said, "*County Wicklow is Ireland in miniature. It has within its borders all the problems common to the nation — small farmers trying to eke out a living on poor mountain farms, inadequate housing and industrial workers with a depressed standard of living*". It was with this in mind that Seamus after his release from the Curragh began his involvement with the problems of the working people of Co. Wicklow. But he was much more than just a local politician. He was a leader of national stature. Seamus was an innovator and pacemaker in the republican movement from the early 60's onwards. He argued against the traditional republican policy of abstention from Leinster House.

He was not unaware of the possible dangers of such a course; but just as involvement in armed struggle does not necessarily lead to militarism, neither does involvement in elections necessarily lead to reformism. Like Lenin, he was pragmatic in his tactics, and while recognising the corruption of the courts and parliament, he was quite prepared to use them as a platform while remaining totally inflexible in his politics. Seamus's views on participation in Leinster House raised much controversy in the republican movement at the time. Because of that, and in view of the present degeneration of Sinn Féin the



*Speaking at a Press Conference  
on the great train robbery frame-up  
torture case*

Workers Party into sterile reformism, I think it is worthwhile and imperative that we restore Seamus's attitude towards participation in the Free State Dail.

Seamus said in an internal discussion document: *"The people of Ireland are clever enough to recognise the fact that effective power lies in the hands of parliament at the moment, and in my opinion they are not going to give their support to any party that refuses to recognise this fact, and act accordingly. Before the republican movement can achieve power we must succeed in breaking the confidence of the people in the existing parliamentary institutions, and I suggest that this should be one of the main functions of our T.D.s. We can use it as a forum from which to advance our revolutionary ideas"*.

Seamus fully recognised that the Free State parliament was a corrupt institution which was a barrier to the emancipation of the Irish working class and aspirations of Irish people to unification and self-determination for their country. But like all good generals fighting a powerful enemy, he knew that while you gathered your forces for a frontal assault on the enemy lines, guerrilla attacks within enemy territory weakened and demoralised the enemy. While not capable of defeating him, the incursions paved the way for the final assault.

"It would be the height of folly for anybody who claims to want to see a socialist revolution in Ireland to ignore the fact that all key personnel in the political parties, the civil service, the judiciary, the military, para-military and police forces are drawn from the capitalist class and are going to protect that class, come what may. The history of the world is littered with very sad examples of what can happen under these circumstances. That is why we republicans believe that a military force with the proper training and the correct ideological motivation is necessary to safeguard the revolution."

Between 1967 and 1969 came the development of the mass movement in the North for civil rights. Seamus gave it his wholehearted support. Recognising its essential reformist nature, he knew that inevitably it would lead to a confrontation with imperialism — a confrontation that the leadership of the "Official" republican movement became determined to avoid. Therein lay the origins and reasons for our parting from the "Officials" in 1974.

From the very beginning of the formation of the IRSP Seamus hammered away continually at the need for a broad front of anti-imperialist forces. He canvassed support for the concept in whatever quarters he could find it. His and the party's efforts began to pay dividends with the convening of the first anti-imperialist conference on March 12, 1977, at the Spa Hotel in Lucan. The rest is history. The talks broke down but weren't a complete failure. A beginning had been made.

It is a sad irony that only after somebody is dead do we begin to appreciate their qualities. For over 20 years Seamus Costello worked and slaved tirelessly for the working people of this island. He never asked for thanks and he never expected it. He never looked for material gain and he never received any. It was my privilege to have worked closely with Seamus from early 1974, and during that period I can only recall three or four times when he wasn't out working for the movement.

His wasn't an eight hour working day — he rarely worked less than 16 hours a day. I think I could safely say that there have been few revolutionaries ever in Ireland who have worked so hard and for so long. I say all these things as no empty rhetoric, but because they need to be said in the light of the Free State attempts to blacken Seamus's name. Black propaganda is nothing new to Irish revolutionaries. Our present Free Staters have learnt the art well from their British and American counter-insurgency tutors.

The British applied the black propaganda technique against every Irish revolutionary leader from Tone to Casement. The Free Staters applied the same techniques against Erskine Childers and other republican leaders in the civil war. Now it is Seamus Costello's turn.

As a republican socialist movement, with a serious and worked out analysis of both the national and class question in Ireland, we must be vigilant against the designs of both the British and Free State governments. They will attempt to devise new policies to divert the national liberation struggle into a cul-de-sac — like the "federal solution" to maintain two reactionary states in Ireland.

We believe that the only realistic solution to the national and class question lies in the establishment of a 32-county democratic socialist republic; full political freedom devoid of any military, economic or cultural control, with the working class in control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. To achieve this the IRSP was formed. It will continue until those aims are achieved.

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*‘In the course of his revolutionary activities over a lifetime, he broke with untruth wherever he found it.’*

— *Tiarnan Mac Gearraigh*  
in a telegram of sympathy after Seamus's death.

## Without Fears or Favourites

### May Hayes

I FIRST SAW SEAMUS Costello at Bodenstown in 1967. He was Chief Marshall, and struck me as a very active and highly efficient young man. I went there with friends from Bray, from whom I heard quite a bit of Seamus Costello's earlier history in the republican movement — all very much to his credit.

There was a very large crowd in the march. Bus loads came from Ulster, Limerick, Cork, Wexford, two train loads from Dublin and many others in cars. It was a great turn-out and to me, who hadn't been to Bodenstown for many years, it seemed that a new spirit had come to life in Ireland. Thousands were there, not Provisionals, not Sinn Féin the Workers Party, not communists, not socialists just Irish men and women paying their homage to the father of Irish republicanism.

The local government elections were held a few weeks after the Bodenstown ceremony. Seamus stood as Sinn Féin candidate for Bray Urban District Council and Wicklow County Council, and headed the poll in both contests. The day of the election I was acting for the Labour Party at St. Brigid's National School, Foxrock, and two of the early voters were Seamus and his wife Maoilíosa. Fianna Fail and Fianna Gael had some children outside the school handing out leaflets. In their innocence, not knowing Seamus, they rushed forward to give him their literature. With a big broad smile on his handsome face, he said to them, very gently, "*Oh, no. It's the Labour Party leaflets I'm looking for*". The children fell back disappointed. If the parties had been represented by grown-up people, they would have known better, because even before he was elected as a local government representative, he had become a public figure.

In May 1968, he lectured to a group of Labour Party members in the Dun Laoghaire area, the title of his talk was "Labour in the Republican movement". Dr. John de Courcy Ireland was chairman, and in his summing up he said: "*I have great hopes for Ireland, that a new day is dawning for her people. The ideas of the lecturer are as good as I could hope for*".

*Seamus treated his audiences with the utmost seriousness, no matter what party or group they belonged to. Evidence of this seemed to percolate through to his listeners, and even when they didn't agree they were always impressed. Many years later when he spoke in Armhurst, U.S.A., even his bitterest opponents listened with admiration.*

After the shootings in Derry in January 1972, he addressed a large gathering outside the British Embassy in Dublin — the day it was burned down. He prefaced his speech with the remark, *"We have come here often before to protest, but this time we have come with a notice to quit"*. I haven't the slightest doubt that, had he been given his head at that fateful time, he was prepared to lead an armed insurrection. He saw the revolutionary situation and he would have had the backing of a large section of the trade union movement — emotionally, maybe, but amenable to leadership.

He was well known and well respected as a hard working trade unionist. But the men who should

have been standing beside him were either tied to apron strings or had other more personal, if less desirable, attractions to dissuade them. It was a great chance lost and it was not the fault of Seamus Costello.

From the time of his election as a public representative, Seamus worked night and day for the people of Bray and Wicklow, for houses, for water schemes, better and more roads, the right of the people to retain use of the strand at Brittas Bay. He fought for fishermen's rights, for people evicted, for itinerants, against pollution — you name it, he was there. He was like a terrier at council meetings. He exposed the faintest smell of intrigue. He knew no fear. He had no favourites, and could not be bought. He was a hard task master. He made us work like slaves and he worked like ten slaves himself.

In addition to the local issues, he led his supporters in the campaign against the abolition of proportional representation, and was tireless in his efforts against Ireland's entry into the Common Market. In this particular campaign, Wicklow Sinn Féin distributed more of the Labour Party's paper on the Common Market than the Labour Party itself distributed in the whole of Ireland. He was the greatest organiser I ever met. He examined every detail, and during all the years of his public life in Wicklow he was all the time actively engaged in the fight for national freedom and independence. One evening in Bray he wanted me to go up the hill to Boghall to sell the *United Irishman*, I



*"At heart, gentle and courteous . . .  
He would cheerfully get up in the  
middle of the night if he could  
help anyone"*

refused. I was 64 and no longer able to rush up and down steps with papers, and I told him so. He was outraged because I stood up to him. He said I was no use in the movement if I refused to do what I was told, and if I wasn't able to work I shouldn't be in it.

Of course, it was a momentary feeling for him and in no way characteristic. He was ruthless and arrogant at times, but not for his own personal gain — always for the cause. At heart he was gentle and courteous and would cheerfully get up in the middle of the night if he could help anyone. I have known him to do just that. After he and I had that little “Dust up”, he was full of concern for me and always asked if I was able to do the job on hand.

The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis of 1968 was held in Liberty Hall. Through Seamus's good offices, I attended as a visitor. At that time Sinn Féin had not achieved the political heights of the 70's. The attendance would have been about 100. To one who had been on the periphery of the movement for many years, I could detect that there were differences of opinion. There were signs there was a departure from the old style traditional republicanism which could be difficult to bridge. The Ard Fheis of 1970 proved this to be tragically correct.

When the split did occur, Seamus remained with Gardiner Place, although it was evident at the Ard Fheis that there was less enmity between him as a person and the people who formed the Provisional movement than there was amongst the leadership of Gardiner Place. This too proved correct.

I was in London when I got news of his assassination. I was shocked to death, absolutely shattered, although, like himself, those of us who supported him in the IRSP lived with the dreadful fear that one day he would die as he did.

As Sinn Féin, Gardiner Place, became less and less of a republican movement, a number of people were dissatisfied and disillusioned. Seamus with his terrier like instinct had discovered the “rat”. He drafted a long memorandum setting out his ideas for a new structure to be read and discussed at the 1972 Ard Fheis (Gardiner Place). He was not allowed to propose it, so there was no discussion. He was eventually expelled.

However, for months he was organising a new group, and in December 1974 he held a meeting where the Irish Republican Socialist Party was formed. In his exuberance he wanted everything done at once. He was in a hurry. Had he known it then, he had only three more years left in which to complete his task.

Apart from the loss to his family and to his party, his loss to Ireland was even greater. After his assassination, the Sunday Press said he was a Che Guevara without a Castro.

Although a member of his memorial committee, I was unable to attend the unveiling. But I have since visited the grave. In my view the stone itself portrays correctly his socialist ideals and his young life cut short, but I cannot help feeling his own thoughts would be as he expressed them himself in 1968: "*The dead don't belong to us, we don't belong to the dead*".

That his comrades and friends should honour him with such a monument is as it should be, but a perpetual memorial can be established by educating for republicanism, by sincerely, and with dignity and integrity, endeavouring to obtain for the people the socialist aspirations of Seamus — the right to live and own our land, our wealth, our resources, within a united and independent Ireland.



## Man of Vision

**Sean Doyle**

WHAT SEAMUS COSTELLO meant and still means to the people of County Wicklow would take volumes. This short account will have to suffice.

For a man of average height and appearance, to us, the people of Wicklow, he was a tower of strength and determination, our hope, our guidance, and our inspiration for the future. He explained our age-old desire for freedom and showed us the path to take to achieve it.

From his secondary education in the 50's border campaign to his Bachelor's degree in freedom fighting, which he obtained in the Curragh University, he took up his practice throughout the 32 counties of Ireland. Graduates from the Curragh realised that in order to achieve national freedom, the class struggle and the national question went together, in other words, that national liberation and socialism were the same struggle.

By freeing the beaches of Brittas Bay, he liberated all the beaches in the 26 counties, thus proving what a small group of determined people can achieve against powerful capitalist opposition. Once elected to the Bray Urban Council and Wicklow County Council, he organised the people to organise themselves, from housing action groups to unemployment, to small hill farmers, to Northern civil rights and the military campaign. Seamus was there in the thick of the peoples' struggle right up to his assassination.

First and foremost, Seamus was a man of the people whose task in life was to make us masters of our own destiny. He was not one of those smooth-talking, respectable politicians of the established parties, or should I say established parasites, who exploit the electorate for personal gain, i.e. Joe Soap going to his T.D. or councillor with his cap in his hand begging for his rights, such as tap water, flush toilets and what not.

Seamus from the outset was a believer in equality, the rights of man, and liberty — the three basic beliefs of all true republican socialists. Seamus spent his time with the underdogs, the working classes, the poor, the exploited, and he taught them. He taught them their rights as human beings. He explained to the people the evils of the British class system and pointed out how the native Irish gombeen class could take over from the British and keep the British class system alive to the detriment of the people.

He explained why certain classes live in luxury and these classes hold on to the wealth and power they stole from their fellow citizens. He

explained to us the evils of capitalism — the profit motive. How and why fellow workers become monsters after they extort profit from their own class, for, to succeed in the capitalist class system, one must be callous to the extreme.

He explained how the class with the stolen wealth, the rich and powerful, set themselves up as the guardians of the people. The rich make the laws, not to protect the poor but to protect and cover up their own crimes and fortunes.

He explained how workers, starved for jobs, are manipulated into the forces of law and order. Let's face it — if we had social justice, there would be no need for force to implement law and order. So pity your fellow worker in the gardai and Free State Army — protecting the rich and harassing the poor.

It comes back to capitalism and the class system every time. So long as the present system remains we will never know justice. He explained that justice, freedom and the brotherhood of man can only come about in a classless society — in effect, a 32 county socialist republic.

Seamus was not an armchair revolutionary intellectual. This is precisely why he did not fit in with the decor of Gardiner Place. His vision — his passion for social justice, his ability to communicate on bread and butter issues and without beating about any bushes — enabled him to link bread and butter issues directly to the class struggle, to capitalism, to the national problem and to British imperialism. He saw in Co. Wicklow the same problems that beset the whole country. He looked on Ireland as one unit — a whole Irish Ireland.

Seamus could see the Northern loyalist or Unionist fulfilling the same British role as the Southern Fianna Fail and Fine Gael nationalists. Both regimes — North and South — continue to uphold British imperialism.

Because of his vision and his organising ability he became a tower of strength to the people of Wicklow and Ireland. He showed them the light. He showed them the road to national liberation. Without doubt he was the greatest threat to the capitalist establishment since James Connolly. His life — short as it was — was not in vain. It exploded with purpose, not for himself but for his fellow men.

In conclusion Seamus Costello was a man of the people. He got his degree in working class involvement, on the streets with his own people, campaigning with them for justice.

## Fighting a Frame-up

### Osgur Breathnach

THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY frame-up of 1976 remains of immense political significance, not solely because it led to the longest political trial in Irish legal history at the cost of well over £1 million, not because State repression became the focus of international attention and to some extent to the downfall of a Coalition Government, but because it failed in its main attempt to discredit and pave the way for the suppression of the IRSP. Because of the correct leadership of Seamus Costello, the IRSP managed to turn the tables, and used the case to discredit the State and its institutions, particularly the judiciary and the gardai.

The robbery of £620,000 from an unguarded train in Kearneystown, Co. Kildare, in the early morning of March 31st, 1976, led to a political storm. Previously, following similar robberies, the Coalition Government of Fine Gael and Labour had promised a new security plan which was seen to have failed. The order then went out from the Department of Justice and the Cabinet to get results.

Garda Commissioner Ned Garvey conveyed the urgency down the garda ranks, and the Special Branch used the occasion to misinform the Cabinet that the IRSP were responsible for the Kildare robbery. This suited the Cabinet, who realised the threat that the IRSP and its politics were to the State, and were happy to suppress the party, despite its legality.

The Special Branch had been engaged in a black propaganda campaign since the IRSP's inception (publicly arresting its leadership following most robberies) and continually harassing its membership.

Chief Superintendent John Joy was given the central task of coordinating the Special Branch and Murder Squad, which he did at a conference in Dublin Castle on April 3rd, 1976, dispatching the 18 arresting parties. Inspectors Ned Ryan and John Courtney were deputed to lead the investigation.

In all, 40 IRSP members and supporters were arrested on April 5th throughout the 26 counties. The IRSP offices were wrecked and files burned and stolen. Fourteen IRSP members were marked for "in depth" interrogation. Of these, nine were severely tortured as Joy returned home to await results.

It was not until early on April 7th that the first (false) incriminating admission was got from an IRSP member. Three more statements followed and eventually six men were charged with the robbery. Nine months later, no evidence being proffered by the State, the case was

thrown out of court and the six released on December 9th. Meanwhile the IRSP had decided to fight the case politically by publicising the tortures, the unconstitutional and illegal arrests, the denial of other legal rights such as access to solicitors, and by instituting civil proceedings against the State for damages.

Civil liberties groups in Ireland and abroad, journalists, barristers, trade unions and academics joined the call for an impartial public inquiry. Fianna Fail (then in opposition) promised one if they were in power. The dismissal of the case against the IRSP six did not halt this campaign, and the State decided they had nothing to lose by going ahead with the frame-up.

In the early hours of December 17th, 1976 four of the original six were arrested and re-charged with stopping the train and removing the mailbags. This time, however, they were to appear before political and juryless special courts which have been a permanent part of the repressive apparatus of the State. Because of the overwhelming medical evidence of the injuries to the IRSP four, from defence and prosecution doctors alike, the State conceded they had been injured, but contended the injuries were self-inflicted or inflicted in concert with each other, and ruled that the only evidence — the written and verbal statements — should be accepted by the court.

The gardai and the Special Branch trooped on to the stand to state, parrot-fashion, that they had caused no injuries, seen none, nor heard anything unusual. Any unconstitutional or illegal acts on their behalf had been due to inadvertence or ignorance of the law.

Then the defence asked for a new trial because Judge William O'Connor was seen to have been sleeping on many occasions during the trial and had been witnessed by defence lawyers, the IRSP four, journalists and spectators. The Special Criminal Court, and later the High Court and Supreme Court, refused a new trial and stated that the judge had never even appeared to be asleep. By this time, the case, the Special Criminal Court and the Garda "Heavy Gang" in particular, had become internationally notorious.

Commissioner Ned Garvey had been sacked by the new Fianna Fail Government on the first day of the trial. And one month after the "Sleeping Judge" application was made on June 6th, 1977, Judge O'Connor collapsed and died and the trial had to be aborted — even though the court had accepted all the statements and verbals as voluntary, the IRSP four as liars and the gardai as truthful gentlemen. The sentencing tribunal could not be completed to convict the IRSP and whitewash the gardai. The case had long since ceased to be about a train robbery but concentrated on whitewashing the gardai at the expense of the IRSP.

Following the investigation in June 1977, Amnesty International

had found evidence of widespread Garda brutality, and also found that the Special Criminal Court "failed to scrutinise such allegations according to the principles of law". Instead of holding an impartial inquiry as suggested by Amnesty, and in accordance with Article Nine of the UN declaration against torture, the Fianna Fail Government established a committee under Judge Barra O'Briain. This committee reported back to the Government in June, 1978, and they refused to implement any of the committee's suggestions.

The second trial of the IRSP four commenced in October, 1978, and one of the accused, Michael Plunket, general secretary of the IRSP, was acquitted. This was to be the only major difference between the first and second trial except for the speed in which the trial ended and *Starry Plough* editor Osgur Breatnach and Brian McNally were sentenced to 12 and nine years respectively. Nickey Kelly jumped bail and was sentenced to 12 years in his absence. Two other occurrences are worthy of note.

A smear campaign against Seamus Costello by the gardai without any evidential base was launched and was assisted by the media; most of the Garda "Heavy Gang" members pointed out as torturers in the course of the first trial were promoted by Fianna Fail before the second trial began. A national and international campaign began for the release of the IRSP three, and 17 months later, in May, 1980, Brian and Osgur were freed. The appeal, which had been unduly delayed, was attended by numerous reputable international civil liberties groups. Three days before the appeal was due to begin, the Provisional IRA publicly accepted responsibility for the Great Train Robbery of 1976. The Court of Criminal Appeal to date has given no reason for its decision to free Osgur and Brian. On hearing the verdict, Nickey Kelly returned immediately from the U.S.A. to clear his name, was arrested at Shannon airport and is now serving the remainder of his 12 year sentence in Portlaoise prison, despite his innocence and bad health due to his torture. The campaign for his release, for the abolition of the Special Criminal Court and to expose the State conspiracy to smash the IRSP goes on.

Seamus Costello responded correctly to the Great Train Robbery frame-up and saw its political potential in exposing the State. He influenced the party and the IRSP four to stand their ground and fight back. In doing so he did much to further the struggle against repression in Ireland. He proved that there are times to use the institutions of the State to the advantage of the working class and the revolutionary movement. Finally, the involvement of the 26 county Government, sections of its civil service and gardai in the murder of Seamus Costello, which occurred in the middle of the Great Train Robbery frame-up, remains a possibility that must be taken seriously.

## Burning Idealism

### Ross Connolly

*The following tribute was paid by the president of Bray Trades Council, Ross M. Connolly, at the time of Seamus Costello's death.*

MY FIRST MEMORY of Seamus Costello was just ten years ago when, as a young man, he carried the banner of the Starry Plough for the Bray and District Trades Union Council in the Industrial Parade which was one of the highlights of our Golden Jubilee celebrations.

This was his first public identification with the trade union movement and undoubtedly marked a significant development in his career. From then on there was a maturing of his social and political outlook. Shortly afterwards he graduated from the rank and file of the union and became a delegate from the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to the Trades Union Council.

From the start his contribution to the council was controversial. His outspoken republicanism and his socialist ideas often gave rise to heated and lively meetings. His early views on the role and function of the trade union movement may at times have been naive, but there could be no gainsaying his sincerity or his genuine concern for the working class. It was not simply a concern to serve them as a messenger — “to get things done for them” — rather it was to make them realise that they had rights which were not dependent on the patronage of any politician or political party; that they should get off their knees and assert their dignity.

In latter years the abrasiveness of the young man had mellowed, although his idealism burned with as fierce a fire. He won his way to the executive committee and in 1976 he became president of the Trades Union Council. His chairmanship was marked by fairness and a warm, if sardonic, good humour, although he never neglected a chance to drive home his philosophy. He used his office, and indeed his status as an elected councillor, to continually emphasise the importance of the Trades Union Council as the representative body of the area's trade unionists. In spite of the many demands of his political life, both local and national, he gave generously of his time to the Trades Union Council, so exemplifying his view of the national unity of political, social and economic forces.

As Bernadette McAliskey said in her graveside address, it is too soon and our grief is too great, for a proper assessment of Seamus's role in the history of our island. Suffice to say for now that he was a man of great physical and moral courage, and the Starry Plough which he carried so proudly that day ten years ago, must surely have lain proudly over him on his journey to his last resting place.

## First Allegiance — a Socialist Republic

Bernadette McAliskey

MY PERSONAL acquaintance and friendship with Seamus Costello began in 1973. Before then I knew him only, as most people in Ireland, by reputation.

On hearing of his death, I could find no words of my own to express the deep sense of loss I felt, both personally and as a revolutionary socialist committed to the struggle for Irish freedom. I took therefore the words of a fellow revolutionary on the death of Malcolm X, the black revolutionary champion of black liberation and socialism in U.S.A.: *"Without him, we feel suddenly vulnerable, small and weak, somewhat frightened, not by the prospect of death, but of life and struggle without his contribution, his strength and inspiration"*.

There is no doubt that the struggle continues and its victory or defeat is not measured solely by the number or quality of our fallen comrades individually. Yet it is equally true that in every generation of struggle the combination of circumstances, history and the nature of the struggle itself, produces from the ranks of its rebels a few, and a very few individuals who, notwithstanding the fundamental principles of organisation, political correct-ness and practical ability, common to many, rise head and shoulders above the rest, with a potential for leadership, far beyond the ranks of the already committed. Such a comrade was Seamus Costello.

Brutally murdered by petty, small-minded men of no vision whose only place in history is to serve as a warning to others how revolutionaries gone wrong can degenerate into worse than nothingness. Seamus Costello, for all that he was and did in his lifetime, was only at the beginning of his potential contribution to the achievement of national



Bernadette Devlin McAliskey

liberation and socialism in this generation. That is not to say that Seamus was above making mistakes or that he was always politically correct. There were many questions on which I disagreed with him, and which I considered crucial to the development of the struggle. These remain unresolved.

Nonetheless, in leaving the official republican movement and taking the initiative of forming the IRSP, Seamus Costello proved his ability in practice — once convinced that the approach of the organisation to which he belonged was wrong and could not be altered from within — to take on the daunting, but necessary task of building an organisation capable and willing to carry the struggle forward. The fact that he was capable of it underlined his key position in the struggle, and his recognition of the need to forge a revolutionary force in Ireland from the unification of the republican and labour movements.

If I did not accept his arguments on how it could be done, I remained confident that he, again, if he found himself mistaken, would move further in his political analysis to another approach. He did not live to see the test of theory in practice.

Much is said of his single mindedness, his ruthlessness and organisational ability. At his hardest, Seamus Costello was never hateful, nor was there a fibre of his being that was petty or personally malicious, and despite the slanders of his enemies, he was neither politically nor religiously sectarian.

He owed his first allegiance to an ideal — a 32 county socialist republic. His enemies he defined only as those who consciously strove to suffocate, distort or deny expression to that goal, and prevent its achievement. As an orator, he was brilliant and inspiring. In debate, he was uncompromising, skilled and learned. As an organiser, he was efficient and did not easily tolerate idleness or half-hearted effort.

Yet in my mind's eye, when I think of him, I see him laughing. A sense of humour, the ability to laugh at oneself, and the predicament in which we find ourselves, is sadly too rare a quality among revolutionaries. Seamus possessed it in good measure.

His single greatest attribute was, however, his ability to relate to the mass of the people. His potential as a leader of mass struggle is not easily replaced. He could inspire not only the dream but the confidence of its achievement, and the commitment to work towards that end.

From the ranks of mass struggle, others will come. From the experience of struggle, the political programme, organisation and method of struggle will come. But another Seamus Costello may never come again. When our freedom has been won, let us guard it well, remembering it was paid for in the blood and the lives of those now dead, but whose memory lives forever in the hearts of us who loved them for all that they were and all they might have been, had they been allowed to live.

## Cailliúint gan Áireamh

### Íte Ní Chionnaith

NUAIR A DÚNMHARAÍODH Séamus Ó Coisdealbha ar an gcúigiú lá de Mhí Dheireadh an Fhómhair 1977, dúnmharaíodh duine de na smaointeoírí agus de na ceannairí Poblachtacha Sóisialacha ba chumasáí agus ba thábhachtaí lenár linn. Cé nár aithníodh sin ag an am agus nach n-aithnítear go cruinn, go foill é, aithneoidh staraithe amach anseo é. Thuig lucht a dhúnmharaithe go maith céard a bhí á dhéanamh acu. Bhí duine mar é róthábhachtach agus róbhaolach. Bhí tuiscint pholaitiúil aige nach raibh ag mórán agus fuinneamh nach bhféadfaí a shárú. Is beag duine a tháinig i dteagmháil le Séamas ar bhealach ar bith nach ndeachaigh sé i bhfeidhm go mór air. D'aithin cách, fiú na naimhde ba mhó a bhí aige, gur duine as an ngnáth a bhí ann.

Mar chomhairleoir contae agus mar chomhairleoir baile a chuir mise aithne air i dtosach i 1970 nuair a bhí mé ag obair i gCill Mhantáin agus chuaigh sé i bhfeidhm go mór orm. Bhí tacaíocht mhór aige sa chontae ar fad, ach go háirithe ina bhaile dúchais féin, Brí Chualainn. Níorbh aon ghnáth chomhairleoir é. Ní raibh sé d'aidhm aige aon dul chun cinn pearsanta a dhéanamh trína oifig. Thuig sé na fadhbanna ollmhóra a bhí ag pobal a cheantair agus throid sé de shíor ar a son. Ach níor theastaigh uaidh go mbeadh daoine ag brath airsiúd i gcónaí lena gcearta a éileamh dóibh. Thuig sé an tábhacht a bhí leis na daoine a oiliúint agus a eagrú chun a gcearta féin a bhaint amach. Is beag fadhb a bhí ag goilliúint ar mhuintir an chontae nach raibh Séamas Ó Coisdealbha go mór chun tosaigh ina léiriú agus ina troid, tithíocht, cíosanna talún, dífhostaíocht, feirmeacha róbheag, truailliú na timpeallachta, tránna príobháideacha, caimiléireacht chomhairleoirí agus go leor eile nach iad. Mar sin a bhí Séamas i gcónaí, istigh i lár an chuillithe. Ní raibh faitíos air labhairt amach agus ní raibh drugall air gníomhú.

Ach ní i bpolaitíocht áitiúil pharóisteach amháin a bhí sé gníomhach. Thuig sé an ceangal idir na fadhbanna áitiúla agus na fadhbanna móra náisiúnta agus rinne sé iarracht a leithéid a mhíniú don phobal. Thuig sé go raibh gá leis an gcóras a athrú ó bhonn agus nach bhféadfaí córas ceart sóisialach a bhunú in Éirinn, thuaidh ná theas, go dtí go ruaigfí fórsaí na Breataine, agus ar bhain leo, scun scan as na sé chontae agus go n-athaontófaí an tír. Ar an gceist dheireanach seo, ar ndóigh, a d'fhág sé féin agus cuid mhór daoine eile na hOifigiúlaigh agus is dá bharr a bunaíodh Páirtí Poblachtach Sóisialach na hÉireann.

Chomh fada siar le 1972, ar a laghad, a thuig Séamas Ó Coisdealbha go raibh an baol ann go dtabharfadh na hOifigiúlaigh cúl le pobal náisiúnach na sé chontae agus leis an troid ar son saoirse náisiúnta. Bhí daoine míshásta leis an sos cogaidh a d'fhógair na hOifigiúlaigh níos luaithe an bhliain chéanna, leis an dearcadh a bhí ag ceannasaíocht na gluaiseachta ar Stormont, leis an gclaonadh i dtreo na ndílseoirí, leis an mbealach a raibh an eagraíocht ag maolú ar a polasaithe poblachtacha agus ag dul i bhfolach laistiar de ghluaiseacht na gcearta sibhialta agus leis an rómhuinín a bhí ag cuid de cheannasaíocht na gluaiseachta, ar a laghad, as an gcóras parlaiminteach. Bhí míshuaimhneas ginearálta ann ach ní fhéadfaí a rá go raibh sé léirithe go hoscailte.

Nuair a sheas Séamas Ó Coisdealbha ag Ard-Fheis 1972 agus nuair a mhínigh sé go paiseanta an tábhacht a bhí leis an troid ar son saoirse náisiúnta, chuir sé friotal ar an míshuaimhneas a bhí in aigne cuid mhór daoine agus thug sé misneach, dóchas agus treoir dóibh siúd a bhraith go raibh rud éigin mícheart laistigh den ghluaiseacht agus go raibh sí ag dul ar strae. Bhí a chuid cainte mar a bheadh léas i nduibheagán. Thacaigh teachtaí na hArd-Fheise leis, in aghaidh toil na ceannasaíochta, agus glacadh seasamh láidir ar an gceist náisiúnta ag an Ard-Fheis sin agus ag Ard-Fheis 1973. Dhiúltaigh ceannasaíocht na gluaiseachta, áfach, na polasaithe sin a chur i bhfeidhm.

Rinne Séamas a lán iarrachtaí sna blainta idir 1972 agus 1974 brú ar an gceannasaíocht cloí leis na polasaithe a leagadh síos ag na hArd-Fheiseanna sin ach ní raibh aon mhaith leis. Chonaic sé cuid mhór daoine fiúntacha ag fágáil na heagraíochta le linn na tréimhse sin ach d'fhan sé féin, níor mhian leis géilleadh. Thuig sé an dochar a dhéanfadh scoilt eile; mar sin theastaigh uaidh a leithéid a sheachaint, dá bhféadfaí ar chor ar bith é. Ag Ard-Fheis 1974, áfach, thuig sé nach bhféadfaí rud ar bith a dhéanamh níos mó. Bhí sé féin agus daoine eile a thacaigh leis curtha ar fionraí nó caite as an eagraíocht ar fad faoin am sin agus bhí a mballraíocht á bhaint de dhaoine eile ag doras na hArd-Fheise. Bhris sé leis na hOifigiúlaigh, eagrais a raibh sé tar éis a dhíogras ar fad a chaitheamh leis ó bhí sé sna déaga agus ar an 12 Nollaig 1974 bunaíodh Páirtí Poblachtach Sóisialach na hÉireann.

Ní raibh laethanta tosaigh an pháirtí, ná laethanta ar bith eile ach an oiread, éasca ar Shéamas ná ar an bpáirtí. Is ar éigean a raibh an eagraíocht nua bunaithe nuair a thosaigh na hOifigiúlaigh ar fheachtas in aghaidh bhaill an Pháirtí i mBéal Feirste. Ag an tús buaileadh daoine, ansin tosaíodh ag lámhach daoine sna glúine go dtí faoi dheireadh gur dúnmharaíodh Hugh Ferguson, ball gníomhach de Pháirtí Poblachtach Sóisialach na hÉireann i gceantar na Carraige Báine i mBéal Feirste ar an 20 Feabhra. Bhí an feachtas a thosaigh mar fheachtas imeaglaithe anois ina fheachtas dúnmharaithe. Sa tréimhse tosaigh sin, dúnmharaíodh triúr ball den Pháirtí agus goineadh breis is

30 duine eile i mBéal Feirste. Bhí daoine ann, ar ndóigh, nach raibh sásta a gcairde a fheiceáil á ngortú nó á marú ag na hOifigiúlaigh agus nach raibh sásta ligint don rud céanna tarlú dóibh féin agus a chuaigh i mbun díoltais. Rinne Séamas cuid mhór iarrachtaí deireadh a chur le feachtas seo na nOifigiúlach trí dhaoine mór le rá a fháil chun idirghabháil a dhéanamh, ach theip ar na hiarrachtaí sin. Ar an 8ú lá de Mhí Bealtaine, tar éis cruinniú i bPort Láirge, rinne beirt Oifigiúlach ar rothair ghluaiste iarracht Séamas féin a dhúnmharú. Bhuail timpeall fiche piléar a Chortina dúghorm ach níor gortaíodh aon duine. Sa Chortina céanna sin a dúnmharaíodh é beagnach dhá bhliain go leith níos deireanaí. Níor cúisíodh duine ar bith riamh as an eachtra sin. Thuig Séamas go maith an dochar a bhí déanta ag feachtas seo na nOifigiúlach — na daoine maithe a bhí cailte agus an drochmhisneach a bhí curtha ar Phoblachtaigh, thuaidh agus theas.

Eachtra amháin eile nach bhféadfaí críochnú gan tagairt a dhéanamh dó ná an robáil mhór traenach i 1976 agus an tosaíocht a ghlac Séamas san fheachtas a lean é. An cás seo thar chás ar bith eile a tharraing aird phoiblí den chéad uair ar bhrúdiúlacht na nGardaí agus is féidir a rá gur do Shéamas atá cuid mhór den chreidiúint ag dul dá bharr. Chomh luath is a scaoileadh é féin saor an t-am sin, chuaigh sé i mbun oibre láithreach chun eolas cruinn a bhailiú faoina raibh tarlaithe, fianaise i bhfoirm grianghrafanna a chur ar fáil, tuairiscí dochtúra a fháil, comhairle dlí a lorg agus an t-eolas ar fad a chur i láthair lucht nuachta. Bhí an fhianaise chomh láidir agus chomh soiléir sin nach bhféadfaí neamhaird a dhéanamh de. Bhí sé ina scéal poiblí faoi dheireadh go raibh daoine á mbualadh go fíochmhar i mbeairicí Gardaí sa taobh seo tíre d'fhonn brú a chur orthu ráitisí cionntachta a shíniú. Go dtí lá a bháis, bháis, bhí Séamas ag obair ar cheist seo na brúdiúlachta agus ag iarraidh a léiriú gur comhcheilg stáit a bhí sa chás in aghaidh bhaill an Pháirtí. Níor mhair sé, áfach, leis an mbua a baineadh amach a cheiliúradh. Muna mbeadh Séamas tar éis tosaíocht a ghlacadh an t-am sin i 1976 i léiriú gníomhachtaí smachtaithe an Stáit, tá sé deacair a rá ag an bpointe seo céard a bheadh tar éis tarlú. Is gá a rá, áfach, gur chuir sé tús le ré nua i stair an ama sin agus gur chuidigh sé go mór le titim an Chomhrialtais níos deireanaí. Léirigh sé a bhuanna anailíse, cinnireachta agus gníomhaíochta go cumasach le linn na tréimhse sin.

Bhí obair Shéamas chomh huileghabhálach sin go mbeadh sé dodhéanta cur síos cuimsitheach a dhéanamh air féin ná ar a chuid oibre. Fear é a chaith a shaol ar fad ag abair ar son cosmhuintir na tíre seo. Sheas sé leis na feirmeoirí beaga, leis na hiascairí agus le lucht oibre na cathrach. Thuig sé a gcuid fadhbanna mar ba díobh féin é. Rinne sé gach ab fhéidir leis, d'úsáid sé gach modh oibre a raibh gá leis, chun saoirse na tíre seo a bhaint amach. Thuig sé an tábhacht a bhí le

feachtas míleata in aghaidh Arm na Breataine agus glac sé féin páirt ghníomhach chumasach san fheachtas sin ó bhí sé sé bliana déag d'aois. Thuig sé freisin an tábhacht a bhí le haontas i measc na bhfórsaí frith-impiriúlacha agus rinne sé gach a raibh ar a chumas chun an t-aontas sin a thabhairt i gcrích.

Ní raibh íobairt ar bith nach raibh Séamas Ó Coisdealbha sásta a dhéanamh. Bhí a fhios aige in gcónaí go raibh a bheatha i mbaol agus go mbeadh, an fhaid is a lean sé den obair a bhí ar bun aige ach níor lig sé dó sin cur as dó. Ba chailliúint gan áireamh é do phobal na tíre seo, thuaidh agus theas.

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**DR. NOEL BROWNE, who attended the Amherst forum in America on the Irish question in 1975, in a personal account of his impressions publicised later, gave the following estimation of the performance of Seamus Costello in the debates:**

*‘Seamus Costello spoke for the IRSP and gave a scintillating display of good humour, history, politics and hard facts.*

*No one who listened to his three hours in the afternoon, and, by unanimous demand two hours additional repeat in the evening, now doubts but that they will have to shoot him or jail him, or get out of his way, but they certainly won't stop him. Costello, the revolutionary Marxist socialist, whose ambition is a secular, pluralist united socialist republic, won't go away until he gets it.*

*I've never heard his brand of republicanism before. He has his own socialist republican following. As well as that, he has gathered around him a considerable block of support from the militant "Officials", now tiring of their own seeming tiring leadership.*

*Is it not a triumph for our radio, TV and newspapers, and of the venomous Dublin political denigration machine, that none of us has ever read, heard of or seen this man's remarkable dialectical skill and political ability?’*

## Luminous Intellect

The annual report of the County Wicklow Committee of Agriculture carried the following tribute, showing the respect with which Seamus Costello was held even by his political opponents

THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN the early afternoon news bulletin on RTE on the 5th October, 1977, confirming the death of Mr. Seamus Costello in Dublin within the previous hour, occasioned acute shock throughout the country and particularly in his native county. Members and staff of the Committee of Agriculture felt a particular sense of grief and loss, against the background of his attendance within the previous twenty-four hours at a meeting of the committee.

The late Seamus Costello was a man of abounding energy, of luminous intellect capable of minute and penetrating evaluation of the most intractable problems, and he fearlessly defended the rights of the under-privileged whose cause he constantly espoused for social and economic betterment.

He was first appointed to membership of the Committee of Agriculture in 1967, and on that committee focussed particularly on agrarian issues and demographic problems in the rural scene as well as viability at farm level, and was particularly concerned with the up-lifting of the small-holder and a strong advocate of land division for the relief of congestion. His ideological commitment to reform frequently generated conflict in debate in which he always exhibited an in-depth trenchancy and a forceful analytical advocacy which were always widely acknowledged, but however heated or controversial the discussion or incisive the exchanges, rancour never lingered outside the precincts of the chamber.



## Oration at Bodenstown

Text of oration delivered by Seamus Costello at the Wolfe Tone commemoration at Bodenstown, 1966.

WE HAVE ASSEMBLED here today to pay our respects to the memory of Theobald Wolfe Tone, the father of Irish republicanism. If we, the republicans of 1966, are to pay a fitting tribute to Tone, it is essential that we examine in depth the ideals for which he fought and died. He believed that the Irish people *"had but one common interest and one common enemy; that the depression and slavery of Ireland was produced and perpetuated by the divisions existing between them, and that, consequently, to assert the independence of their country, and their own individual liberties, it was necessary to forget all former feuds to consolidate the entire strength of the whole nation, and to form for the future but one people"*.

His attitude towards the so-called 'Irish parliament' of the day is also worthy of attention. He maintained that the parliament was a totally ineffective body, that it had changed nothing in Ireland, that the social and political order remained the same, and that, as before, the real power lay with the British Government. He realised that until such time as the Irish people united and demanded their just rights that the wealth of this country would either be controlled directly by Britain, or that it would be syphoned off with the willing connivance of a subservient Irish parliament.

Having seen the problems that existed at the time, Tone in conjunction with the other leaders of the revolutionary movement decided that the first logical step towards a solution was to *"break the connection with England, the never failing source of all our political and economic evils"*.

You may well ask why we of the republican movement, 168 years after the death of Tone, find it necessary to advocate the same course of action that he advocated. The answer is simple. We find it necessary to advocate the same course of action because of the fact that the Irish people still do not control their own affairs, and because their economic and political independence is considered a fit subject for barter or sale by our two subservient puppet parliaments. If the Irish people have any doubt about the truth of this statement and want proof of what I say, they have only to take a close look at the situation that exists today in each part of our partitioned land.

In the North the destinies of 1½ million of our countrymen are controlled by a puppet regime whose existence for some 45 years has depended on the support of British armed forces. This regime has found to its apparent delight that one of the simplest ways of ensuring its continued existence is by the furtherance of bigotry and sectarianism.

Ample evidence of this policy can be found in the recent antics of a certain reverend agent provocateur.

These then are the means by which the British imperialists intend to maintain the people of the North in perpetual slavery. These are also the means by which the working classes are divided against their own material welfare. The pro-British capitalist class who control the economy of the North know very well that, when the people reject those who foster sectarianism, their next step will be to demand a just share of the wealth which they create. These are the real reasons why one section of the community are led to believe that it is in their interest to discriminate against another section. Never are they told that the standard of living which they enjoy, at the expense of their victimised neighbours, is theirs by right — rather are they tricked into believing that these natural rights are a reward for their support of the regime. These tactics serve to ensure that a large section of the population of the North remain loyal to the regime and at the same time do not insist on having a bigger share in the wealth.

In the 26 counties the most that can be said of the position is that it contains one evil less. Religious discrimination is absent. The political and economic subjection of this part of Ireland to Britain is no less complete than that of the North.

However, British control over the destinies of the people of the 26 counties is not as obvious. This is due in the main to the fact that since 1921 they have had the co-operation of successive quisling parliaments in order to ensure that their interests here are fully protected.

The effects of this economic subjection are obvious in every sphere of life in Ireland at the present time. We of the republican movement have no need to tell the Irish people of the sorry mess which has been made of the economy.

The politicians are telling us every day. They tell us that this position arises as a result of the workers insisting on having a better standard of living. Never are we told that the profits which accrue from our labours are invested abroad by the native and foreign capitalists who control our resources. We are constantly told that we must work harder for the same wages despite the fact that we have to live with an ever increasing cost of living and an ever increasing burden of taxation. Up to now we have been 'advised' that it is wrong for workers to withhold labour in the struggle to wrest a decent wage from those employers whose only role in life seems to be the exploitation of workers. The situation in this regard has now changed radically, with the introduction of coercive anti-worker legislation. We now find that Mr. Lemass, in his eagerness to please his imperial masters, is prepared to use against farmers and workers the same type of repression which was previously reserved for republicans. It now seems inevitable that the republicans in Mountjoy prison will soon find themselves joined by farmers and trade unionists.

We republicans must not be content to criticise those who misgovern both parts of our country. If we are to regard ourselves as true followers of Tone, we must provide the Irish people with an alternative. It must be a realistic and practical alternative. Our target must be the achievement of the ideals set out in the Proclamation of 1916 — the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities for all our citizens.

This in effect means that we must aim for the ownership of our resources by the people, so that these resources will be developed in the best interests of the people as a whole. Some of you may feel that these aims are impossible to achieve until such time as we have an independent all-Ireland government. It is certainly true that some of these aims will not reach fruition until such time as we have an all-Ireland parliament. However, in the meantime, you as republicans have an extremely important part to play in the furtherance of this policy.

It is your duty to spearhead the organisation of a virile co-operative movement among the farming community. It is also your duty to use your influence as trade unionists to organise a militant trade union movement with a national consciousness. In short, it is your duty to become active, hard working members of each and every organisation that is working for the welfare of all the people and towards the reunification of the country.

You should use every possible opportunity to acquaint the people with our policies on land, industry and finance. We believe that there should be a limit to the amount of land owned by any single individual. We also believe that the large estates of absentee landlords should be acquired by compulsory acquisition and worked on a co-operative basis with the financial and technical assistance of the State.

In the field of industry, our policy is to nationalise the key industries with the eventual aim of co-operative ownership by the workers. The capital necessary to carry out this programme can be made available without recourse to extensive taxation by the nationalisation of all banks, insurance, loan and investment companies whose present policy is the re-investment of our hard earned money in foreign fields.

This in short is our policy. This is our definition of freedom. It was Tone's definition, Lalor's definition, Mitchel's definition, and the stated aim of Pearse and Connolly. We can expect the same reaction to the implementation of these aims from the forces of exploitation, whether native or foreign sponsored, as the originators received in '98, '48, '67 and 1916. Therefore, to imagine that we can establish a republic solely by constitutional means is utter folly. The lesson of history shows that in the final analysis the robber baron must be disestablished by the same methods that he used to enrich himself and retain his ill-gotten gains, namely, force of arms. To this end we must organise, train, and maintain a disciplined armed force which will always be available to strike at the opportune moment.

## Aims . . . Principles . . . Policies

In an interview with an Italian journalist shortly after the formation of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, Seamus Costello defined the party's aims and objectives with his customary clarity and precision.

*What does your party stand for?*

We are a revolutionary socialist party and our objective is to create a revolutionary socialist state in Ireland. Part of the struggle for a socialist state entails resolving the national liberation struggle and ending British imperialist intervention, whether military intervention, political intervention or control of aspects of the economy. This is the basic position of the party. We see the ending of British imperialist intervention in Ireland as an essential prerequisite for the development of the class struggle between left and right in this country. The class forces in Ireland have never developed properly in the last 50 years basically because of the imperialist intervention and because of the fact that the national struggle remains incompletd.



*Friends of the Irish revolutionary struggle demonstrate in Paris at the news of Costello's murder*

*Could you tell us something about the structure of the six-county state and its relation to the non-development of the class struggle in Ireland, especially as regards the position of the Protestant working class?*

Class politics have never really developed in the six counties because of the nature of the state. The Unionist majority, or the loyalist majority, have always enjoyed some marginal privileges. Basically because of their loyalty to Britain, and because they wanted to maintain the constitutional status quo, they have been rewarded with the better jobs, better housing, and up to recent years they had advantages in voting. The organisations traditionally used to maintain this loyalty are the Unionist Party and the Orange Order. They have always crossed class divisions, and always had a large following of working class people. They've had the petty bourgeoisie, they've had the support of the native capitalist class. For these reasons the class struggle has never really developed in the North, and we feel that it cannot develop because of the basic nature of the state, because of the sectarian nature of the state, and because of the manipulation of the sectarian divisions by the imperialists, who deliberately created these divisions in the first place, and subsequently fostered them.

*Is there any situation anywhere in the world with which you could compare the situation in Northern Ireland?*

I can't think of any example which is parallel in every respect. There may be some general examples. An example perhaps, although not identical but with certain comparisons, would be the French in Algeria. They saw their allegiance to France as a means of preserving their privileged status. Therefore they fought to maintain French domination in Algeria. There are some parallels, but in my opinion none of them is essentially identical.

*About the working class in the Republic, its level of consciousness both in an anti-imperialist sense and in a socialist sense?*

In the anti-imperialist sense its level of consciousness is, I think, pretty well developed for historical reasons. Perhaps you could say it is instinctive rather than theoretical. It is something people have inherited for hundreds of years, and in times of crisis it becomes very evident. This sentiment, or anti-imperialist opinion, is there, and we've had many examples of it in the last five or six years. After Bloody Sunday when 13 people were killed in Derry by the British army, something like half a million people demonstrated in Dublin. Factories and shops closed and the British embassy was burned. There were 100,000 to 150,000 there the day it was burned. These demonstrations are a manifestation of historic anti-imperialist sentiment or opinion. The major political party here, Fianna Fail, have traditionally got approximately 50 per cent of the votes in every election. Their original

motivation was anti-imperialist, or they presented themselves as an anti-imperialist party, and for this reason they gained popular support and still retain that support. The development of class politics is a much different question. Class politics have never really developed in this part of Ireland. The working class are organised in the trade union movement. In fact, they are very well organised and better than most European countries in terms of organisational structure and numbers — even in terms of militancy. But there is little or no ideological direction in the trade union movement. Although the trade union movement is officially affiliated to the Labour Party, most trade unionists probably vote for the Fianna Fail party, which represents native capitalism. There is an obvious contradiction there. They are just organised to gain better conditions of work on a day-to-day basis, and to fight for wage increases. But they don't have a perspective for undermining the capitalist system as such. Working class socialist politics are confined to the smaller parties on the left, who represent a section of working class opinion which, unfortunately, is a minority section of working class opinion. One of the principal reasons for lack of development of working class or socialist politics is the existence of partition — the fact that the British are still within the country. In the minds of most people this has been the main question in Irish politics for 50 years. The main question which must be resolved is the struggle against imperialism, so that the workers can think in terms of confronting the native capitalist class. That is the principal reason why we want to end imperialist intervention in the country. We want to see a natural political situation develop, with the confrontation which you normally expect between left and right, and in this way to bring the Irish working class into control of the resources and the wealth of the country.

*How long do you think it would take, if partition were ended, to bring the Unionist working class in the North to a militant socialist position? And what is necessary for such a development apart from ending partition and destroying the six-county state?*

Historically, some sections of Unionist working class in the North have been fairly militant within the framework of the six-county state. They have been militant on some class issues. If the British presence in the country were ended, and if the loyalist working class in the North were convinced that it was ended and finished for ever, we feel that the natural tendency on their part would be to think in terms of class politics within this island. In some ways they have different traditions. They perhaps would have a different definition of what they call civil and religious liberties. They would want those civil and religious liberties protected, and they are entitled to have them protected. They are entitled to have a constitutional arrangement in this country which does protect them. They are also entitled as workers to have their

standard of living protected. The key to the development of class struggle lies in this area, because this raises the whole question of class politics — who controls the wealth and resources. In that context, we think class politics can develop, and the Unionist working class in the North will adopt a radical position. How long is going to take? I don't know. It might happen in a year, it might take ten years. I'm no prophet.

*What is the position about education in regard to clerical control?*

The education system in the 26 county state is a sectarian education system controlled in the main by a Catholic clergy. We are completely opposed to this. We want a secular education system in both parts of the country.

*How would you see the problem of school integration in the North?*

In principle we are in favour of an integrated secular education system. The difficulty about the present situation in the North is that if we do have an integrated education system, it means in effect that we have an education system which is under the control of the pro-imperialist section of the population. So, in the present conditions we would have to argue and oppose that development. The Catholic community in the North have controlled their own education system. The state has controlled the education of Protestants or loyalists. While we disagree with the Catholic Church controlling the education system, Catholic education has tended to produce people who have some form of anti-imperialist attitudes and sentiments, and even politics. We think it is better to maintain that than to destroy it. When we have the destruction of the six-county state, we would have a national education system for the whole country which would be secularised.

*What in your view is Britain's policy now towards the situation in Northern Ireland?*

British policy must be viewed in the light of their attitude towards Ireland as a whole — not just towards the six counties. What Britain wants is to maintain her influence here over the whole island. Her military and political intervention in the North is simply a means of maintaining this influence and this control. Britain knows that if she is compelled to withdraw from the North, she loses all control over the economy, the wealth and the resources of this country. She knows that there is a good possibility of the creation of a socialist state. Britain and the EEC countries also would be conscious of the effect of a socialist state in Ireland on the western European working class, in France, in Germany, in Italy, in Belgium and in Holland. A socialist revolution in Ireland would be an inspiration to people all over western Europe. The EEC countries have a vested interest, as well as Britain, in ensuring that there is no change in the status quo in Ireland.

## Principled Stand

In an interview given to an American newspaper correspondent at the time of the violent flare-up in hostilities between the IRSP and the "Official" IRA in Belfast in 1975, Seamus Costello defined, in answer to the questions put to him, the "main ideological differences" which existed then between the IRSP and the "Officials".

Although the interview dealt largely with matters which were of more immediate urgency at the time, and which have subsequently been overtaken by other developments, extracts from it are given here as an illustration of Seamus Costello's consistently revolutionary approach to the problems involved, to the problem of co-operating with other anti-imperialist forces, and particularly to the problem of combining possible parliamentary activities with the general political struggle for national and social freedom.

**In its historical perspective, it illustrates, too, the enduring quality of a serious and principled analysis of current issues in contrast with the forgotten ephemera of opportunism.**

The principal ideological difference would be in our attitude towards the national question. Basically, the position of the leadership of the Officials is that there is no hope of achieving national liberation until such time as the Protestant and Catholic working class in the North are united, and therefore there is nothing which can be done in political terms or in any other terms about this particular issue. Our attitude, on the other hand, is that the British presence in Ireland is the basic cause of the divisions between the Protestant and Catholic working class in the North. It follows that the primary emphasis should be on the mobilisation of the mass of the Irish people in the struggle for national liberation. The Left should play a leading role in this struggle. The rank and file of the Official movement, at the 1972 and 1973 Ard Fheiseanna, put forward a policy which would have led to a more militant approach on this question, but the leadership frustrated its implementation. The Official republicans gradually degenerated into taking a reformist position on a number of very important issues.

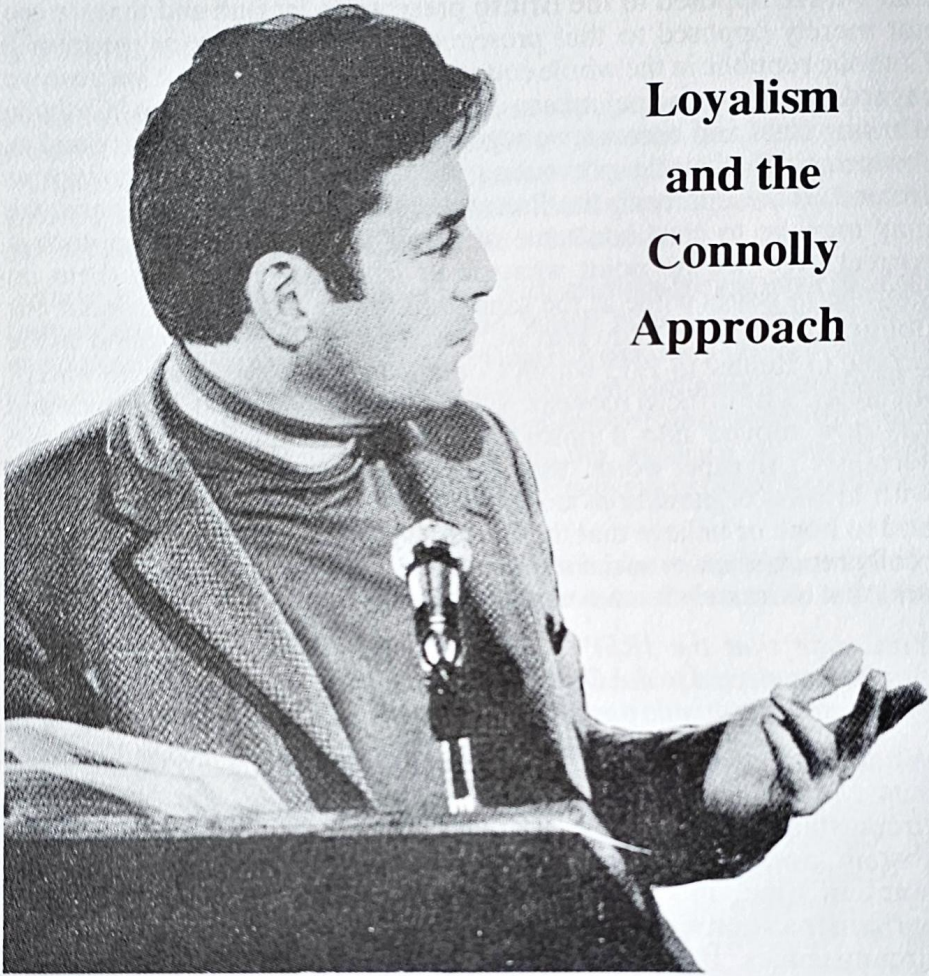
*Would you be willing to co-operate with loyalist groups on short-term economic and social issues?*

Any approach to the loyalist and Protestant working class in the North must be on the basis of a principled political approach. There is no use going to some loyalist group and asking them for co-operation with regard to housing on the Shankill and Falls Road, and at the same time pretending that we are not socialists and we are not republicans. The approach to the loyalists must be an honest one. We must explain to them what all aspects of our policy are. We must explain, for instance,

that we are opposed to the British presence in Ireland and that we are not merely opposed to that presence because we want to establish a Catholic republic in the whole country. We are opposed to it because we regard it as the principal means of dividing the Protestant and Catholic working class and because we regard the British presence in Ireland as the principal obstacle preventing the emergence of class politics in Ireland. If we approach the Protestant working class on this basis, we may manage to convince some of them, at least, that our approach is correct. We see no point whatsoever in co-operating with them on short-term issues while at the same time trying to fool them about our politics. If we were to do that we would be in the same position as the people in Belfast in 1913 whom Connolly described as "gas and water" socialists. The Official movement has tried this particular approach and has now moved into a position of what we would call "Ring-road socialists". In other words, they are prepared to adopt a common stand with loyalist organisations on the question of the ring-road in Belfast, and to hope or believe that the Protestants will not suspect that they are really republicans or socialists. We feel this is a very dishonest approach and that ultimately it is a counter-productive one.

*You state that the IRSP is not an abstentionist party. If you get candidates elected to the Dail, what kind of role will they play? The role of a social democratic party? (e.g. the Irish Labour Party).*

When we say we are not an abstentionist party, we mean we are not a party, in principle committed to abstention. But there are circumstances and conditions under which it might be desirable to abstain, and if we felt that it was tactically desirable at any particular point in time, in either the North or the South, to abstain from parliament, then we would do so. That would depend, however, on the circumstances. If a situation existed, for instance, where there was a possibility of large-scale dissatisfaction on the part of the people with either the 26-county parliament or the six-county parliament, then abstention on our part would be a legitimate tactic. As for IRSP representatives in Leinster House, we would see their primary task as one of highlighting the policies of the IRSP, using the parliament as a platform for the pursuit of these policies and for achieving publicity for them. But members elected to parliament would have to be active in politics outside the parliament, i.e. in extra-parliamentary and agitationary politics on the streets. We see a direct relationship between the successful struggle on streets in pursuit of any particular political objective and the presence of people in parliament. We don't see parliament as an institution that is likely to produce the results which we want from a long-term point of view. We don't see it in a reformist way. We see both parliamentary institutions in Ireland as institutions that have to be abolished if we are to make progress towards establishing a Socialist Republic.



## Loyalism and the Connolly Approach

Costello drew on both the experience and teachings of James Connolly in his approach to the problem of "loyalism" among the Belfast Protestant working class. When questioned in March, 1975, about co-operation with representatives of the Protestant workers on immediate issues "which would appear to unite the people", he defined his position clearly and succinctly.

Connolly had to face exactly the same predicament. In Belfast prior to 1916, you had people who classified themselves as socialists and who were also interested in ending British rule in Ireland. Their approach to the Protestant working class was on the basis of limited and immediate issues. One of the principal issues which affected both sections of the working class was the question of whether or not they could get gas and water into their houses.

Some very militant campaigns were engaged in on these two demands — gas and water for the houses in the working class districts. Republicans and socialists were involved in this campaign on the basis that this was the way to unite the working class. At the same time, these republicans and socialists refused point blank to mention or even discuss the national question with the Protestant working class, on the grounds that if they did, the Protestant working class wouldn't listen to them and that they would lose their co-operation on the issue of gas and water for the houses.

Connolly was totally in opposition to this approach. He categorised them as gas and water socialists. Today in Belfast we have what we call ring-road socialists. They are exactly the same type of people. They are, in fact, the leadership of the Official republican movement in Belfast.

We maintain that any co-operation with the Protestant working class must be on the basis of a principled political position. It must be on the basis of explaining fully to the Protestant working class what all our policies are, not just our policy on the ring-road. We must try and politicise them, simultaneously with conducting a political campaign to get rid of Britain. It will be primarily an educational function, or an educational campaign directed towards Protestants in the hope at least that some significant section of the Protestant working class will understand.



*The funeral cortege on its way through Bray*

## The Broad Front

A document drafted by Seamus Costello, and representing his consistent and clear-cut political approach to the problems of national and social liberation, was presented for discussion to the "Broad Front" talks held between various socialist and anti-imperialist groups in 1977. Costello put his document before the ard chomhairle of the IRSP as the party's response to a discussion document circulated at the talks, and, while adopted as official IRSP policy, it was made clear that the seven demands included were in no way regarded as preconditions for the establishment of a broad front. The document is reprinted here.

The IRSP fully endorse the sentiments, expressed in the basic discussion document regarding the seriousness of the present political crisis in Ireland and fully support the call for the maximum degree of anti-imperialist unity. We feel that genuine anti-imperialist unity can be achieved and that the basic discussion document lays the basis for such unity provided those present at this conference can agree that the document needs clarification and amendment on a number of important points.

As a socialist party, our ultimate political objective is the creation of a unified 32 county Democratic Socialist Republic within which the Irish working class will control the wealth and resources of the nation. This objective can only be achieved through the efforts of a unified and politically conscious Irish working class. The fact that a unified and politically conscious Irish working class does not exist is a direct consequence of the creation of two partitioned states in Ireland, and of continuing imperialist interference in both parts of the country. The problems arising from this lack of working class unity are painfully obvious.

The working class people of the South have been skilfully divided by the allies of British imperialism since the establishment of the 26-county state. For 50 years the Southern working class have been conned into supporting political parties who held out the illusion of radical solutions to both the national question and the class struggle, while in reality they used the working class as a power base for their continued betrayal of both struggles.

In the North the Protestant working class were led to believe that the only way in which they could preserve the marginal supremacy which they held over their Catholic counterparts in jobs and housing was through supporting corrupt Unionist politicians and through them the Union with Britain. Their genuine and well founded fears regarding the preservation of their religious and civil liberties in the context of a united and clerical dominated Ireland were also exploited by the same corrupt politicians. At the same time the Catholic working class were conned into believing that their salvation lay in supporting green tory

politicians who, while hypocritically advocating the re-unification of Ireland, as a guarantee of their ultimate salvation, completely submerged themselves in corrupt Unionist politics in exchange for favours for the class they really represented, the Northern Catholic middle class. As history has shown, the working class, North and South, Protestant and Catholic, have been victims of the so-called solutions to the 'Irish Question' imposed by Britain and her subservient native parliaments.

It is still Britain's objective to find and impose a political solution which will guarantee the continued protection of Britain's economic and strategic interests in both parts of Ireland. Britain is also acting as the local protector of the interests of other imperial powers in Ireland. Some of the EEC countries as well as America and Canada have powerful vested interest in supporting a British imposed 'solution' in Ireland. Britain also has to consider the possible effects on internal British politics of the emergence of a united and independent state in Ireland. In our view, if an independent Ireland is to be viable in economic terms, and if it is to provide a reasonable standard of living for the majority of our people, it can only be done through a radical change in the ownership of wealth and resources. In these circumstances Britain and the EEC countries would have every reason to worry about the effects on working class opinion in their own countries. Finally of course Britain's strategic interests must also be protected through the imposition of a 'solution' which will ensure that Ireland continues its present policy of pro imperialist 'neutrality'.

Every British imposed solution including the original partition of the country, the Northern Ireland Assembly . . . the Convention and direct rule, has been designed to protect these economic and strategic interests. The present policy of the Ulsterisation of the conflict is also clearly designed to perpetuate the division of the country, and the sectarian divisions of the Northern working class.

The native capitalist class, acting through the political parties which represent their interests in both parts of Ireland have played a fundamental role in supporting British imperialist interests in Ireland. They have done so because they have now accommodated themselves to the role of overseers for British and other imperialist economic interests. They have clearly thrown their weight behind the various solutions put forward by British imperialism over the past eight years, and will continue to do so in order to ensure that the one solution which would end their role as the native agents of foreign imperial interests does not emerge.

As a party we therefore recognise the absolute necessity of securing a constitutional solution to the present crisis which will allow the Irish working class the freedom to pursue their interests as a class in the context of the development of normal class politics. In our view the first step in securing a constitutional solution which meets this

requirement must be for Britain to concede the right of the Irish people to exercise total sovereignty over their own affairs. This objective can only be achieved through the creation of a unified struggle on the part of all anti-imperialist organisations. We would therefore support the formation of an Irish anti-imperialist Front composed of delegates from affiliated organisations who support the agreed political programme of the Front. The primary objective of the Front would be to mobilise the maximum degree of support for its declared objectives throughout Ireland. The Front should clearly be seen as the leadership of a mass movement against all forms of imperialist control and interference in Ireland. The Front should have sufficient support and assistance from its affiliated organisations to enable it to open a head office with a full time staff.

We propose the following political demands as the basis on which an Irish anti-imperialist Front should organise:

- 1 That Britain must renounce all claims to sovereignty over any part of Ireland or its coastal waters.
- 2 That Britain must immediately disband and disarm the UDR, RUC and RUC Reserve and withdraw all troops from Ireland.
- 3 That the British and 26 County governments must immediately release all political prisoners and grant a general amnesty for all offences arising from the current conflict.
- 4 That Britain must agree to compensate all who have suffered as a result of imperialist violence and exploitation in Ireland.
- 5 Recognising that no country can be free and independent while it permits imperialist domination of its economic life, the Irish anti-imperialist Front will oppose all forms of imperialist control over our wealth and resources.
- 6 That the Irish anti-imperialist Front rejects a federal solution and the continued existence of two separate states in the 6 and 26 counties as a denial of the right of the Irish people to sovereignty and recognises the only alternative as being the creation of a 32 County Democratic Republic with a secular constitution.
- 7 That the Irish anti-imperialist Front demands the convening of an all Ireland Constitutional Conference representative of all shades of political opinion in Ireland for the purpose of discussing a democratic and secular Constitution which would become effective immediately following a total British military and political withdrawal from Ireland.

We feel that these demands would secure the active support of all genuine anti-imperialists in Ireland and that they should form the basis for an agreed programme of action by the Irish anti-imperialist Front. We are submitting them to this conference in the hope that we can make a serious contribution towards overcoming some of the problems caused by the divisions existing between the anti-imperialist organisations.

## Policy Statement

Address by Seamus Costello to the Troops Out Movement conference in the Mansion House, Dublin on September 18, 1976.

I AM ADDRESSING THIS conference on behalf of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, and for the benefit of those who are not familiar with our policies I would like to give a brief summary of the origins of our party and of the political principles upon which we are organised.

The IRSP was founded in December 1974 by a group of active republicans, socialists and trade unionists, who recognised the need for a revolutionary socialist party — for a party that understood the relationship between the national question and the class struggle in Ireland, and would have a programme of political action based on this understanding. Our ultimate goal is to end imperialist rule in Ireland, and establish a 32 county democratic socialist republic with the working class in control of the means of production, distribution and exchange. Most of those involved in the formation of the IRSP were active members of Sinn Féin Gardiner Place until we reached the conclusion that the leadership of that organisation were unwilling to accept that a struggle against imperialism was in progress, and incapable of mobilising the Irish left in support of that struggle. The repeated failure of the Gardiner Place leadership to implement the democratic decisions of their own organisation, or to allow for an honest and free internal debate of their failure, left many of their most active and politically conscious members with no alternative but to form a new party.

Our party is organised on an all-Ireland basis with approximately 800 members. We accept the principles of democratic centralism, and produce a quarterly internal bulletin which promotes debate on matters of policy, strategy, and tactics within the party. We also produce a monthly newspaper called "The Starry Plough". Our main activity since our formation has been to promote the concept of a broad front in support of the struggle for national liberation, and against repression, North and South. We are also involved in the current campaign for the repeal of the death penalty in the 26 counties, and for the reprieve of Noel and Marie Murray who are currently awaiting execution. We are also involved in organising the campaign against unemployment and the campaign for the retention of political status in Northern Ireland prisons.

I want now to elaborate on our concept of a broad front and the demands around which we believe it should organise and campaign. Our first and most important demand is that Britain should

immediately, and publicly, renounce all claims to sovereignty over any part of Ireland or its coastal waters. Secondly, Britain must immediately disband and disarm all of the locally recruited, pro-imperialist forces such as the UDR, RUC and RUC Reserve and withdraw all troops from Ireland. Finally, Britain must release all political prisoners, grant a general amnesty, and abolish all repressive legislation. As socialists, we believe that these demands are attainable, and that the development of normal class politics throughout the whole country will follow as a natural development. Every republican and socialist organisation in this country supports the demands which I have just outlined, and in our opinion, the vast majority of Irish people would also support them if given the opportunity. During the past 12 months, we have attempted to give them this opportunity by promoting the concept of a broad front. We have held a series of discussions with members of all republican and socialist organisations at either rank and file or national leadership level. At rank and file level in all organisations we found an almost unanimous desire for unity in the struggle against imperialism and an ever increasing awareness of the power of the reactionary forces ranged against us.

Unfortunately, the widespread desire for unity in the struggle which exists at rank and file level is not reflected in the attitudes of the leadership of some of the organisations involved. At the very point in the struggle when unified action is absolutely essential on all fronts, we found leaders more concerned with maintaining their own positions of influence, or in pursuing faction fighting and vendettas against former comrades. We found some whose political judgements were so perverted by the irresistible urge to automatically do or say the opposite to what some other republican, or socialist organisation, said or did that they were prepared to concede victory to the main enemy.

At the very point in our history when a thorough and all-embracing re-assessment of overall strategy and tactics is so vital to the success of the struggle we found leaders unwilling to admit or concede the slightest possibility that they ever made a mistake. Some say that the civil rights strategy as expounded in 1968 and 1969 is still valid and that the democratisation of the six-county state is the central demand. They expect Britain to impose a Bill of Rights on a loyalist majority whose position of marginal supremacy depends on the total denial of civil rights to the nationalist minority. They say that the most revolutionary demand in Ireland today is "peace at any price", and prove their point by marching with the most reactionary elements of Irish society — the elements whose true slogan would be "peace with exploitation" rather than "peace with justice". The same people, who profess to be socialists and democrats, have even gone to London to deny the democratic right of the British working class to demand a British withdrawal from Ireland through the "Troops Out Movement".

Of course, all of the opposition to the broad front concept does not come from the ex-revolutionaries now turned reformist. It comes as well from some sections of the ultra-left who fail to recognise the connection between an unemployed worker from a multinational concern and the presence of imperialist troops in the country. Finally, the opposition to a broad front comes from leaders who recognised the changing nature of the struggle in '69 and '70 but didn't have the ability to create the necessary popular support for their actions. Because they were nurtured in the tradition of the heroic and lonely sacrifice and the tradition of carrying on the torch to the next generation, they saw themselves as an elite sect who would hand freedom to the people on a plate.

The fact is that the elitist and conspiratorial approach is no substitute for the development of a people's struggle. The wonder is that after six years of active struggle, some of those involved are not prepared to re-assess their strategy and tactics. The confusion, weakness and divisions which exist throughout the anti-imperialist movement was heralded in the carnival of reaction which Connolly spoke of. The imperialists and their native capitalist allies are more united than ever before in pursuit of their solution. If our analysis of the situation in Ireland today is accepted as being correct, we would like to know the attitudes of all organisations towards our call for a total re-appraisal of strategy and tactics. In particular, we would like the comments of those represented at this conference. If this conference serves the function of opening a debate on the fundamental problems confronting the revolution in Ireland it will have served a very useful purpose in our view.

The IRSP is fully committed to the struggle for national liberation, democracy and socialism in Ireland, and we understand the relationship between the national question and the class question: the presence of British troops in Ireland is but one manifestation of the imperialist presence and must be seen in the context of the overall relationship between Ireland and Britain. Some people say that Britain would really like to withdraw from Ireland and that she is only waiting for a suitable opportunity to do so without losing face. The principal advocates of this particular argument are, of course, the native capitalist class whose position of power and influence is guaranteed through the maintenance of the constitutional status quo. They promote this idea mostly to confuse and de-escalate the struggle and thereby secure a return to a position of "peace with exploitation". The fact is that British economic interests in Ireland can only be guaranteed through her continued military and political presence here and through the maintenance of partition. Partition has been the instrument through which the working class in both parts of Ireland

have been divided for almost 60 years. In the south the green Tories of Fianna Fail have always had more working class support than the Labour Party. They have had this support because they were regarded as the party that would end partition and complete the national liberation struggle. Of course, the orange Tories in the North kept their working class support in line by convincing them that their position of marginal supremacy could only be guaranteed through the preservation of the union and discrimination against the nationalist minority. Both sets of Tories could thus continue their exploitation of the entire working class and effectively prevent the development of class politics in the whole island.

Even if Britain didn't have to protect her own economic investments in both parts of Ireland, she would still be under tremendous pressure to stay and protect the interests of American and European multinationals who also control large sections of our economic life. Almost every important sector of our economic life is now subject to exploitation by British and other multinational concerns. The most obvious areas are oil, gas, mineral resources, hire purchase, insurance and banking companies, light and heavy engineering companies, textiles and man-made fibres, motor assembly, fertilizers, and fisheries, the construction industry, and finally the breweries and distilleries. As you can see from the list it doesn't leave much in the control of the native capitalist class. In many instances they have been bought out and now fulfil the function of a compliant and obedient managerial corps.

As a revolutionary socialist party we are conscious of the international implications of our own struggle. We regard our struggle as part of the world-wide struggle for the emancipation of working class people. Our contribution to that struggle must be to create an independent socialist state here in Ireland, and at the same time extend solidarity to all genuine revolutionary movements abroad. An independent socialist state based on the history, traditions, and cultural identity of our own working class, would be an inspiration not only to the British and European working classes but to oppressed peoples everywhere. Our enemies are, of course, also conscious of the possible effects of a successful anti-imperialist struggle here, and can be expected to give moral and material support to Britain as an insurance against an upsurge of support for socialism in their own countries. The existence of support groups abroad, particularly in Britain, are of paramount importance to the success of our struggle. The anti-Vietnam war movement in America succeeded in making the Vietnam war a live issue in domestic American politics and eventually played a major role in compelling an American withdrawal from Vietnam. We believe that the "Troops Out Movement" and the

British trade union movement can play a similar role so far as Ireland is concerned. You have the potential to make the Irish struggle a live issue in domestic British politics, and this will ultimately be the key to success or failure in our struggle. For our part, we must accept the responsibility for overcoming the divisions that exist in the ranks of the anti-imperialist movement, and producing the organisational structures which will be capable of demonstrating to the world our determination to secure our own emancipation. If we fail to demonstrate the stature and vision that will be necessary to accomplish our goal we have no right to look for your support.

We are confident that the momentum of the past seven years can be maintained and that even if the leaders of the various revolutionary organisations are not capable of giving the necessary leadership in a rapidly changing situation, then new leaders will emerge from rank and file level to fill the vacuum. Too many sacrifices have been made for us to fail now, so let us move forward to victory. We have nothing to lose but our chains, and in breaking them, we also break those that bind you just as securely as us.

## Youthful Homage

Following the death and funeral of Seamus Costello, a young poet then aged 14 composed the following lines as a tribute to his memory especially for *Maoilíosa agus a clainn*.

### SEAMUS O COISTEALBHA

Dúnmharaíodh Séamus ar an gCéadaoin,  
 'Ba thobann an nuacht é do na daoine.  
 Bhí ómós is grá óna chomrádaí  
 Nuair a shíúileadar taobh leis an gcónra is a mhuintir.

Bhí socraid Shéamais ar siúil ar an Satharn,  
 'S bhí daoine ón Tuaisceart a' freastal ar an Aifreann.  
 Bhí mná agus páistí ó Bhré ina láthair,  
 Thart ar trí mhíle is dóigh liom a bhí sa cheantar.

Fear é Séamus a bhí macánta.  
 Chomh maith leis sin bhí sé ionraic ina chuid oibre;  
 Beidh sé deacair a' bhearna a líonadh.

*Cormac Breatnach*



*Seamus's widow Maoiltosa and his mother Elizabeth  
at the unveiling of the Costello memorial*



*At Seamus Costello's funeral, October 8, 1977, his widow Maoiliosa (centre) with his children, from left Caoilfhionn (12 years), Ronan (4 years), Aoibheann (6 years) and Fionan (9 years)*



*Maoiliosa listening as James Daly delivers the oration at the unveiling of the memorial. Just behind him is Miriam Daly*

## Reflections by Miriam Daly

on Seamus Costello's life



The Costello Commemoration Committee owes much to its first chairperson, Miriam Daly, who was a member of the *ard-chomhairle* of the IRSP when Seamus was murdered.

Her politics were very similar to those of Seamus, and it was for her adherence to them she met the same fate and was murdered in her home by agents of imperialism.

She was tireless and persistent in her efforts to see Seamus fittingly honoured, especially by the unveiling of the memorial at Little Bray churchyard. For that occasion, which meant so much to her, she wrote the oration, which was delivered by James Daly.

She made the occasion a time of meditation on the meaning of Seamus's life and death. The themes she emphasised were his essential rationality and morality. She was conscious that the core-meaning of the life of a revolutionary is a universal one, and that it is nothing if not the embodiment of the highest ideals and aspirations of man, a struggle for the triumph of good over evil.

Her tribute to Seamus is in itself a tribute to her own kindred spirit.

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OUR TIME OF mourning is over. Death, even the natural, peaceful death of an old person who has completed his life span and been blessed to live to see his children multiply and prosper, is always experienced by the living as a blow, as a threat to the security with which they plan ahead and relate to others. The pain of bereavement is like a sickness for which the only certain cure is time. And in the case of

Seamus Costello the sorrow was all the greater and the suffering the more acute since he was struck down by a hired assassin at 38 years of age.

Today a memorial has been unveiled, a monument in stone and bronze conceived and executed by John Burke, an Irish socialist sculptor of genius whose labour as an artist has been dedicated to the same goals that Seamus pursued politically. Nora Connolly O'Brien, dedicated political activist, daughter, student and authority on James Connolly was to be with us to perform the unveiling ceremony, but sickness, which we hope she will speedily overcome, has prevented her. At the memorial meeting last week the poet and intellectual Anthony Cronin, the historian Pádraigh Ó Snodaigh, Ite Ní Chionnaith the Gaelic scholar with Bernadette McAliskey, Niall Lench, the secretary of the IRSP, and Sean Doyle ard-chomhairle member from Wicklow, contributed talks on the significance of Seamus's work and life.

It is fitting that the artists, scholars, political activists of Ireland should honour his memory and that under the organisation of the Costello Memorial Committee a memorial has been erected here which is an inspiration to us and a practical example of the art that Irish socialism inspires. The practice of raising enduring monuments in stone to be testimonials to the lives of heroes, and the gathering of people by the tombs of great men to reflect on their principles and actions, and to draw inspiration from the artists who conceived their stone memorials, is as old as civilisation. In Ireland in recent times the severity of the repression against republicans has meant that annual commemorations at the graves of republican heroes have developed a special dimension, as the only occasions on which political speeches could be delivered and elementary organisation done.

Patrick Pearse, whose centenary we celebrate this year, whilst delivering the oration at Bodenstown at the grave of Wolfe Tone in June 1913 said: "*We have come to the holiest place in Ireland, holier to us even than the place where Patrick sleeps in Down. Patrick brought us life but this man died for us. And though many before and some since have died in testimony of the truth of Ireland's claim to nationhood, Wolfe Tone was the greatest of all that have made that testimony, the greatest of all who have died for Ireland in old time or in new. He was the greatest of Irish nationalists, I believe he was the greatest of Irishmen And if I am right in this I am right in saying that we stand in the holiest place in Ireland, for it must be that the holiest sod of a nation's soil is the sod where the greatest of her dead lies buried*". This place in Little Bray is in the same way a place of inspiration for all Irishmen and for all socialists.

Most of us knew Seamus Costello, some for a longer, others for a shorter time, in greater or lesser depth. All of us have been touched by his greatness. To meet him was to meet a person who valued life and lived it intensely, to recognise his discipline. In all circumstances all his decisions were taken on rational grounds and once taken they were defended. This is not to say he never changed his mind, or that he was always right. But it does mean that the principles he held were held sincerely, as he expected others to hold them also, and that he was prepared to explain them at any length and in any depth to anyone who was genuinely interested in building socialism and liberating Ireland. To discuss politics with him was a serious, challenging business. As his politics evolved and he faced the challenges posed for him by his own analysis, he made difficult decisions, but he explained the reasons for decisions he made, and they were consistent with his political development. To have known him or to have studied his life is to face the challenge of his dynamic, charming, coherent and demanding personality and to risk being changed by it. As I said when I spoke at his graveside on that awful funeral day two years ago, "*To be associated with him was to be inspired by his greatness, and to learn new dimensions of human possibilities*". The passage of two years has re-inforced that judgement.

His great qualities were rationality, imagination, generosity and courage. His rationality led him to examine the world as he found it and to study the relationships between classes and between nations. He willed the good as do all good men, and studied the history, not only of Ireland but of the whole world. He saw that economic relations were organised on the exploitative capitalist system which rewards the strong and the powerful and the immoral, and exploits and grinds into intolerable oppression, the weak, the unarmed, the defenceless. He saw that this is not only the case between classes, but also between communities and nations.

He saw that the state into which he was born, and which called itself Ireland, was not the historic Ireland for which Pearse and Connolly died. He saw the six counties occupied by the British army and ruled in a sectarian way that oppressed intolerably the nationalist people who lived there. He saw in the twenty-six counties a neo-colony. But he believed that problems had solutions, that oppression is not a necessary part of the human condition, that socialism is the most rational form of political organisation, and that it was armed might and ideological deception that prevented men from living rationally, not only in Ireland but wherever the capitalist system and its imperialist violence deformed mankind and prevented the true rational nature of man from being realised.

His powerful imagination led him to see what life could be like if it

were ordered rationally and justly; how Ireland and Irish people would be if the British armed forces were removed from Ireland, if the resources of the country were used to provide work and wealth for the people instead of profit; how, when the reasons for acting in a pro-imperialist way were removed, the conditions would be laid for Irish Protestants to recognise their class interest as members of the Irish working class. He understood the nature of the development of working class national exploitation through international finance and the multi-national capitalist corporations.

He saw that the new powerful empire of the EEC would exploit the weaker states, especially those on the periphery, and intensify the injustice and violence done to the working class. In Ireland he daily saw the people who own property get richer and the 'propertyless' being ground down to the very margin of existence.

His vision of a sovereign Irish socialist republic, with its liberation of the potential for full human living of the Irish working class and small farmers, was so clear and so good that it sustained him through unspeakable disappointments, sufferings and betrayals, and through persecution by the British and neo-colonial 26-county state. As he himself said: "*We are nothing and we shall be everything*". It showed him clearly the dangers that lay in any approach to a so-called federal solution to the Irish problem, and the real threat that was presented to



*Tony Hayde, comrade-in-arms of Seamus Costello from the fifties, unveils the memorial at Bray*

the Irish people's welfare by any form of encouragement to the idea of an independent Ulster.

As the magazine, *Fortnight*, said of his brilliant exposition of republican socialism at Amherst, he gave no hope to those promoting the six-county Ulster. During the 1977 anti-imperialist unity talks, he led the resistance to that pro-imperialist compromise.

His generosity led him to dedicate his life to improving the lot of mankind. He was not satisfied merely to study and understand human life in classes and under imperialism. Equally, he scorned the elitist preservation of the fruits of his thinking amongst a jargon-ridden few, who would find occupations for themselves in theorising while the historic present passed by. His socialism was more demanding.

It was his duty to show the Irish working class their class, national interest, and how to act in their own liberation. This was the labour of a revolutionary, and in Ireland with its long tradition of struggle for freedom, he saw his revolutionary duty clearly as resistance to the armed might which kept Ireland and the Irish working class divided and weakened by partition. He became a soldier, a freedom-fighter and a great leader of armed resistance to British imperialism.

In this capacity his personal bravery and military skill were to the fore. But he never divorced military from political struggle, or the national question from the question of class oppression and deprivation in Ireland. He kept a calm and critical eye to the whole reality of any situation, even while he burned with anger and hatred of oppression, and sympathised and fought alongside its victims. The rare combination of all these qualities is something few, perhaps, among us can emulate. But like James Connolly, he is an ideal and a model for us, to judge ourselves by, as well as to be inspired by. This total dedication of a rare and precious personality led to the ultimate sacrifice, in which he laid down his life for his friends.

The very perseverance and endurance he manifested shows us how we must go forward. Before his death he was full of good humour and optimism and confident of a great leap forward. The movement of which he was the chief founder has had to try to make good his hopes while bereft of his leadership. The task still remains, and it is only its achievement which will justify his memory, and those of his comrades who have also given their lives.

Today as we commemorate one who has fallen on the field of battle for Irish freedom and socialism, we remember and pledge our solidarity with those in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh, who are now vindicating his struggle by protesting that their cause is a just war of national liberation, and that the imperialists and their Irish capitalist collaborators have no right to call them criminals. In their stand, they, too, are retrospectively justifying Seamus and all those who have fought and died in the Irish socialist cause. Our duty to them, to him and to ourselves is to press on to victory for that cause.

## Seamus Costello Memorial Committee

THE SEAMUS COSTELLO MEMORIAL Committee was established at a meeting held in the Central Hotel Dublin, in December, 1978. The purpose of the Committee was to raise a suitable memorial to the memory of Seamus by raising contributions from people who value the principles and politics for which he struggled during his active lifetime.

THE COMMITTEE COMMISSIONED John Bourke, the sculptor, to execute a memorial in Wicklow granite, which was unveiled on October 7, 1979 in St. Peter's Cemetery, Little Bray, Co. Wicklow.

AN ANNUAL PRIZE WILL BE ENDOWED for an original essay on either the policy or practice of Republican Socialism in Ireland. The purpose of the essay competition is to stimulate political debate and provide a forum for publishing such writings. Further details of this essay competition may be had by writing to the Secretary.

IT IS ALSO OUR INTENTION to publish a biography of Seamus, based on the best available sources, which should be a major contribution to historical scholarship in Ireland. To this end, the Committee would be grateful for any material relating to Seamus, i.e. writings, tapes or photographs. These should be forwarded to the address below.

AFTER THESE FIRST CHARGES have been met it is hoped that it will be possible to give a contribution towards making provision for Seamus Costello's dependents.

SPONSORS: † Miriam Daly (Founding Chairman of the Committee); Elizabeth Costello; Maoilíosa Costello; Maire Comerford; † Nora Connolly-O'Brien; Maire Bean Uí Dhochertaigh; Uinseann Mac Eoin; Tomás Mac Anna; Joe Stagg; Ita Ní Chionnaith; Daithí Ó hÓgain; An Athair Piaras Ó Duill; John Arden; Margaretta D'Arcy; Jack Lynch; May Hayde; Raynor O'C. Lysaght; Eddie Douglas; Brigid Makowski; Aine Fagan; Anna Barron; Len Gaynor; James Daly; Tony Hayde; Peggy Doyle.

COMMITTEE: May Hayes (Chairman); Tony Gregory and Elizabeth Doyle (Joint Secretaries); Peggy Doyle and May Hayes (Treasurers); Maoilíosa Costello; Tony Hayde; James Daly; Osgur Breatnach; Johnny White.

FURTHER COPIES OF THIS Pamphlet, together with details of any of the above undertakings of the Committee may be requested from the Memorial Committee, at the address below. Donations may also be sent to this address.

PUBLISHED BY: The Seamus Costello Memorial Committee, C/o 39 Dollymount Park, Dollymount, Dublin 3.



SEAMUS COSTELLO  
REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST,  
ASSASSINATED 5th OCTOBER 1977, AGE 38 YEARS