

No. 3

An Irish Socialist Review

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Aug/Sept 1982

GERATTION

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IRELAND

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THE HALF
OF IT



EDITORIAL STATEMENT

What kind of people are producing *Gralton*? What kind of people will read it? We think the answer to these two questions is the same: those interested in discussing the realities of Irish society and the methods of radically changing it; those who feel that no existing publication or organisation is at present providing a forum within which the experiences, victories and defeats of the past decade can be assessed and learned from.

We hope *Gralton* can become that forum. Our aim is to promote debate and discussion centering around a number of broad positions:

- * that capitalism is not a force for progress and has to be replaced by Socialism
- * that Socialism consists essentially of people controlling their own lives in the workplace and the community
- * that such a change of system goes far deeper than anything that can be achieved through parliamentary methods alone
- * that real change cannot be brought about through the actions of any small elite group, whether guerilla army or state bureaucracy, but requires the action of masses of people acting consciously together to establish their own power
- * that none of this change can be achieved solely in an Irish context

But *Gralton* will not be simply discussing ideas. We also aim to give practical support to the struggles and movements of the day by providing information, commentary and factual analysis of service to trade unionists, feminists, socialists, political and local activists — and by opening our columns to those actively involved even if we do not share their political viewpoint. We believe there is a close link between the experience of activity and the development of ideas and we shall always be seeking to strengthen it.

The Editorial Board of *Gralton* reflects who we believe to be our audience: individual socialists and activists in a wide variety of left-wing movements. Some of us are members of left organisations, more are not. Among us there are differences of tradition, political bias, interests — even some sharp disagreements on major political issues. But we all share a basic political approach and method: that of looking towards and participating in the struggles and movements of the working class and all the oppressed and exploited sections of society.

Believing that the successful mobilisation of people is itself a political gain contributing far more to real change than the mere existence of a political party, *Gralton* will be independent, broad-based and non-sectarian in all its coverage. Independent, because only freedom from the control or dominance of any organisation can produce the kind of open, self-questioning exploration and exchange of ideas that is necessary. And this is partly a recognition that none

of the existing groups contain the full answer themselves — although some individuals may consider certain organisations closer than most.

Gralton will not be handing down any firm “line” Our articles are the responsibility of the authors alone. We welcome articles from currents and organisations of the left by way of contribution to the debate, but we are not a “heavy theoretical journal” so they will have to be written in ordinary English and priority will be given to articles from whatever source which raise real questions or which provide useful information. Sexist terminology will be cut.

If *Gralton* is to succeed in its aim of providing a forum for debate, discussion and analysis then the widest possible number of people involved with the magazine the better. To facilitate this, the overall direction and control of the magazine is being vested in a body called Gralton Co-Operative Society Ltd., consisting of all individual readers who are in broad agreement with the aims of the magazine as outlined above and are committed enough to the project to take out a Supporters Subscription. The Editorial Board will be accountable to the group and in future will be elected from it. We hope as many readers as possible will identify with the magazine in this way — and by writing for it and selling it — and thereby help to make *Gralton* as relevant as possible to the advance of the left in Ireland.

Editorial Board

Paul Brennan ■ John Cane ■ Michael Cronin ■ Mary Cummins ■ Des Derwin ■ Colette Fallon ■ John Goodwillie ■ Goretti Horgan ■ Gene Kerrigan ■ Pete Nash ■ Tom O'Connor ■ Molly O'Duffy ■

JIM GRALTON



JIM GRALTON is the only person to have been deported from the 26 Counties for political activity. Gralton was not prosecuted for any criminal offence. His offence was to have helped give the poor, the landless and the unemployed of County Leitrim the confidence to fight for themselves.

In the early Thirties, Gralton devoted himself to establishing a social hall for the people of Gowel, Leitrim. For this heinous crime he was denounced from the pulpits and the hall was eventually burned down. Finally, in 1933, the De Valera government succeeded in deporting him — despite a vigorous campaign on his behalf waged by left wing trade unionists and republicans, unemployed activists and local supporters.

Gralton's name represents a challenge to established authority, a call for people to take their fate into their own hands and an imaginative application of socialist ideas in a difficult environment. For all that, and more, he deserves to be remembered. That's why this magazine is named after him.

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Women in the unions, four-page pull out page 17.



Eurocommunism: Marchais of the French C.P. with Berlinguer of the Italian C.P. A guide to the Parliamentary roads, page 24.

Gralton was with the hundred mile march for jobs, page 36.



Cover photograph (by Derek Spiers). Two traveller children inside a Tigin in Finglas.

Coming soon

Taxation and socialism
Radical theatre
The crunch in the Labour Party
Pornography
The debate on partition
The new Irish working class

The Abortion Referendum

Where the Left stands

The Anti-Amendment Campaign has, since its launch, gained widespread support on the Left in Ireland. But not quite universal and not always unqualified. GORETTI HORGAN provides a run down.

LABOUR PARTY policy in favour of a secular constitution has not, as yet, translated itself into opposition to the Amendment. There are, however, a number of heartening moves in this direction within the party. The Labour Women's Council has come out with a strongly-worded statement against the Amendment and affiliated to the Anti-Amendment Campaign. They have put a motion to the July Administrative Council opposing the Amendment but it may well be that any decision is deferred "until the precise wording of the Amendment is available."

Meanwhile, a number of individual Labour members have come together to form the Labour Committee Against The Amendment, which is operating as an action group within the AAC. It will also be working at all levels within the party and encouraging grass roots opposition to the Amendment.

The **WORKERS PARTY**, on the other hand, has publicly stated that it will oppose the Amendment referendum in the Dáil but has not yet seemingly reached a decision on whether to throw in their lot with the AAC. The women's section and the youth section are pushing this course, but the Ard Comhairle's decision on the matter may well depend more on their perception of the AAC as being tarred with the pro-abortion brush. Such caution may not please all their activists.

SINN FEIN have issued a statement opposing the Amendment, but they will not be getting involved in the AAC, believing that too many of their supporters might be alienated by such open commitment.

The **DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PARTY** has however, thrown itself wholeheartedly into the AAC. A DSP policy document on women calls for the decriminalisation of abortion and the legislation of therapeutic abortion. As a result,

Jim Kemmy, T.D., has been having a rough time of it though. DSP meetings have been picketed by SPUC members carrying placards saying, "Kemmy murders babies". He can certainly expect an influx of SPUC activists to Limerick for the next General Election.

TONY GREGORY, T.D., is unlikely to have any such problems. Gregory rationalises his refusal to take a stance on the Amendment by claiming that abortion is not an issue for his constituents. Apparently only trendy, middle-class women have abortions. Yet figures produced by the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre, show that 64 of the first 1,000 women referred by them for abortions in England came from his area — of which well over a third were manual workers, unemployed or working in the home. But apparently these women don't come to his constituency clinics to talk about them, therefore, according to Gregory, they simply don't happen. And isn't it just electorally handy for him that they don't.

The **COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND** and **PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY** are both committed to a woman's right to choose and are working within the AAC. The CPI do not, however, see abortion as the main issue at stake in the proposed referendum whilst PD see as their priority, not raising the right to choose, but the provision of an anti-imperialist analysis, laying stress on seeing the referendum as the inevitable result of Fianna Fáil's "green Catholic nationalism".

The **IRISH REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST PARTY**, the **SOCIALIST WORKERS MOVEMENT** and the **DUBLIN ANARCHIST COLLECTIVE** support a woman's right to choose position and are working within the Woman's Right To Choose Campaign. The RTC Campaign sees the defeat of the Amendment as the immediate priority and is committed to building the AAC. It also sees the referendum as an opportunity to raise the question of abortion and to promote debate about the right to choose.

Forum two

Well, in the last issue we promised you another Forum. The topic this time was "How Socialist are Socialist Countries?" About eighty people attended the forum which was held in Liberty Hall in Dublin, and heard Matt Merrigan, Eoghan O'Murchu and Eamonn McCann argue the toss. Needless to say there wasn't too much agreement on the nature of the Socialist Countries.

Eamonn McCann put forward the theory of State Capitalism. He argued that the relations of production in the USSR and similar countries were essentially the same as in the Capitalist West, with a bureaucracy acting as a ruling élite. Matt Merrigan seriously doubted that *truly* Socialist countries could suppress a Workers' Movement like Solidarnosc. In the "socialist countries" the official trade unions were, as far as he could see, merely appendages of the State, promoting increased productivity and output rather than the interests and rights of workers.

But no one said that there were no problems argued Eoghan O'Murchu, editor of the *Irish Socialist*, the socialist countries are *building* socialism, a long hard process. The essential thing, he argued, was that life in the USSR is a good deal better than in the West, with no unemployment or poverty. In addition he cited the support that

these countries gave to anti-imperialist movements and struggles around the world.

Well you pays your money an dyou takes your choice. Unfortunately most of the audience — mainly socialists and political activists — had taken *their* choice a long time ago. Rather than a discussion, the forum consisted mainly of well-rehearsed set piece contributions on the topic (and occasionally off the topic). While some people tried to open a discussion, the sectarianism of the Irish Left oozed visibly around the hall and once again we talked of our differences rather than our agreements.

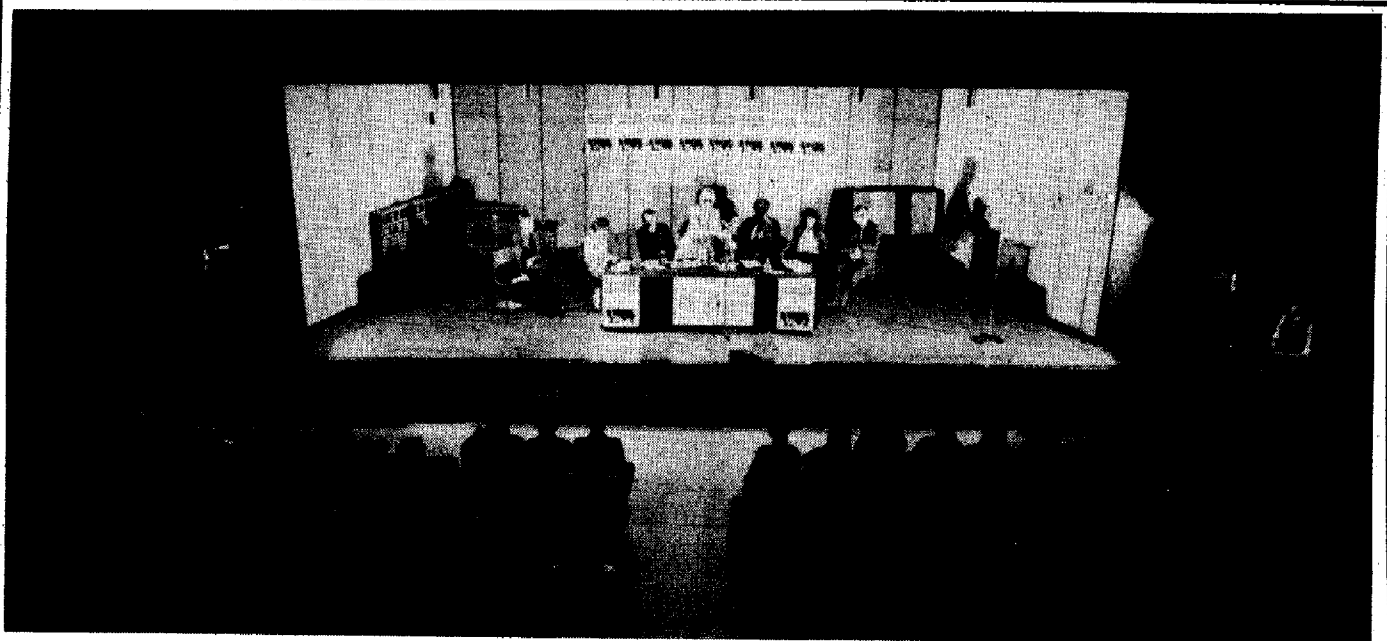
So where does that leave our stated objective of encouraging non-sectarian discussion and debate amongst socialist and radical thinkers. Well, we are not giving up the idea of a forum. Next time we will choose a topic with a lot more grey and less black and white.

We believe that the Left have got to get together to fight for socialism and for change in our society. Events such as the latest attack on public sector workers and the budget-by-stealth increase the urgency of the task.

As for the next forum... well the summer months are not the best time for getting people to meetings, so watch this space in the next issue.

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The Anti-Amendment Campaign

Progress report

Despite the difficulties the Attorney General is reported to be having with the wording of the proposed amendment to the Constitution, the Taoiseach reiterated his commitment to the referendum during the Galway East By-election campaign in July. It would appear that Fianna Fáil does not intend to change its stance.

Fine Gael's liberal image, not to speak of its Constitutional Crusade, were greatly tarnished by FitzGerald's rapid yes-response to the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign last year. As branches of his party pass motions against the amendment and the Protestant churches unequivocally condemn its sectarianism, he appears to be thinking again. His current position is to wait and see the text before he commits himself. This is the escape route the Labour Party also seems to be using, though many of its sections have already publicly opposed the amendment.

Fianna Fáil's unprincipled opportunism may once again pay off if it can claim the dubious merit of being the only party fully behind the amendment. With that possibility in the air there can be no expectation of the referendum being quietly ditched.

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of this whole affair is the extent and force of the Protestant opposition. The Church of Ireland and the Methodist and Presbyterian churches have not only stated their opposition but have also written to and visited the three political parties about it. Throughout the country individual clergymen are speaking at public meetings, writing to the newspapers, being interviewed on radio, providing meeting places and generally

supporting the Anti-Amendment Campaign.

To my knowledge they have never taken such a public political stand on anything before. On issues like divorce, contraception and the control of Community Schools they more or less suffered silently the Catholic Church's encroachment on the rights of their members. But when at last they speak out they choose abortion as the subject. Fair play to them!

The Anti-Amendment Campaign shares much of its organisational form and tactics with the H-Block/Armagh Campaign of '80/'81. Similarly, it defines itself as a broad front campaign attempting to hold within its ranks many divergent views. Its minimum platform consisting of five points of opposition to the amendment — that it is unnecessary, wasteful, sectarian, anti-democratic and shows disregard for the needs and rights of women — is intended to keep out nobody and contain everyone. Thus the AAC is composed of some strange allies; Protestant church leaders, feminist right to choose supporters, bourgeois liberals, revolutionary socialists, anti-imperialists and two-nationalists — to name only a few!

The overall political and tactical direction of the campaign is determined at regular delegate meetings and a trade union committee has been set up to co-ordinate the work of raising the

issue in the unions. On the ground the campaign is organised in the form of local and regional action groups. These do the local publicity work, which largely consists of holding public meetings, seminars and fund-raising socials, poster, leafletting, collecting in pubs and lobbying T.D.'s.

Many of the more seasoned campaigners to be found in the action groups got their experience from the H-Block/Armagh campaign. For some at least, the AAC is providing the way out of the demoralisation which followed the defeat of that campaign.

This proposed amendment, despite the fact that it represents a strongly organised offensive, it is a godsend(?) to the women's movement in Ireland. A Woman's Right To Choose Campaign could never in 10 years have generated the amount of discussion about abortion as this proposal will do in 10 months. Not alone are people seriously considering grounds on which abortion might be acceptable, but the hypocrisy of it is also becoming more apparent.

Women are probably treated worse here in terms of the law, medical practice, social welfare and general attitudes than in any other country in Europe. Feminists have always explained this as the result of the power and influence of the Catholic Church. Recent articles in *Magill* and *In Dublin* uncovered the forces behind this amendment. They are doctors who wish to

maintain their absolute authority and control, rabid reactionaries who oppose all democratic rights and arch-Catholics who fear all expressions of sexuality.

This is the opportunity for women to take on the opponents of everything the women's movement stands for. If women could not find the issue to unite on before, it has surely arrived now.

Mary Gordon



THE ANTI-AMENDMENT CAMPAIGN

can be contacted by phoning 308636.

The women's room

A Women's Centre was opened in Dublin on 8 March 1982, International Women's Day.

It consists of four floors over ground floor level at 53 Dame Street (side entrance) Dublin 2. Included in its nine rooms are a small coffee bar, library and resource unit, typing and duplicating facilities and a small dark room. Other rooms are available for meetings where women's groups can debate, share experiences, pass on information, counsel women and make policy on the various issues in the women's movement.

The Women's Centre did not occur overnight. Briefly its history is as follows:

In May 1978 at a seminar on family violence in Greystones organised by Women's Aid the following resolution was adopted:

"That this Conference supports the principle of the establishment of a women's centre to be run by women for women, and that groups such as Combat Poverty be approached to provide a premises and that a Steering Collective from this Conference be formed to carry out the proposal".

In June 1978 the Steering Collective (SC) formed from the Greystones Conference held its first meeting. About 800 letters inviting ideas and participation at a public meeting on 22 July were circulated. A document containing proposals for a women's centre was drawn up by the SC.

At the first public meeting in July the proposals were accepted. Fundraising, premises and special interest groups were formed and coordinated by the SC.

In December, at an open meeting in the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union Hall arising out of a report on premises, the SC were given responsibility to look for not just a campaign office but a few rooms. Fundraising during this period brought in over £1,450.

Disappointments over premises followed but later in the year campaign officers were acquired at

8 Marlborough Street from which the Campaign proper was launched in February 1980.

During our stay in Marlborough Street, groups using the Campaign offices included WICCA magazine, Women and Medicine, WASTE (Women against sexist education), Feminist Federation, W.L.M., Association of Pre-School Staffs, International Women's Day Committee and Women Against Violence.



Ita Gannon

We had to vacate these premises in 1981 as they were due to be demolished and, as the Campaign had never got off the ground, women got involved in other issues and the Campaign existed in name only. However, the need for a focal point for women's activities was still evident. When, early in 1982 the present premises were found, the remnants of the Steering Collective got together and rented it.

The main aims of the Irish Women's Centre Limited adopted at a public meeting in 1980 are:

(a) to establish and maintain a Centre for women which will provide a meeting place, information bureau, educational facilities and other resources and facilities as the Steering Collective and members think fit.



(b) to promote and encourage the advancement of women in all parts of life in Ireland.

(c) to promote and assist the establishment of Centres for women throughout Ireland.

(d) to encourage the exchange of ideas and information among women at home and abroad.

(e) to aid in bringing about closer coordination among women's groups.

(f) to run commercial undertakings including the running of a creche, coffee shop and bookshop, and to print articles, pamphlets, newspapers and to publish documents, newspapers, books and articles.

(g) to promote the education and training of women in Ireland and to carry out research on women in Ireland.

(h) to oppose at every level the oppression of women in Ireland.

Lesbians, Action for Lesbian Mothers, Yoga for Beginners, Women's Right To Choose Group, Association of Pre-School Staffs, Women's Study Groups, Assertiveness Training Group and Consciousness-raising Group.

Finance, as usual, is a headache. Groups donated lump sums of money to enable work to be carried out so that the Centre could open on 8 March. Through donations, the hire of rooms and the coffee bar, the rent is met. Other sources of funding are being investigated.

In the meantime we would welcome donations. Money can be lodged direct to our bank — Allied Irish Bank, 7/10 Dame Street, Account No. 87290046, the Irish Women's Centre Limited, or call to the Centre Monday to Friday, 2—5 p.m.

There are rooms available in the Centre for meetings throughout the day. Women are welcome to call in and see or phone to make a booking. Our phone number is 710088. Opening hours: Monday to Friday — coffee bar — 1.15 to 10.30 p.m. Monday to Friday typing and duplicating service — 2 to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday — library and resource unit — 6.30 to 8 p.m.

Despite the many years and many disappointments experienced in acquiring the premises, things look very hopeful at present. Our Georgian house is hardly big enough to cope with the increasing activity. Despite the differences, it is likely that the Women's Centre will facilitate unity on certain issues, while allowing groups to develop their own particular interests. Also it will provide interaction between the variety of opinions found in the women's movement in Ireland.

Ita Gannon,
Administrator

Gays step up the pace

MELISSA MURRAY and CHARLES KERRIGAN of the newly-formed Dublin Gay Collective argue that gay men and lesbian women need a more militant organisation to promote their cause.

The trouble with being an oppressed minority is that nobody takes you seriously. Minority equals marginal equals peripheral. At best, you're an issue to be taken up from time to time by those involved in "the main struggle". Anyone who has any pretensions to being a good liberal, let alone a good leftist, will naturally support, without question and without thought, "homosexual rights". And certainly, it often is without thought. It is without realising that the struggle of lesbian women and gay men challenges the ideology and the practice of the "straight left".

For years the women's movement not only had to struggle within and against the system, but also against the complacent sexists of the left. It had to be made clear to the predominantly male left that first, feminism was an issue, then, gradually, that it was a main issue, a significant and essential part of the socialist movement.

There are still, of course, a large number of socialist men who have only learnt to add a few words to their potential vocabulary and happily retain their old viewpoint. After all, sexual politics is a bit *personal* and really a matter for the individual and then, we're all so used to attacking the enemy out there that it is a little hard to suddenly have to look critically at oneself.

As radical gay people, we have to be recognised by the law and to be neutralised by liberal concessions. Of course we agitate for reformist demands, but they are not our fundamental objectives. The type of society we envisage — the one that we are struggling for — is a socialist, non-patriarchal, non-sexist society.

Within the gay community itself, we are in a minority at the moment, and are looked upon with suspicion and hostility by the two main gay organisations. In their efforts to survive at all, these organisations. In their efforts to survive at all, these organisations have become at best, Don't-rock-the-boat timid, at worst, conservative and reactionary. They have a very real fear of being political because it might draw unfavourable attention from the gardai and the media.

Such argument has been proved totally ridiculous after the events of the past year. The media's coverage of gays has reached an all-time low.

Remember the homophobic binge that the press indulged in over Kincora and recently the *Sunday Tribune* printed a series of three articles extremely offensive to gay people. As for the gardai, everyone must be well aware of the harassment that took place during the Charles Self murder investigation when over 1,500 gay men were interviewed by the police.

The authors of this article were involved in setting up a Gay Defence Committee to protest about this gardai harassment. It drew support from many sections of the Left. The picket on Pearse St. Gardai Station had support from the Right To Choose Campaign, socialist feminists, the left and the republican movement. That is the kind of support we desperately need. But it must always be understood that it is for the radical gay movement to define the issues and the strategy. Too often people's support is conditional on us following their programme on matters that gay people themselves must decide.

In June, the National Gay Conference was held in Dublin. Two hundred people attended and for the first time the percentage of women nearly equalled that of men. The discussions, covering areas like lesbians and gay men at work, gays in a patriarchal society etc., were nothing if not lively. Resolutions were passed affiliating to the Right To Choose and Anti-Amendment Campaigns. An Action For Lesbian Mothers group was set up. And, last but not least, the first meeting of the Dublin Gay Collective was announced.

The Dublin Gay Collective is a mixed collective of progressive gay people with a definite activist orientation. For example, one of our first actions was to join the People's March For Decent Jobs on its demonstration in Dublin and to send a message of solidarity which also pointed to discrimination against gay workers.

The Collective meets every other Thursday night at 7.30 p.m. in the Grapevine Centre, North Frederick Street. August meetings are on the 12th and 26th. We are also publishing a newsletter and would welcome contributions from a progressive viewpoint. We are also willing anytime to give educational or engage in debate with any group or organisation. Contact: P.O. Box 1076, Dublin 1.



Clodagh Boyd (Report)

Why Socialists should not support university students

Spending on third level education (for those aged over 18) is in effect an enormous subsidy for the middle class. Two reasons:

1) Universities and colleges charge low fees. The rest of the cost is made up by a subsidy from the state — currently costing £2,000 per annum for university students (or £40 per week).

2) University and other third level students are almost entirely middle class. Only 4% of unskilled manual workers' children get to third level education. By contrast, 75% of children from professional middle class backgrounds get to university.

The existing low fees are not what stop children from poor backgrounds making it to third level education. Most of them have dropped out at around 15 years of age. Many have got a poor education. Socialists should be in favour of much better primary education, with particularly good schools for the poorest areas — this money should come from the subsidies now going to third level. The only other source is increased

taxation, which already bears heavily on poor families.

But there is a right to free education . . . isn't there?

Not at the moment there isn't. Only 13% of university students are working class. Reducing university fees won't help working class kids to get to university — only 10% of those sitting the Leaving Certificate are working class.

the same picture applies to Regional Technical Colleges and NIHEs, to a slightly lesser degree.

Is education good for society?

Learning to read and write is — so education up to 15 is probably good for society. The benefits of education after that flow mainly to those who get it — in the form of higher incomes. Higher education is largely a means of monopolising middle class jobs for middle class kids.

Not convinced after reading this far? You've probably been through third level education! Check it out.

The facts above are contained in the recently published ESRI paper 109.

John Shandon

Import Controls For Whom?

Paul Brennan

This article is motivated by the recent comments expressed by the General President of the ITGWU, John Carroll on the subject of Import Controls.

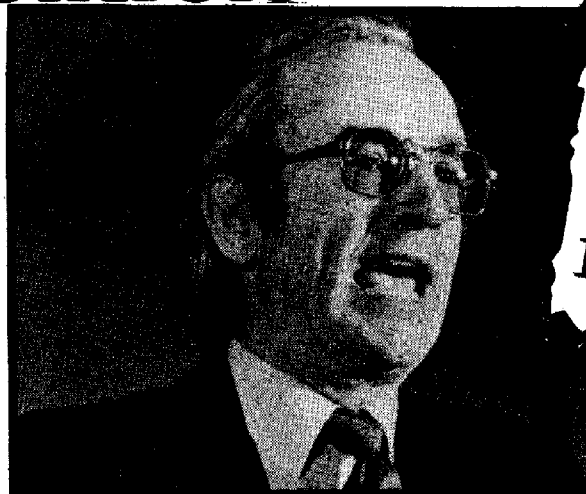
At the recent ICTU conference in Belfast, Mr. Carroll called for "Import Controls and the blacking of goods entering this country in order to protect the jobs of Irish workers." The theme of John Carroll's speech is a subject worthy of detailed examination, in particular what role if any, would Import Controls play as a policy option for the trade union movement and its socialist allies in protecting jobs.

THE PAST REVISITED

The concept of Import Controls is not a new feature of Irish Economic thinking and method. In the 1930s, the Fianna Fáil government, representing the national bourgeoisie, with substantial support from the working class and small farmers, embarked on a policy of industrialisation through import substitution. It was the policy of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, put into force by the sections of the nationalist cause that had opposed Griffith in the Civil War. Local manufacturers were given tariff protection and state industries were established in areas of the economy where private capital was weak.

The policy of Import Controls was tried in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s. The aim of this Fianna Fáil policy was to make the Irish economy less open, by reducing the influence of a foreign price structure and insulating Irish industries against the pressures of international capitalism.

The limits of Fianna Fáil's industrialisation on the basis of high protective tariffs were reached in the 1950s and the party switched under Mr. Lemass to a policy of attracting foreign investment by means of tax reliefs and subsidies. Throughout the era of import substitution, emigration remained at a constant high level. Even with high tariffs, Irish capital was never strong enough to create jobs for all those who sought them. As a result of the Lemass policy, Ireland today has been transformed, in socio-economic terms, in that the country is undergoing dependent industrialisation. This in turn has created a new working class in its own image, one third of the manufacturing labour force, about 85,000 workers is currently



employed by foreign companies operating in Ireland.

NATIONAL SOLIDARITY OR CLASS SOLIDARITY?

It is understandable that John Carroll is concerned about job losses in Irish industry. But he must in my opinion, go beyond Import Controls as a viable policy option to create and protect jobs, mere rhetoric at a union conference is no substitute for a developed socialist policy on the Irish economy.

Ireland has not escaped the international recession. And she faces economic problems unique in form. The age structure of her population, and the basis of her industrialisation which is principally a stage post in the production process of trans-national capital, whose production line may stretch from Puerto Rico via Naas to Portugal.

As we enter the ninth year of the current economic recession, the Irish economy, North and South continues to contract. In a time of crisis, Irish capitalism like its international counterparts seeks solutions to balance the books at all costs. In Irish terms that means over a million unemployed on the whole of this island.

This state of affairs should be a matter of grave concern to all socialists. As never before the Irish Left needs a coherent policy programme and not a blurred vision of what maybe possible. Through piecemeal applications like Import Controls. There is no substitute for a programme of industrial reconstruction, North and South, based on the foundation of democratic planning and industrial democracy. International in character and solidarity — that must occupy the centre piece of any socialist economic policy.

The central weakness in John Carroll's analysis is that he poses the problem faced by Irish workers in terms of foreign capital rather than capital as such and in this way helps to obscure the actual

international nature of capitalist oppression. In times of capitalist crises, the drum beat of national self interest becomes the call of every hack politician and small town business man.

The capitalist system knows no laws but its own. The market place is its battleground and whether the protagonists are domestic capital versus international capital, the trade union movement should never become the voice of our national bourgeoisie (or their multinational paymasters) whose failure through domestic capital usage, led to the strategy via monopoly capital which has transformed Ireland in a generation.

John Carroll has a responsibility to the Irish working class as one of its trade union leaders to seek political answers to the acute economic problems they face. This he does not convey by stressing the interests Irish workers and their employers have in common. By adopting such a view, he underplays the more basic class interests that unite foreign and Irish workers against employers everywhere.

In capitalist societies, workers merely sell their labour power. They receive no share of the profit from their expended labour. Are we to guarantee domestic capital and our bourgeoisie increased profits without question. By introducing import controls at the expense of our fellow workers in the first and third worlds. If we are to heed John Carroll's words, class solidarity becomes secondary to national solidarity and if the latter becomes the central point of our strategy via import controls. We will soon find ourselves not on the road to a radical socialist economic strategy but to class collaboration and working class subordination to a corporatist strategy of national capitalist reconstruction.

IMPORT CONTROLS: THE BRITISH CASE

In Britain, the concept of import controls form an integral part of the

alternative economic strategy, which the Left sees as a major plank in any radical labour government's future policy programme. It is important to reflect on the position the Labour Left takes on import controls. It would be a mistake to see their application by a future Left Labour government as a blue print for use by socialists here, given the unique development of monopoly capitalism in Ireland. Yet because of their importance in socialist economic thinking in Britain and the support given to them by such people as Tony Benn, it is useful to examine the British case for import controls. When many British socialists talk about import controls, they do so in terms that convey the idea that such a socialist initiative is without costs to other workers. This is the nub of the question. Anyway a Left government, British or Irish would have to cope with the reaction of capital, regardless of import controls. The political facts of life are that multinational companies, foreign governments, i.e., the USA and international financial agencies (like the IMF), would all move against a Left Labour government, and capital would react accordingly. Chile and Jamaica are examples of this fact.

If the Labour Left in Britain wants socialists and workers elsewhere to support them on the question of import controls, then they must construct their alternative economic strategy in such a way that makes it clear that its success in Britain is in the interest of workers everywhere. The working class cannot act in isolation, its internationalism is the class power that can erode the power of the big multinational.

RICARDO AND THE CAPITALIST CRISIS

The name of David Ricardo is synonymous with most orthodox economic theory taught in academic institutions in this country. Why? Because elementary textbooks of economic theory contain an exposition of Ricardo's Theory of Comparative Advantage. Certain assumptions are made, and on the basis of them it is shown that every country has a net advantage if it specialises and trades with another, even if one of the two countries in a trading situation is less efficient overall than the other. For example, it may be to the advantage of Ireland to import potatoes from Cyprus even if Cyprus produces them less efficiently than Ireland.

The problem is that the overwhelming majority of orthodox economists, 158 years after Ricardo's death, still think that the theory is relevant. To the real-world situation, in that they see the theory as supporting a policy of free trade between nations, and while not accepting that international capitalism is in deep trouble, they would be prepared to refine

the theory by supporting 'some import controls, at least until the recession buttons out and we have some economic growth next year.'

The reasoning behind policies like import controls, is that they act as a halfway house policy option. To those who are not prepared to develop socialist strategies which define the problems of the Irish economy in terms of the system that gives rise to those problems, i.e., monopoly capitalism. If trade union leaders like John Carroll and Moss Evans of the Transport Union in Britain, act as the brokers of international and domestic capital, then it becomes more difficult to offer political leadership to the working class and a way out of the economic chaos created by the ever decreasing capacity of capitalism to provide jobs, and a decent standard of living. Talk of import controls in John Carroll's context would merely lead us into an economic cul de sac. The real issue is not import controls, but the fact that capitalism itself is in a period of crisis. The question that needs to be posed is, what does that mean to the working class?

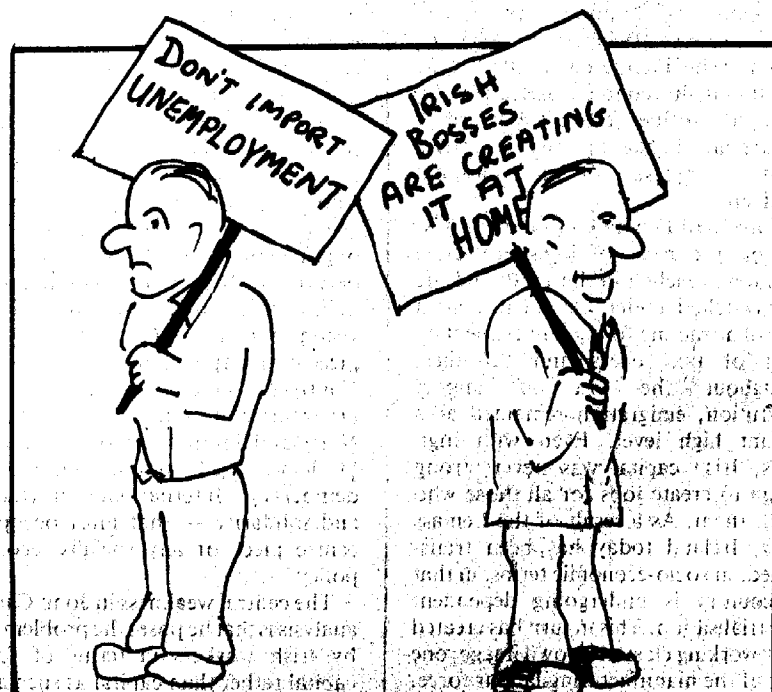
I believe the present crisis is of a new form which will drag on, with minor ups and downs, bringing in its train historical changes and transformations as those of the 1930s, i.e., the Great Depression.

What John Carroll needs to do is acquire a theory to explain what is happening in the capitalist world, then he would not need his import controls option. What would such a view entail? Well it would hold that under capitalism when conditions are favourable to the accumulation of capital and the process goes forwards vigorously and with only minor interruptions, all the

contradictions of the system are softened and the problems to which they give rise can either be solved or at least do not generate dangerous tensions and conflicts. On the other hand, when the accumulation process lags, all the contradictions grow more acute. The problems become more interactable and the tensions and conflicts more dangerous. We, that is those of us living under capitalism, are now in a period of the latter kind, and its most prominent characteristic is stagflation, i.e., persistent high levels of unemployment and excess capacity and inflation.

This view of political economy is open to John Carroll if he so wishes to accept it. Its author, one Karl Marx, left it as a legacy to the working class so that they could break the chains of capitalism, by understanding the nature of the system which oppressed them.

In conclusion, establishment economists (of whom, this country has no shortage), have no gimmicks to eliminate the inflation of the 1980s without inducing a major depression, nor within the limits of a capitalist society do they know how to get rid of unemployment and poverty. The crux of the matter is that the debates over import controls, fiscal policy, money supply and interest rates are irrelevant as far as the needs of the vast majority of the Irish people are concerned. At the end of the day, the only real issue is whether government policy is to be directed to the aims of social justice in defense of the poor and oppressed or to protect business profits. If John Carroll feels that import controls help the Irish working class then he or the research department of his union should make those facts available for debate on the Left.



Flying to the United States on the eve of the Falklands recapture, Charles Haughey and his entourage listened to a recorded John Bowman essay on de Valera. It included 'the Chief's' broadcast reply to Churchill in 1945 — the moment of neutrality, when de Valera defended Ireland's non-participation in the war. Aspiring to de Valera's stature, Haughey beat the republican drum for Irish-Americans in New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and, the following day, he addressed the Second Special Session on Disarmament of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly.

Haughey's journey to the UN was another example of stroke-pulling, to use the degenerate language of Ireland's political godfathers. He sought to use his disarmament posturing — against the background of his policy-switch on the Falklands — to domestically fool supporters of Irish neutrality into acquiescence in his leadership. And he succeeded . . .

Sean MacBride came out in support of Haughey after the Falklands *volte face* and helped draft the disarmament speech (*Irish Times*, 10 May 1982 & 19 June). Pat Comerford, national secretary of Irish CND, presented Haughey as an advocate of a nuclear-free Europe, when he addressed the huge London CND demonstration in early June. And Irish CND, which had welcomed what is considered 'the recent strengthening of the country's neutrality by the Government', subsequently welcomed Haughey's 11 June UN speech (24 May & 28 June).

Irish CND admitted finally that Haughey had not actually committed Ireland to anything (19 June & 24 June). In fact, MacBride's proposals were diluted in the pursuit of diplomatic credit. No reference was made to Ireland's neutral status nor to its implications for superpower rivalry, as Carol Fox, Irish CND's chairperson, observed later. She argued that Haughey could have endorsed the concept of a nuclear-free zone in Europe, by stating that nuclear facilities would never be allowed in Ireland and that all belligerents would be denied access, and that he could have orientated Ireland towards the European neutrals and the search for *détente* between East and West (24 June).²

How could prominent supporters of Irish neutrality have been taken in by Haughey? Leaving aside questions of Haughey's personality, his political *modus operandi*, the incorporation which tends to result from consultation, and Irish CND politicking, the answer lies in the character of Irish neutrality.

When Irish CND argues that the cause of nuclear disarmament can be helped by the defence of Irish neutrality, it taps the same political vein which saw 'our traditional policy of neutrality' advanced by Haughey as the excuse for pulling out of EEC economic sanctions against Argentinian aggression. But the resonance of 'neutrality' in popular consciousness is particularly national. In certain circumstances, neutrality Irish-style could disarm its supporters and see Ireland in NATO, in the context of a move towards the ending of partition.

The so-called tradition of neutrality is an ideological quicksand. It is integrally related, through the medium of the Irish nation, to the pursuit of a separatist, united Ireland. It is characterised by *isolation* and *irredentism* —

Neutrality, Irish style

AUSTEN MORGAN

the qualities of a *stunted nation-state*, where a stable state is legitimized fundamentally in terms of a greater, utopian nation — rather than the *internationalism* of advocates of positive neutrality, who are concerned centrally with building a non-nuclear European *bloc* between East and West.

It is this ideological quicksand Irish CND was sucked into on the Falklands issue. It remains to be seen whether their recognition of Haughey's disarmament duplicity has become a lifeline of ideological rescue.

The concept of neutrality in international relations has evolved but its essence remains the conscious struggle to avoid participation in war. This tended to imply isolationism, the behaviour of a political ostrich. However, the strategic possibilities of the nuclear age have generated geopolitics where neutrality must be pursued through international action. Remaining on the sidelines of regional conflicts has given way to the active, cooperative opposition to war and its preconditions. Neutral states clarify their non-combatant intentions in the hope that threatening belligerents will consider it too costly to infringe neutrality. Nothing is certain for a neutral state, but defence and foreign policy are conducted to reduce uncertainty. Defence commitments can be a heavy domestic burden, but defence agreements and participation in military alliances are ruled out absolutely.

Neutrals in the past, tended to be concerned with security in isolation but the search for collective security — through, for example, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) — has now become the main focus for neutral states. Neutrality has nothing to do with pacifism and it is often compatible unfortunately with a domestic arms industry — Sweden, for example, is an arms exporter. A commitment to 'general and complete disarmament' usually coexists with participation in United States' peace-keeping forces. Neutral states may fight at home in the name of defence and abroad in order to enforce collective security agreements. They seek to maintain internal security, not least because armed insurrection could threaten external



security; endangering the interests of another state would be a breach of neutrality.

Neutrality is usually enshrined in a state's constitution and recognised often by international agreement. Political restraint or apparent agnosticism are often a concomitant of neutrality in military affairs but neutrality implies invariably a commitment to international democracy, espoused in Wilsonian 'new diplomacy' during the First World War and in the work of the United Nations since 1945. And, finally, neutrality is rarely a selfless display of virtue. It can be forced on a state — as is, debatably, the case with Finland and Austria — or it can have an extremely selfish motivation, as is more certainly the case with Switzerland.

Against this template, 'our traditional policy of neutrality' does not amount to much. Ireland falls far short of Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, and Finland, in Western Europe, and, across the divide, Yugoslavia . . . followed by the other, third world, members of the Non-Aligned Movement. Portugal, Turkey, and now Spain — World War Two neutrals which have joined NATO — are better contrasts. Ireland was neutral in 1939-45 and its non-participation in a military alliance has persisted, though successive Irish ministers from Sean MacBride onwards threatened neutrality until it was interred effectively around 1970 when Ireland undertook to join a future defence organization — if one should emerge within a European, federal state.

Ireland refused to join NATO in 1949, not because it was neutral but because of partition, neutrality and partition have become linked illogically from 1938 in a conception of Irish identity which implied self-sufficiency in everything. Ireland has survived outside NATO, less because of state policy, and more because it is low on the agenda of NATO concern, being socially and politically stable (even taking the North into account) anti-communist and pro-Western, and relatively unimportant strategically given its 'benevolent neutrality' towards American global hegemony.

The Irish bourgeoisie has been content to shelter under western security without a defence contribution, believing that stunted nation-states have none of the responsibilities of 'established' states and will even get away occasionally with tantrums of international posturing for domestic gratification. The classic example

of this must be Haughey on the Falklands.

Wpolitical and military non-alignment" amounts largely to the following: the advocacy of Casement and Connolly during the First World War of an Ireland neutralised under German hegemony; Childers' proposal during the treaty negotiations of recognised neutrality — a proposal dropped in order to save de Valera's compromise on constitutional status, "external association"; a "white" dominion in the 1920's and a small European state in the 1930's before the return of the ports permitted the possibility of neutrality; a nationalist opposition to British wars that failed to develop into a practical anti-militarism.

The, during the Second World War: the successful maintenance of neutrality, a fundamental demonstration of national sovereignty; the subsequent enshrinement of neutrality and anti-partitionism as Irish virtues; a reluctance to guarantee Britain's western security; a minority of aficionados of Mitchel's wacry, "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity" — who would be shocked to hear they were the greatest Irish threat to neutrality.

And, in modern times: non-participation in NATO because of domestic political competition on the participation grievance; pro-westernism at the United Nations collapsing into supineness in the face of America; fascination with a Brussels-shaped society as long as this produces net benefits; repeated commitments of preparedness to enter a European defence organisation; the willingness of the toughest nationalist in power for years, Haughey, to trade neutrality in a deal on partition — a deal that would see imperialism well and truly implanted in Ireland, the North "internationalised", the country "Lebanonised" and the international bourgeoisie committed to Irish self-determination.

This is a tradition of passivity and sentiment — not a tradition of neutrality which could have any relevance in the late twentieth century and certainly not a tradition of non-alignment, as that has been articulated by the Non-Aligned Movement. For Ireland, the perspective of advocates of positive neutrality must be resistance to

NATO membership or the EEC's evolution into a defence organization. But Ireland is already part of the pattern of non-nuclear European neutrality, which the movement for European Nuclear Disarmament (END) and supporters of a European *bloc* are trying to create by rolling-back the superpowers from their European theatre of conflict.

The goal must be to orientate Irish defence and foreign policy from non-membership of the NATO defence system to active participation in the development of European neutralism. This implies standing firm with the EEC, allying with link-minded forces, and reaching out to the European neutrals, in the UN and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. A measure of the present difficulty is the fact that the European neutrals consider EEC-membership to be inimical to their neutrality. (Switzerland even considers UN-membership to be inimical).



Much is up for political decision within the EEC, the largest trading *bloc* in the world, which has its own parliament, and is under the political direction of European social democracy in partnership with the bourgeoisie. Since American hegemony is beginning to be challenged by European, Irish attention should be directed to a struggle to define European's geo-political status, a struggle which will involve the critical relationship between European and the third world, and, of course, the social character of the emerging *bloc*. Since EEC-membership will continue to the socio-economically popular in Ireland and a condition for further industrialization, it is indeed fortunate that there is virtue in this necessity.

While Irish neutrality would be threatened by a European defence organisation in present circumstances, participation in the defence activity of a neutralist, supranational Europe would strengthen neutrality in Ireland, albeit at the expense of national sovereignty in issues of war and peace.

The post-1979 peace movement has produced some fascinating thinking about European geopolitics and this is aiding some preliminary socialist thinking on strategy in European states. Irish socialism remains undeveloped, dividing between two positions; the defence of national sovereignty and acceptance of foreign capital with its implications.

The latter, a realistic response to a waning social republicanism (so-called anti-imperialism), amounts to a rediscovery of the Marxism of the Second International.

Theoretically sophisticated, by the standards of post-Connolly Irish Marxism, it is politically fatalistic. The existence of foreign capital, membership of the EEC, participation in European Political Co-operation in search of a common foreign policy, do not mean the inevitability — and certainly not the obligation — of Ireland's entry into NATO. Missing are politics, the recognition that the *status quo* of actually existing neutrality, with all its mystification and hypocrisy, is worth defending from a secular, socialist perspective in order to develop a serious socialist internationalism in Ireland.

The former tends to provide the political complement of pacifism in contemporary Irish CND. The totem of sovereignty, which leads to the defence of the so-called tradition of neutrality, is recognised by the right-wing of Fianna Fáil, the Irish Sovereignty Movement (ISM), the Communist Party of Ireland (though this uses national separatism to be anti-NATO and *sotto voce* pro-Soviet), the Provisionals, and various camp-followers. The popularity of the national sovereignty lobby was indicated in the 1972 referendum, precisely because of its legitimate succession to the political plans of de Valera, which collapsed in the 1950s.

The ability of those who invoke national sovereignty to defend neutrality is demonstrated in the person of Sile de Valera, who led Haughey to his pro-neutrality stance on the Falklands. It was the same de Valera who led the same Haughey to brag about Ireland's contribution to western security in the eventuality of all-Ireland defence participation, in the 1980-81 Anglo-Irish summitry. Haughey had no difficulty spiking the national sovereignty argument: if there was a move on partition, a new defence arrangement would be required, and there would no longer be an obstacle to NATO membership; national sovereignty meant the Irish people could vote to join NATO if the state system in Ireland was restructured with the help of the country's 'friends' in the United States and Europe.

The whole madcap scheme was interrupted temporarily, when Haughey enraged Thatcher with his policy-switch on the Falklands. The gratuitous resort to 'our traditional policy of neutrality' by this political-poacher-turned-gamekeeper froze the *status quo*. Haughey abandoned the terrain of diplomacy and statepersonship for domestic demagoguery. The only consolation must be the damage done Haughey's use of 'teapot diplomacy' to pay the green card. The damage done the attempt to develop positive neutrality is a cause of considerable distress.

What should have been done? Did Ireland play a progressive role? And what was the substance to Haughey's justification in terms of neutrality? Unfortunately, these questions did not receive serious consideration in Ireland. Debate became polarised between the pro-British view of Conor Cruise O'Brien and, effectively, the pro-Argentinian view that Haughey came to endorse — Garret FitzGerald took a middling, European statesperson's view.

Argentina committed an aggression and it was right that it should have been opposed. UN resolution 502 was a democratic statement. Diplomacy should have been resorted to, with or without UN economic and even —

military sanctions. But the punishment should have fitted the crime and the seizure of the Malvinas was not as serious as some pending 'border disputes' in Latin America and was certainly not the aggression of a Hitler. The aggression did not justify the British task force, which resolution 502 forbade. Britain's invocation of defence rights was both hypocritical given the denial of full citizenship to the islanders and a considerable threat to world peace — a whole ocean is not a back-yard. Buenos Aires might have kept the Falklands but their oppression of a British minority and UN condemnation would have made it a Pyrrhic victory.

The question of EEC economic sanctions is debatable. They were not imposed by good UN members, as Conor Cruise O'Brien argues. But nor were they imposed by British sycophants. European social democracy took a stand for the existing international state system, something which did not conflict with resolution 502. It may be, as FitzGerald argued, that the economic sanctions would have been used against Argentina and to constrain British militarism. It is an open question as to what extent Haughey's switch prevented the EEC from holding to its non-military response. One thing is certain: Haughey's hint of continued support for sanctions, given British movement on the budget and agricultural prices, was one of the most cynical contributions to the European role.

The question of British military action, after the *General Belgrano*, is less problematic. The fleet was on the seas when economic sanctions were operating. Haughey's initial support for sanctions was just as much support for militarism, then, as continued support for sanctions would have been. There was no anti-militarist justification for his policy-switch unless his argument was that Britain had gone too far — which it was not. Nor was neutrality at stake: support for economic sanctions, however Britain used it in the war effort, was not directly related to military adventurism. There was no likelihood of Ireland becoming involved militarily and the fact that its EEC partners are NATO members was no more a threat to neutrality than it has always been.

Haughey panicked after his failed horse-trading. Party and domestic concerns became uppermost. The Power speech was classical chauvinism. The irredentist line on the North was prominent, for some reason, in what should have been an analysis of an international crisis. The Mitchel warcry lingered in the background — no advantage would be taken of this British difficulty, but pleasure would be taken in Britain's embarrassment and even adversity, and certainly no support would be extended to the former colonial power even if the sanctions were in the name of international democracy. No doubt a sloppy pro-Argentinianism drifted around somewhere — the tortuous claim to the Malvinas is not that different in character from the republican claim the North.

In surrendering to this, Haughey may have bought support, but he lost credibility. Haughey cannot justify the switch. If he did the correct thing in pulling-out, as his supporters argue, then he had been doing the incorrect thing. Such is the logic of Brit-bashing, a logic which can use the language of independence or neutrality to articulate its essential parochialism.

While his supporters, including Irish CND, argue that Haughey was wrong and then he was right, when he came out with the neutrality argument, I would argue that the cause of neutrality was not advanced because Haughey was wrong at the beginning and wrong at the end. Leaving aside his horse-trading, the early support for EEC economic sanctions was dangerous since it pointed in the direction of British militarism rather than UN mediation. The switch, of course, was a snub to Britain — something which is both good and bad — but it was more critically a nod in the direction of Argentinian legitimacy; something the Argentinian working class may not be too keen about at the moment as the hunt for the conscripted dead proceeds.

But the Powers in the Fianna Fáil cumainn were elated at the ejaculation of 'our traditional policy of neutrality' and, as Ireland turned in on itself, another international opportunity to prove the worth of actually existing neutrality was lost. There should be a lesson or two there!

NOTES

1. Before the Special Session, Sean MacBride argued that Ireland, alone or in association with Sweden, Costa Rica, and others, should present the following disarmament agenda: immediately — a moratorium on weapons development, an end to weapons manufacture, the outlawing of nuclear and other mass destruction weapons, the reduction of military budgets, the phased destruction of nuclear and other mass destruction weapons, a register of the arms trade leading to its cessation, and an independent UN commission on the causes of armed conflict; automatic UN mediation; global UN radio propaganda; disarmament and peace education; the right of conscientious objection; UN financial assistance to the peace movement (*Dawn*, 81, May 1982, p.3). Irish CND also presented its own proposals (*Irish Times*, 24 June 1982). At the UN, Haughey proposed 'some first steps' towards disarmament, concerning the nuclear states: opposition to 'first use' of nuclear weapons; a two-year moratorium on their stockpiling; a test-ban treaty; ratification of SALT II; and the eventual involvement of all nuclear states in START (Text issued by the Government Information Services). Noel Dorris, Ireland's UN ambassador, intimated later that the two-year moratorium was conceived with START in mind and that Ireland hoped to see it included in the final Comprehensive Programme for Disarmament (*Irish Times*, 30 June 1982).

2. She also made a point about Dublin seeking neutrality in the North from London. At times, Irish CND's concern for the North bears towards republican irredentism rather than peace movement internationalism. Such a statement can hardly have been of assistance to Northern Ireland CND (*Dawn*, 81, May 1982, pp.7-8; *Irish Times*, 13 April 1982).

3. As perceived by the signatories of a letter, organised by Anthony Coughlan, Patrick Lynch, and Michael Mullen, sent to the Irish media on 14 February 1980.

4. See the articles by Magri and Halliday in *New Left Review* (Ed.) *Extremism and Cold War*, London: Verso (1982).

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY



The Party's Over

by DERMOT BOUCHER,
formerly of the National Executive of the SLP.

Derek Speirs (Report)

On the 12th June, quietly and with little ceremony, the Socialist Labour Party voted itself out of existence. Five years earlier, almost to the day, the Independent Labour campaign had scored a major electoral success, returning Dr. Noel Browne to Dáil Éireann, and the following November over 300 delegates gathered in Liberty Hall to launch the new party on a rising tide of optimism and expectation. What, if any, were the Party's achievements, and, more to the point, where did it go wrong?

In retrospect its most remarkable achievement lay in surviving for so long. From the outset the SLP was fatally flawed. In the first place there was no consensus as to what the Party was supposed to be: a slightly more honest and democratic version of the Labour Party? An Irish version of the Socialist Workers' Party? the revolutionary Party? An election machine for Noel Browne (or other aspiring public representatives)? A socialist debating society? Worthy objectives perhaps, but hardly reconcilable within a single organisation.

Obviously, too, despite the drama surrounding the expulsion of Matt Merrigan and Noel Browne from the Labour Party, the SLP failed to attract a

majority of Labour Left-wingers. Those remaining behind included the "militant" (which had campaigned for Coalition Labour candidates against Browne and Merrigan), the "soft" Left personified by Michael D. Higgins, and even some of the former Liaison of the Left members, notably Ald. Pat Carroll. The consequence of this disastrous split was that whereas the Left Opposition within the Labour Party was effectively destroyed, the new party lacked sufficient experienced organisers to establish itself on a truly national basis.

Again, the new party created immense difficulties for itself by adopting a remarkably liberal Constitution, a reaction against the restrictive rules and practices of the Labour Party. Revolutionary groups, or "tendencies" were positively encouraged to set up shop, and four duly obliged. These varied from the Socialist Workers Tendency, which had a genuine commitment to building the Party, albeit in their own image and likeness, to the League for a Workers Republic, which merely used the Party for arguing that the SLP should not exist. While never quite descending to the Babel-like conditions of the ill-fated Socialist Labour Alliance in the early Seventies, the SLP soon found itself deeply divided, not so much over policies

(with the obvious exception of the National Question, the Party programme was agreed almost unanimously) as over tactics, activities, and work priorities. Something of a cultural divide opened up between the ex-Labour members and the tendency supporters. At times this bordered on mutual incomprehension.

Ironically, the SLP's first major setback, from which it never really recovered, arose through circumstances which actually united almost all sections of the Party. Outside of Noel Browne's constituency of Artane, SLP members refused to become involved in the familiar, degrading, but for would-be public representatives, essential practice of clientilism. The electoral consequences of such virtue were predictable. Its worth recalling that at the '77 General Election, prior to the formation of the SLP, Matt Merrigan actually polled 300 votes more than Prionnsias De Rossa. However, Merrigan, a busy trade union official, had neither the time nor the inclination to engage in the soul-destroying clinic work that is expected in a working class area such as Finglas; and so a potential SLP Dáil seat was tamely surrendered to the dogged Workers' Party representatives.

In the 1979 Local Elections, despite public and private disagreements, the SLP polled a creditable enough 10,000

first preferences actually outpolling SFWP in Dublin City and County apart from the Inner City wards. However, not a single SLP candidate was elected. In the key area of Artane the SLP won 18% of the vote, but a combination of inept campaigning and personality disputes robbed the Party of an apparently certain seat by the slender margin of 200 votes. Elsewhere the Party's performance varied from modest to frankly disastrous. Lacking any serious national party profile, or local personal work base, several dozen SLP hopefuls literally sank without trace. Many were never heard from again.

Meanwhile, the troublesome tendencies departed one by one, with varying degrees of encouragement. When the largest and last, the SWM, left during the 1980 Conference (a parting of the ways marked by considerable mutual regret), the Party's fortunes appeared to undergo a distinct improvement. This, however, proved to be a false dawn. The biggest crisis was yet to come. Inevitably, perhaps, it centered around the Party's best-known member, and only TD, Dr. Noel Browne.

From the outset, Browne's attitude towards the SLP had been ambivalent. True, he agreed to serve as "parliamentary spokesperson", he appeared at numerous public meetings around the country, and his office in Leinster house became a second HQ for the Party. Yet all the time he kept his distances from the mainstream of the SLP, rarely if ever attending Executive or Standing Committee meetings, and in no sense accepting a Party "Whip". Knowing his legendary unwillingness or inability to work within structured organisations, the Leadership were happy enough to grant him this semi-detached relationship with the Party; but the younger generation of members were shocked and disappointed with the performance.

His public repudiation of the SLP policy on H-Blocks provoked a half-hearted attempt at expulsion at the 1979 Party Conference. While this move was easily headed off by the leadership, Browne's response was prompt and decisive: he immediately announced his resignation as Parliamentary Spokesperson, citing Conference remarks made by Matt Merrigan apparently sympathetic to the Provos. In reality this was a mere pretext (he subsequently admitted privately that he had not disagreed with the remarks, merely that they had been made in public, and, indeed, his own simultaneous comments on a Feach programme might well have provoked a similar outcry had they not been made in the happy anonymity of the First National Language). The truth was that the canny



Knowing Noel Browne's legendary inability to work within a structured organisation, the leadership were happy to grant him a semi-detached relationship with the Party; but the younger generation of members were shocked and disappointed with the performance.

old political stager had begun to distance himself publicly from an unruly and disrespectful party organisation.

Approaching elections, like imminent executions, tend to concentrate the minds of the principal participants. Noel Browne is an exception to this, as to every other rule: he tends to suffer endless bouts of anxiety and indecision. Some months before the 1981 General Election he presented the SLP with an ultimatum: stand down at least 5 of the 7 prospective Party candidates or else he would not contest under the SLP banner. Browne's argument was that as the SLP had no hope of winning seats elsewhere, or even of doing well, they ought to concentrate most of their resources on his constituency. The Executive view was that a Party that placed all its hopes on a 66-year-old man with a serious heart condition, had no real future. When Browne refused to give an undertaking that he would definitely stand even if guaranteed exclusive support, the Executive decided to call his bluff — and

for once got away with it. Both sides of the argument were ultimately to be proved correct. Although ignoring the Party campaign, and refusing even to appear on their political broadcasts, Browne contested as an official SLP candidate, and was duly re-elected, though his share of the poll in a changed constituency fell back sharply from 18% to 12%. Demoralised by this controversy, and ill-prepared, the other 6 SLP candidates could only attract 2,000 votes between them.

Thereafter it was downhill all the way. Browne declined to serve as parliamentary spokesperson in the new Dáil, and finally severed his residual links some months later when the Party criticised his stand on the school entry age controversy (characteristically, he claimed at the time that he had left the SLP two years earlier in protest against Matt Merrigan's stance on the National Question: the reality was that when attending the SLP Annual Conference as a delegate 6 months earlier he had actually voted for Merrigan's policy on the National Question). His enthusiastic endorsement of Garret FitzGerald, and his unswerving support for the Coalition, culminating in his Dáil vote for the Bruton Budget alienated most of his residual supporters. When the Coalition fell, precipitating a general election, Browne found himself unable either to raise an adequate personal organisation, or obtain a nomination from the ~~Local~~ Party.

Meanwhile, deprived of the prestige of a Dáil deputy, and with its credibility undermined, the SLP drifted aimlessly. Having opted out of the February 1982 election for practical reasons, the Party decided on a last ditch effort in the Dublin West By-election. With the IRSP, Provos and CPI all opting out, and the Labour Party in disarray, the initial prospects appeared favourable, particularly as the candidate, Matt Merrigan, had previously contested part of the constituency. However, the campaign was to demonstrate that the SLP lacked the organisational resources, political base, enthusiasm and work record, to compete seriously with the three main candidates; and apart from a belated intervention by the Peoples Democracy, few of Merrigan's many admirers on the Left turned out to help. The result was, frankly, a humiliation.

And so, to coin a phrase, the SLP sank slowly in Dublin West, an idea whose time had past. It campaigned on a variety of issues such as divorce, nuclear power, housing, contraception, and national wage agreements, but, lacking resources and unity of purpose, such interventions tended to be fragmented and ineffective. It produced a bewildering range of policy documents, ranging from Agriculture to Public Transport, and from Women to Worker Control. The forthcoming "pro-



Derek Speirs (Report)



(Above) The first Annual Conference of the SLP. (Below) Matt Merrigan on the Dublin Fair picket 1979.



life" referendum recalls to mind that, four years ago, the SLP was the first Irish political party to demand the decriminalisation of abortion, and that the present developments were forecast at an SLP-sponsored public meeting to coincide with the Pope's visit to Ireland. Sadly, these policy documents, the most comprehensive since Labour's exercises in the late Sixties, remain largely unread, not least by SLP members.

Given the manifest and growing hostility between various leading figures on the Irish Left, the prospects for the SLP's final initiatives (more accurately perhaps those of Matt Merrigan), of attempting to promote Left unity through the newly-established "Socialist Forum", and of influencing the Labour Party through the affiliated trade unions, do not appear particularly bright.

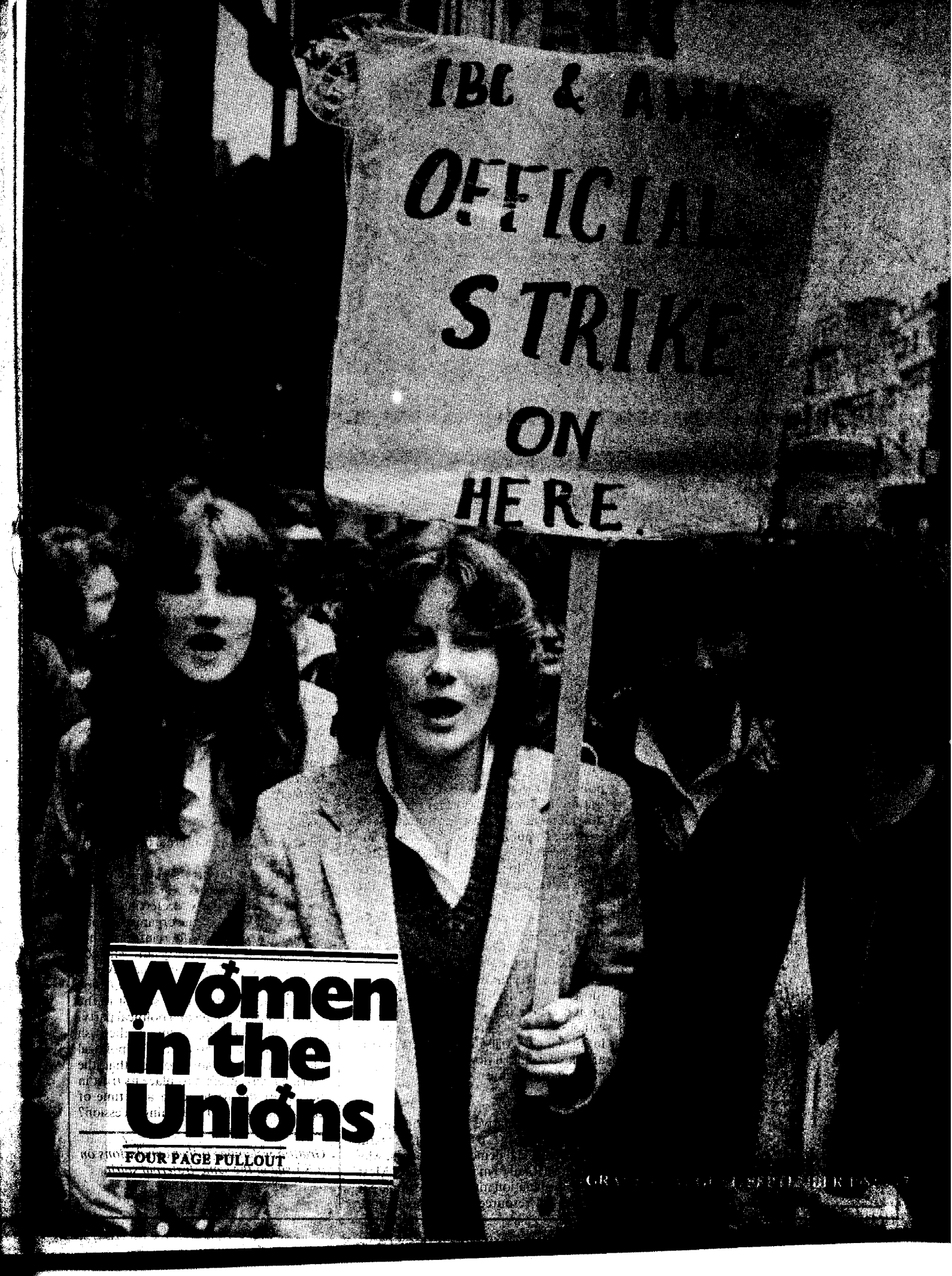
Given the relative success of various Left-wing off-shoots from European social democratic parties, why did the SLP fail to make the grade? Most of the explanation must now be apparent — lack of resources and imagination,

personality disputes, the electoral system, the divisive activities of some tendencies, the personality of Noel Browne, and, not least the fact that the Workers Party had already established itself as a credible alternative to Labour. However, two other crucial factors require comment. The leadership of the SLP (apart from Noel Browne) were always prepared to agree to differ on the National Question, on which there was a broad range of opinions, allowing individuals to do and say more or less what they pleased in a personal capacity. While this practice may have been acceptable in an internal pressure group such as the Liaison of the Left, it was wholly inappropriate to a serious political party, not least in that it precluded concerted party interventions on the subject. Furthermore, the Party's official policy document was at best ambivalent, and, frequently amended, it ultimately became incomprehensible. Not surprisingly, the Party rank and file, not to say the general public, were soon alienated by this state of affairs.

Ultimately, however, the failure of the SLP must be considered a reflection on the Irish Left as a whole. In most European countries the Left commands the support of between 35% and 55% of the electorate; in Ireland the Left's ideologically based support, as distinct from the clientelist support of Left-wing public representatives is at most 5%, and probably a great deal less. When, as in Ireland, the "mother" social democratic party is pitifully weak and in decline, its Left offspring must inevitably be a sickly child. One obvious lesson from Dublin West, and indeed from previous elections, was that the SLP was always regarded as being an integral part of the Labour "family". Far from benefitting from Labour's decline, as the SDP has profited from the crisis in the British Labour Party, the SLP, insofar as it was noticed at all, was associated in the public mind with Labour's internal troubles and general disarray.

Significantly, it now seems likely that few ex-SLP members will seek to join another political party, preferring to join the growing ranks of the organisationally unattached. This will reinforce that phenomenon of recent years whereby activists prefer to involve themselves in single issue campaigns and *ad hoc* organisations, rather than submit to the tedium and discipline of a political party. Given the continuing failure of the Irish Left to create any sort of credible political alternative, is it any wonder that the working class prefers to place its trust in parties of the Right, even at a time of economic crisis and deepening recession?

Gratton welcomes further conclusions on this issue in the same fraternal spirit.



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Women in the Unions

FOUR PAGE PULLOUT

GRAND ILLUSTRATION SEPTEMBER 1987

If you are a woman worker and a trade union member in this country, then the chances are very high that you don't see any positive reason to get actively involved in your union. And even if you do, you are faced with enormous barriers to surmount — not the least of which is the fact that you probably don't hold any representative position. All this despite the fact that one in three trade unionists is now a woman, and the numbers are steadily rising.

In a situation where the dice are loaded against you, any woman worker who wants to set about changing things both inside and outside the unions must have a very clear idea about what she is about. This article aims to provide you with some ammunition on how to get organised.

HIDDEN FROM HISTORY

A short historical glance at the position of women workers in the trade union movement is an essential start.

Women have not always constituted over a third of trade union membership. The growth in women's membership has gone hand in hand with the entry of women into the labour market proper — away from the traditionally unorganised and very badly paid areas of domestic service and farming. In the 1920s, women made up only 5% or one in twenty of trade unionists — and half of these were in the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO).

The Irish Women Workers Union (IWWU) played an early, if limited, role in focussing attention on the plight of women workers, organising skilled and unskilled women alike at a time when there was great reluctance on the part of the trade union movement generally to organise and recruit women workers.

Right up until the 1960's, the male-dominated trade union movement gave little attention to women workers. They fought unashamedly for the "family wage" for married male workers and were reluctant to organise women seeing them as a threat to "men's" jobs and the stability of the family unit (a view held in common with the employers). It has only been since the economic boom of the Sixties, when women began moving into traditional "male" job areas in large numbers, that the trade union movement has slowly begun to see women as "genuine workers" who deserve equal rights with their male counterparts.

SOME ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS

Though the unions may now be organising women workers, they still remain very much a male preserve in terms of who runs them. Consider the following facts:

★ Women make up over a third of trade union membership, yet only 47 (8%) of over 600 delegates at the 1979 ICTU Conference were women.

★ There were only 13 full-time women officials in the 26 Counties in 1979 — less than 4% of all officials.

★ Though women constitute large majorities in some white collar unions, their executives are still heavily male dominated. For example (1979 figures):

Women in the Unions



	% women members	% women on Executive
CPSSA (Civil Servants)	75	29
INTO (Teachers)	70	18
IUDWC (Distributive Workers)	62	22
ASTI (Teachers)	59	20

★ The ITGWU organises more women than any other trade union in Ireland. A third of its members are women. Yet in 1979, only 3 out of 125 officials were women, only 15% of branch committee members and only 19% of



Derek Speirs (Report)

Occupying the confexim factory, Drogheda 1978.

shop stewards. This year a woman was elected to the 18 member Executive — for only the second in its history!

These facts speak for themselves. If ordinary male trade unionists often claim — and rightly — that they have little control over how their unions are run, the situation for ordinary women trade unionists is ten times as worse. At least!

POSITIVE ACTION AT THE TOP?

Some unions are, of course, beginning to recognise that something needs to be done about getting women into representative positions. The ITGWU is a good example. In 1980 the union adopted a

comprehensive document on women in the union that suggested remedies such as reserved seats for women on the Executive, advisory committees, more training for women shop stewards, full-time woman officers etc. Getting them implemented has proved more difficult. In June 1982, they finally appointed one Womens Affairs official and plan a 9-woman advisory committee. But any idea of reserved seats on the Executive has been put on the long finger.

This year's ICTU Conference also threw out a proposal for reserved seats for women. This is obviously something of a sticking point for the men who dominate the top levels of the union movement. A few unions — and it is still a very few — are prepared to contemplate "advisory committees", "special facilities" and the like

for women, but women, as women, actually making the decisions is too much to stomach. Positive Action, how are ye!

REAL ACTION AT THE BOTTOM

It is extremely important to have women represented at all levels of the union but this, in itself, won't reform much less revolutionise the movement in women's interests. Absorbing "token" women into the bureaucracy as it is presently constituted will do little to change attitudes and consciousness at rank and file level — which is where it matters most.

It is not unknown for militant women activists to be "absorbed" into high positions in their unions. This can often be counterproductive to their ultimate cause — especially if they take up unelected full-time positions. They tend to become isolated from the workers, unanswerable, unrecalable and often better paid.

Women trade unionists should constantly be seeking real positive action in the unions to get more women into representative positions. There is no doubt that this would give much needed encouragement for women to get more active at all levels. But it is far from the whole story. Much more important is women organising at the rank and file level to change both the union and their work conditions.

SOME IDEAS ON ORGANISATION

The first thing to remember is that you and your sisters know better than anyone what problems you have at work, what issues make you angry and frustrated, what's wrong with the present union set-up. You don't need a union official to tell you — male or female.

What's needed is to get together *as women* to discuss all the various problems and get organised to do something about them. These women's groupings need to be got together at all levels: the factory, the individual office, the government department, the hospital, the typing pool, the union branch — whatever is the most appropriate grouping at the ground floor level in a trade union sense.

You may run into some opposition from the male-dominated union on this. They like to keep control of what's going on. Explain what you are about to the officials and try to get them to recognise your group as a "legitimate" part of the union set-up. But if this is not possible, fire ahead anyway. "Unofficial" groupings in the union movement are nothing new and have a proud history of militant action. If it's your own male shop steward who is trying to stymie you, then don't forget you can kick him out and get a woman elected instead — there are still far too many male shop stewards representing female workforces.

When you've got your women's meetings together, it's well to get off the ground by concentrating on immediate issues to be tackled as they arise. Equal pay claims, canteen facilities, maternity leave, re-grading claims, toilet facilities etc. Not just *women's* issues. These meetings are important for gaining confidence to tackle the bosses and the union on *all* issues.

As the meetings progress, you can get onto wider issues including how to start changing the male-dominated union. Finding out what women think is wrong and what

should be done is vital here. One way — especially if the group is spread about — is to conduct a survey. The facts will provide good ammunition later on. Ask the union to provide research facilities, if they won't then do it yourselves.

Having decided what issues you want to take up in the workplace and what changes you want to see implemented in the union, the next task is putting the pressure on to get them activated. Fact sheets and newsletters are very important here. Support will have to be sought from other women workers, male workers and throughout the union. Link ups with other women's action committees is also vital. The issues will not be too dissimilar. Enough pressure from the grass roots and things will start to happen.

In this way, by the development of women's committees at the rank and file level and then by spreading them up and across the whole union, much more can be gained — both in the workplace and the union — than merely relying on top-level "Advisory Committees" or a few token women in the bureaucracy.

SOME ISSUES TO BE FIGHTING ON

Meetings: the timing of union meetings is very important for women's participation in the unions. Sunday mornings, for example, virtually exclude women with kids to mind and dinners to cook. As long as most women still perform the dual role of worker *and* housewife, then on-the-job meetings in work time are a must. But in the long run it's that dual role that must be broken — and the unions must play their part.

Creches: some unions are now offering creche facilities at least at their annual conferences. But you still get the line, "The NEC has agreed to introduce creche facilities on a trial basis for a year, with a charge for each child and registration well in advance." Forget it. Demand free creche facilities, properly staffed with unionised workers. They *can* afford it — and not just for annual conferences too.

Discrimination: discrimination in hiring and promotional procedures at work must be taken up directly by the unions themselves and not left to the understaffed, overworked and consequently ineffective Employment Equality Agency.

Right to work: this is a much neglected area in terms of women. The unions must always defend the rights of married women to work and seek to organise them alongside the registered unemployed and expose the discrimination against women in the Social Welfare code.

Equal Pay: this is far from won despite the legislation. The average woman's wage is still less than two-thirds that of a man. The unions tend to ignore the main reason for this — that women are concentrated in the low-paid jobs. Here is a great case for Positive Action.

This list could go on forever. The issues are there. Women workers are prepared to fight them — and fight, damn hard when they do. We must organise ourselves in the workplace and the union to ensure our fight succeeds. Fight on, sisters!

Travellers

Bigotry, tokenism and fighting back

This article was written by a Dublin social worker who has worked with travellers for a number of years.



Derek Speirs (Report)

Travellers constitute a tiny proportion of the total Irish population — approximately 0.1%. Ethnically, they are Irish people but culturally they constitute a separate minority. Several other European countries have indigenous traveller populations: Holland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and England for example. The origins of all these groups are confused but there is a consensus that many of them came from land wars, famines and rural dispossession. In most other European countries there are also groups of Romany gypsies who are a separate race of people but have intermarried to some extent with native travellers. There are only a very small number of Romany families in Ireland.

Nobody has done any conclusive research on the origins of Irish travellers, mainly due to the lack of historical data. Travellers themselves have no definite folklore on the matter although individual clans can trace their ancestry back over many generations. However, their secret language, Shelto or Gamon, which is still widely understood amongst them though not so widely spoken anymore, does give some clues about their origins. It is not a full language,

more a defensive code, and consists mainly of reversed gaelic words, indicating that it originated at a time when Ireland was Irish speaking.

Socially, the most striking feature of travellers as a group are; their early marriage age, large numbers of children (averaging twice that of the settled population), high infant mortality rate and very low levels of literacy. Their nomadic lifestyle sets them apart from the settled population and contributes greatly to the degree of social isolation that they experience. On a cultural level, travellers do not share many of the norms and values of the settled population. The economic base of their society is founded on the need to be mobile, to adapt constantly to economic situations and opportunities. The society is based on the clan as the economic unit. Hence the practice of match-making is designed to reinforce the economic unit of the clan, although more and more young travellers are now insisting on choosing their own partners.

In many ways, travellers can be seen as a throwback to peasant society but this is too simplistic an analysis for a group of people who have survived as a distinct

cultural entity for hundreds of years and who have counterparts in several European countries. Today, travellers face the need to adapt to a settled society that is increasingly intolerant of them and of their lifestyle.

In the last fifteen years, large numbers of travellers have moved to the urban areas especially Dublin, just as the settled population has. One third of the traveller population now live in the Greater Dublin area where they are inevitably caught up in the vicious competition for land. They need places to stay but increasingly they are pushed into the newer suburbs where there are still tracts of open space left. Here they have congregated in large numbers resulting in open confrontation between them and the residents of the "new towns" of Tallaght and Clondalkin.

How will the travellers react to this situation? How have events been allowed to drift to such an extent that travellers are now being hounded from one camping ground to another without any sort of adequate provision being made for them?

First, let's take a look at political organisation amongst the travellers themselves. Over the past 15 to 20 years,

their cause has been "taken up" by bodies such as the *National Committee for Travelling People* (formerly the *National Itinerant Settlement Committee*) which excessively consists of people "acting on their behalf". This group came into existence largely as a result of the *Report Of the Commission On Itinerancy 1961*, which documented their dreadful living conditions and isolation.

But previous to the establishment of the *National Itinerant Settlement Committee*, there had been an attempt by an English gypsy, Grattan Paxan, living in Dublin's Cherry Orchard, to organise the travellers autonomously to resist evictions and to campaign for properly serviced sites and schooling. This attempt was partially successful, but was undermined by the setting up of the Committee and the return of Grattan Paxan to England. Autonomous organisation amongst Irish travellers then virtually ceased up until the very recent past.

The *Gypsy Council* in England, however, has had several Irish travellers among its organisers — there are still five times as many Irish travellers in England as there are in Ireland. The *Gypsy Council* is affiliated to the international *Romano Congresso*, which has fought, amongst other things, for compensation from the German state for the millions of gypsies murdered by the Nazis.

In the past five years, travellers have begun to participate in the meetings of

the new *National Committee For Travelling People* but there is still a strong element of tokenism in their involvement. The Dublin Committee has refused to take a militant stand on the various issues that effect the travelling population: the constant evictions and harassment, the lack of properly serviced sites, the blatant discrimination against them as a group, their children's lack of access to education etc.

One group, the *Association Of Teachers Of Travelling People* (ATTP), has filed a case against the Irish government in Strasbourg for its failure to uphold the human rights of travellers. But this case will not be heard for some time yet and any results that may flow from it are several years away.

As a group, the travellers won their most decisive victory three years ago as a result of a High Court action by a traveller woman, Roselle McDonald. She took Dublin County Council to court as a result of being evicted by them from one roadside camp to another on several occasions. She won a decision, later upheld by the Supreme Court, that a Local Authority cannot evict travellers from a roadside without providing a reasonable alternative. However, travellers have found that Local Authorities can, and do, find ways to indirectly evict them — leaving them without the "protection" of the courts. Overall though, it has had the effect of preventing the constant "moving on" in the Dublin area that had been so much a feature of traveller's lives.



Two traveller children inside a Tigin in Finglas.

The recent attempt by a group of residents to physically force the travellers out of Tallaght has provided the impetus for new defensive organisation among travellers. On two occasions, the so-called "Tallaght Action Group" marched in their hundreds on the travellers camps with the straightforward intention of physically intimidating the travellers into leaving the area.

Appalled by the fascist nature of this attack, a small group of Tallaght people organised themselves to oppose such actions and to defend the travellers. This *Committee For The Rights Of Travelling People* opposed the thugs with placards and pickets and gradually began to draw in the travellers themselves to defend the campsites — a big step in itself as the travellers had vivid memories of being stoned, their caravans smashed up, their children frightened and their property destroyed. All this happened nine months ago in Loughlinstown, County Dublin.

Since these events in Tallaght, travellers have now marched through Dublin three times and picketed the offices of Dublin County Council when a plan for sites throughout the Country was being discussed. They are joining in the meetings of the Travellers Rights Committee in large numbers and, for the first time, travellers from all over the country are expressing solidarity and joining the marches and pickets.

The vast majority of travellers want



properly-serviced halting sites where they can have water, toilets, tarmac, electricity and the opportunity to send their kids to school. Most of them want to retain their identity as travellers, but to do so in decent conditions. A small number want standard housing and assimilation with the settled population. Some would settle for small group housing for travellers only to enable them to adjust to the demands of settled living.

None of this is beyond the capacity of the state to provide immediately. Local Authorities get 100% recoupment from the Dept. of Local Government for provision of these facilities. But local councillors use travellers as a political football — even descending to the level of seeking popularity with their constituents by leading marches of thugs against the travellers as one Fianna Fail councillor, Damian Murray, did in Tallaght. Meanwhile, their public utterances on the subject generally range from bigoted prejudice to outright racism.

But then, the attitude of many of the settled population is quite often racist as well. In a recent interview, a traveller woman, Chrissie Ward, describing her feelings on being refused in a pub because she was a traveller; "I felt dirty, I asked him to look at me, to tell me if there was something different about me, was there a smell? I went home and

looked at myself in the mirror for a long time. I could not see the difference." The sense of discrimination and injustice goes very deep in the traveller population, but there is also an overriding sense of fear. They have all personally experienced racist attitudes and actions ranging from being refused water to outright physical attack.

The settled population find many aspects of the traveller's lifestyle objectionable: the dirt on the sites, the belief (false) that travellers are all involved in some kind of crime or another. Irish people generally are highly intolerant of minorities be they blacks, gays or travellers. Travellers are perhaps the most vulnerable because they are highly visible, illiterate, unaware of their rights, unused to organisation and only beginning to fight back themselves. They need the support of sections of the settled population who have muscle but who are also prepared to allow the travellers to make the decisions about their own lives.

A group of social workers and travellers, the *Social Action Group*, recently formulated alternative policy proposals for travellers in the Dublin area. Copies have been sent to all relevant government bodies, politicians and union organisations. The basis of these proposals is that the government

nationally should take responsibility for policy and provision for travellers, overriding local councils who fail to provide sites and ensuring that travellers are consulted on all decisions. It also contains proposals on child care facilities for the traveller children at risk in Dublin city centre — the so-called "glue children". The proposals are supported by the *Travellers Rights Committee*.

Some practical ways in which people could help are: Tenants or Residents group that feel there is a "problem" in their area should contact the Travellers Rights Committee and ask for a speaker to talk to them about their experience in Tallaght; local authority workers told to evict travellers should contact their unions and help get a union position passed opposing evictions without proper alternative sites. Teachers should invite local travellers into the schools to talk about their lifestyle and problems. The demand for properly serviced sites should be taken up in the unions generally and in tenants and community groups. Bigoted prejudice should be confronted.

You can contact the Committee For The Rights Of Travelling People at 701 Virginia Heights, Tallaght, Co. Dublin. Tel. 570195 and the Social Action Group at 168 Castle Avenue, Dublin 3. Tel. 331314.



Derek Spiers (Report)

A guide to the Parliamentary roads

Brian Trench

Over three days last month (July), hundreds of thousands of people attended a Communist Party festival on the outskirts of Madrid. Dr Feelgood this year filled the role which last year Rory Gallagher had taken — the big-name international rock music act which draws in the young and less deeply committed. Many of Spain's leading performers were also there. And the programme included a group from the People's Republic of China. The Spanish Communist Party does not take its orders from Moscow — not even in the choice of musicians it hires for its festival.

Like similar festivals organised by communist parties in France, Italy and Portugal, this "Fiesta PCE" is the biggest political-cultural event of its kind in Spain. The Communist Party (PCE) organises it professionally — and, at least in relation to the big acts, strictly commercially. The weeks of preparation and the event itself are essential ingredients of the cement which binds members' loyalties to the party.

But the Fiesta PCE had for some weeks been under threat — not from the state, which has learned to live with it, but from divisions which are cutting deep into the ranks of Spain's communists. Over a series of marathon Central Committee and Political Executive meetings during June and July, the PCE has tried to find a formula which would prevent the leadership breaking apart completely and cause a further exodus of members to follow those who have left already in the past year.

The principal local factor in the party's crisis is the difficulty, which affects all Spanish parties, of dealing coherently with the demands for regional autonomy. The strong personal feelings which leading members have about the general secretary of 40 years' standing, Santiago Carrillo, have also coloured the debates. But the differences which have emerged from Poland, feminism, party democracy, alliances with socialists and nationalists, the independence of the trade union movement, and so on, are all reflected in their own way within the French and Italian communist parties.



Enrico Berlinguer, Secretary of the Italian C.P. points the way

TRAUMAS

These three CPs, the largest outside Eastern Europe, who count their members in hundreds of thousands and have 10% or more of the popular vote in general elections, have all been wracked by the same traumas. All of them have experienced a dramatic decline in their popularity. All are engaged in an acrimonious internal debate. Only the Portuguese party, of the western communist parties which operate on that grand scale, has escaped the epidemic. But it never felt the first fever of eurocommunism — that ambiguous tendency in the world communist movement which removed the major Western European parties from Moscow's direct influence.

Just seven years ago, the Spanish Italian communist parties issued a joint declaration which marked the formal emergence of eurocommunism.

Presenting a new critical view of the incomplete achievement of socialism in Eastern Europe and stating a firm commitment to the forms and methods of parliamentary democracy, the "euro-communists" appeared to be ushering in a new era. Now it seemed possible for them to hope for that elusive alliance with other currents in the workers' movement. Now they seemed finally to have kicked out the Stalinist skeletons in their cupboards. Now it appeared the communist parties could reasonably hope to take up a position in the centre of the political stage.

To those on the Right, the new concept of eurocommunism was no more than a ploy aimed at disguising the unchanged, barbed-wire reality of communism. To those on the far Left, it represented a massive concession to social democracy. There was, no doubt, a bit of both, but it was also clear that the three major communist parties of Western Europe stood to gain credibility with their new

"human face". And they did, indeed, score significant electoral gains. Communists would soon be moving in the corridors of power, it seemed.

TATTERS

Seven years later, the dream is in tatters. Even with four members in the socialist-led government of Francois Mitterand — or possibly because of it — the PCF has recently suffered a drop in local election votes. The four ministers have become trapped in the government, born of its own "Left Union" strategy, but now forced by the dictates of managing a capitalist economy in a recession to introduce an austerity programme. Although they voted with the government in June on the overall economic programme, the PCF has had to explain that it doesn't support government proposals to hold back wages. Looking both ways is proving increasingly difficult. But the PCF has not been absolved in any way from the criticisms in the Soviet press of the French government's "zig-zags". And Soviet criticisms still hurt.

The Spanish Communist Party has never recovered from the factional wounds opened at the 1981 National Congress, following which the majority of the Party's Basque members left, six Central Committee members and a group of Madrid councillors were expelled, and regional and provincial sections of the party in Catalonia, Valencia, Salamanca split or were disbanded. In May, as the internal crisis worsened, the party's vote in the Andalusian regional elections fell from 13% to 8%. In June, Santiago Carrillo resigned as general secretary — only to be persuaded to return a couple of days later. But all the evidence of his majority support in the Central Committee leaves the questions unresolved. If the critical minority cannot find a way of staying in the party, the PCE's image as a eurocommunist and therefore, it is understood, democratic party is obviously tarnished.

In Italy, the PCI, led by Ernesto Berlinguer, dropped votes in the June local elections, falling back by as much as five percentage points in some large towns. The slogan of the "democratic alternative" which last year replaced the older slogan of the "historic compromise" was seen not to deliver results — except for the Socialist Party which for so long had seemed irrelevant in Italian politics. The communists' attempts to woo the socialists simply boosted them at the communists' expense. The PSI had been encouraged to adopt a more aggressive pose. At the same time, the leaders of the several trade union confederations, and specifically the communist leaders of the CGIL, are having their mettle tested by the employers' decision to pull out of the

1975 arrangement which protected wages against the nominal rate of inflation. Now the bosses will take on the unions in the open market, and battlefield.

The PCF, PCE, and PCI have all felt in varying degrees the shock waves running through the communist world and the related parties from the events in Poland. For instance, the PCI was quick to oppose the regime's repression of Solidarnosc — so quick, and so keen that it provoked a reaction from some of the older members who reckoned the party leaders were taking their eurocommunism a bit too far. Membership cards were ceremonially torn up in some major engineering factories where the workers re-stated their commitment to something closer to the traditional brand of communism.

In the ranks of the PCF, the reaction was the other way around. The opposition to the leadership has come from those who believe the position on Poland was not firm enough in support of Solidarnosc. The PCF's principal concern has, however, been to prevent

Poland coming between them and their socialist partners in government. They have sought to defuse the issue when the socialists have raised it — as, for instance, in the preparation for a united May Day demonstration.

CRITICAL COMMUNISTS

A grouping of former and current PCF activists who recently held a conference of "critical communists" considers that the crisis of the Soviet-type societies has been "expressed brutally in Poland." They believe that those in the communist tradition are "obliged to analyse honestly the process by which these states were formed, as well as the organisational forms of the communist parties". The key notes of their approach to unity of the working class movement's rank and file and to "exploring new paths to socialism" are "total rigour in the matter of democracy, and full independence and force for the social movements." Linking the same issues, PCF intellectual, Etienne Balibar, says:



A rally of the Portuguese Communist Party

"Whether one wishes it or not, the history of the socialist countries determines *internally* the whole of the working class movement. It is the main historical challenge the movement faces."

These "critical communists" are the logical outcome of the process which the three parties opened by adopting the concept of eurocommunism. But the new notions never amounted to a full theory and — as the insistence on the independence of communist parties from any monolithic world centre might suggest — its advocates have always had different individual interpretations. When leaders of the French and Italian communist parties met in June after a long period during which they had no direct contact, they were obliged to recognise that they had substantial differences on international questions. While they both

communist parties constitute a centralised movement which derived all foreign policy from the interests of the Soviet Union — as it had done, for instance, in the 1930s (see the Spanish Communist Party's attitude in the Civil War) and through World War II (see the abrupt changes of position as Stalin moved from a pact with Hitler to joining the Allies). Each of the eurocommunist parties is more closely integrated into its own state. The disagreement between the PCF and the PCI on the Falklands/Malvinas simply reflected the different attitudes of their own ruling classes.

For all the hopes, and the real signs, that eurocommunism represented a new surge in internationalism within the communist movement, nationalism remains the essential binding force. The implications of that were most disastrously demonstrated in the PCF's

methods to deal with the changed circumstances — and fumbled it. In spite of the pressures from the very significant intellectual groupings around the party to come clean on Stalinism, the PCF moved little from its traditional ground. At the party's February 1982 congress, Georges Marchais suggested that the party had responded inadequately to the signals coming from Eastern Europe in the mid-1950s and had remained too long a prisoner of a model of socialist society which was out of date.

But the party did make some effort to adapt to the demands of left-wing intellectuals (whose role in French society is not confined to intellectual circles but covers much wider social ground) for a more independent and critical approach to socialist theory and practice. PCF philosopher Roger Garaudy took the initiative in setting up a series of meetings and debates in the 1960s with Catholics who had been influenced by the "liberating" experience of the Second Vatican Council to seek common ground with the organised political Left. Much later, the PCF dropped "materialism" as a criterion of communist thinking from its party constitution. By the time that had happened, Garaudy had left the party.

In the mid-1970s, the main section of the party leadership decided on a new tack towards other non-communist tendencies (though not the far Left, who had taken the brunt of their abuse and physical opposition in the 1968 "events") and a new, apparently more open style. They worked for unity with the increasingly influential socialists until, on the eve of the 1978 general election, they inexplicably broke off relations. Although still advocating unity of the Left and laying claim to an independent "eurocommunist" approach, the PCF did not manage to re-open effective lines to the Socialist Party until after Mitterand's election as president in June 1981. Since then, the PCF has blown hot and cold on unity, although it has claimed the appointment of four communist ministers as a major gain for their "Left Union" strategy. The recent replacement of Georges Seguy as leader of the communist-dominated CGT trade union confederation seems to indicate a new, less tolerant turn. The new general secretary, Jacques Krasucki, is said to represent a "hard line" and is not likely to continue Seguy's attempt to develop a more open style of leadership.

The inconsistencies, and more particularly the Polish crisis, have spurred a new wave of critical self-examination by party theorists. Like the other large communist parties of Western Europe, the PCF has spawned a vast apparatus of research, debating and publishing bodies. Not surprisingly, some of the people active in them or recently resigned from them, have turned their dialectical skills in on the party and



emphasised the importance of the developing peace movement in Western Europe and North America, Ernesto Berlinguer read more into it than his French comrade, Georges Marchais, was willing to do.

For Berlinguer, the growth of the peace and disarmament movement indicated that the main impetus for world socialism came from Western Europe, and that the impetus from the East and from the October revolution in Russia was "exhausted". Berlinguer's criticisms of the Soviet Union, of its role in Poland and in Afghanistan, where, he says, there was no evidence that the Government invited in the Soviet troops, were much more forthright than Marchais's. Even on the Falklands/Malvinas conflict they could not establish common ground.

Leaving aside the merits of one position or another, the disagreements are significant as symptoms: under the banner of eurocommunism, the communist parties of Western Europe have taken further than ever before the "polycentrism" which was becoming evident in the communist movement through the 1960s. No longer did the

action against immigrant workers in a Paris suburb.

It is not too difficult to understand why nationalism would be such an important part of these parties' ideological make-up. All of them derive much of their credibility and their traditional support from the role they play in the resistance movements during World War II, and under fascism. And those movements were based very largely on nationalism. But the historical legacy can also be a trap.

RIPPLES

This was clear as long ago as 1956, Nikita Krushchev's revelations about the Stalin period, and the rising in Hungary — sent ripples through the French Communist party, and the ripples found new force when the party was confronted with the new phenomenon of Gaullism. After all, Charles De Gaulle who came to power in 1958, had been the leader of the "official" French resistance movement during the war. The PCF faced the challenge of devising new

its own history. The several new books on the party all contain their share of individual horror stories about the dogmatic leadership and the intolerance of individual dissidence. More significantly, they have been demonstrating that the party's conception of the world, of the desirable goal, and of its role in achieving it have changed little in over 20 years. Its view of the masses and of the mechanism by which it purported to lead them to their own liberation remain largely unchanged.

SPANISH SPLITS

Similar charges are being made against the leadership of the Spanish Communist Party by some activists within its own ranks, and more who have left, or been expelled recently. The PCE's tactical and strategic innovations during the last few years were certainly more substantial than those of the PCF. But general secretary Santiago Carrillo has faced bitter criticism from several sides, including from a sizeable section of the party membership in Catalonia, where communists get over twice the national average of PCE votes, which objects to the dropping of the commitment to "Leninism" and to the severity of the party's criticisms of the Soviet Union. Some of these recently formed a new Catalan Communist Party, after Carrillo had threatened, cajoled and manoeuvred a majority of the PCE's Catalan leadership back into the fold.

The more important, though possibly less coherent, grouping of Carrillo critics are the "reformers", or "renovators", who believing that the eurocommunist approach is correct but that it can never be carried through consistently as long as Carrillo and the other "historicals" — those who trace their record of political activity back through 40 years of Francoism and before — hold sway. They claim Carrillo is dogmatic and inflexible towards the new movements among women and young people and, above all, in the regions, where the demands for autonomy have become increasingly insistent. They point to the greater independence of the Catalan communists from Madrid control as an explanation of the Party's greater popularity in that region.

Basque communists argued they needed more space to work out their own regional strategies, refused to be brow-beaten by Carrillo, and earlier this year left the PCE with most of the members to form a new party in conjunction with a left-nationalist grouping. Leading members in Madrid and elsewhere, including deputies in the Spanish parliament, who supported the Basque comrades in doing this, were expelled. They have formed the Association for the Renovation of the Left, not as a party

with its own ambitions for power but as an intellectual forum. Some of those left in the party, but sympathetic to these "renovators" have continued the internal debate.

Most recently, Marcelino Camacho, leader of the Workers' Commissions, Spain's largest trade union confederation, has been making an issue of the independence of the union's from party hegemony. His alliance with the anti-Carrillo eurocommunists is one of convenience, aimed at achieving greater party democracy, rather than a real meeting of ideas. For Camacho is closer to the PCE's old traditions. The continuing series of crisis meetings has failed to produce an organisational formula which can contain these factional interests. It is especially clear that Carrillo's demagogic appeals for unity and his device of resigning, only to be persuaded to return two days later, have left everything still to be sorted out. It is not tenable to be eurocommunist to the outside world and the opposite towards the membership, Carrillo's critics say.

The background to the internal bleeding is a steady decline in public support for the party. The poor showing in regional elections in the Basque country, where nationalism draws the

partner in any new regional administration.

This decline is all the more serious as the widening splits in the central government party, the UCD, open up new opportunities for the opposition. But so preoccupied is Carrillo with the threat of a right-wing backlash to a Left government that he has been opposing PSOE's call for an early general election, as at the same time arguing that PSOE must not cut itself off from the rest of the democratic forces — meaning explicitly the PCE, and implicitly the "progressive" section of the UCD. Carrillo argues that the UCD still has a role to play in the maintenance of democracy and of the constitution, and that it must be given time to patch up its internal differences. His deeper concern may well be that the PCE also needs time to patch up its own differences.

COMPROMISE

The Italian communists find themselves in a similar predicament. While the coalition governments stumble from crisis to crisis they are unable to get a handle on power. Most humiliatingly of all, however, they see the smaller socialist party gaining in confidence — a

Spanish Communist Secretary Santiago Carrillo has faced bitter criticism from several sides. He has been a member of the Cortes (Parliament) since 1977.



Left's fire, and in Galicia, where conservative parties have always had overwhelming support, was little surprise, but the PCE did have reason to hope for better in the May elections to a regional parliament in Andalucia. However, following a campaign directed personally by Santiago Carrillo, the PCE vote dropped from 13% to 8% and it won no seats, while the socialists (PSOE) jumped ahead to 52% of the vote. The PCE's slogan of "We can do it together" simply delivered voters into the hands of what was clearly going to be the dominant

confidence boosted by the proprietorial interest which the socialist president, Sandro Pertini, assumed in the Italians' World Cup victory.

Ernesto Berlinguer had developed the notion of the "historic compromise" — a phrase adapted from the writings of the Italian revolutionary, Antonio Gramsci, and distorted to take on a much more obviously conservative meaning that Gramsci would ever have intended — to meet a situation in which the socialists were very weak. The compromise was to be between socialists, communists and

Catholics, who would unite to run the country and prevent any right-wing adventurism. The shadow of Chile lay across Southern Europe at the time.

The compromise was on issues of law and order (the PCI, like the PCE in Spain, has often been first to condemn terrorist acts) and on economic and social reforms. Taking the older PCI conceptions of National Government further, Berlinguer insisted on the defence of the state institutions as a political priority. The slogans of democracy, honesty and efficiency (these last two in response to the corruption endemic in Italian Christian Democracy) displaced any notion of fighting for socialism. With 12 million votes in 1976 to back them, the PCI could claim a niche in the state — but could deliver little in return, except perhaps in local administration.

It is there that the PCI has dug itself in — notably in the “red city” of Bologna, where right-wingers bombed the railway station and killed over 80 people some years ago, and where the most recent controversy surrounds a council decision to designate an ecclesiastical building a centre for gays. The communist mayor did his tactful best to avoid a row with the church by delaying the centre's opening until after the Pope had visited the city last April, but he still ran into flak.

The concentration on local government activity has been accompanied by lower-key approaches to trade union work. The “sliding scale”

negotiated in 1975 has reduced the scope for active intervention on jobs and wages. Some dissatisfied members of the communist-led CGIL have broken away form “autonomous unions”, which have particularly attracted newly proletarianised sections in the public service. At the same time, the CGIL's big battalions have been weakened by massive redundancies in enterprises like Fiat (7,000 jobs lost). Some old-fashioned, distinctly non-eurocommunist discipline has been required to hold the membership up to respectable levels. But CGIL can still turn out the millions for a token national stoppage.

The shift to the “democratic alternative” eighteen months ago was the PCI's way out of isolation. The socialists' error, the PCI says, is to think that the problems of the country can be resolved without the Communist Party and competing with Christian Democracy directly. Fresh elections would make the crisis worse, says the PCI, because they would not guarantee a real change in the form and substance of government. According to the PCI, the situation demands a new initiative which can mobilise new forces and energies, taken from the Christian Democrats the weapon which the division of the Left represents, and stimulate “Catholic popular forces”. The PCI makes no claims to leadership, recognising that the communists on their own cannot provide the alternative which the country needs.

The response to this appeal, “made in a spirit of openness”, has not been encouraging, and the party continues to be affected internally by the debate on Eastern Europe, as well as having suffered damage from a row on the party daily paper, *L'Unita*, about a story alleging a deal between the Red Brigades and the Christian Democrats.

NETWORKS

The Italian Communist Party remains, in Italy's fragmented political world, the one with the second largest vote. It retains much of its strength in the unions, the co-operatives, and in intellectual-cultural activities. The PCI, PCF and PCE all have gigantic networks of strictly party and indirectly party organisations which resemble an alternative state. They are based on a deep reservoir of traditional popular loyalty.

But their different versions of eurocommunism have not done what was hoped — that is, give them a decisive role in the running of the real state. And now the repercussions of the Polish upheavals have added to the problems of evident failure, provoking more deeply critical self-examination.

Other communist parties have been affected, too. The Finnish CP, which is in a coalition government, is now split open between factions which might be broadly described as “pro-Soviet” and “eurocommunist”. When the neighbouring Russians tried to influence their debates, the retiring CP leader accused them of “provocation”. The Greek communists have been divided into two parties for some years. The eurocommunist tendency in the British CP has gained strength as a result of the Polish event. The West German CP is having difficulty facing the challenge from the Green Party with a totally united front. The Portuguese CP is one of the few to have escaped serious debate. But their price for internal peace is to have stood still for several years.

Eurocommunism is not just a trick with mirrors. However ambiguous it may be, it does correspond to something new in the methods and forms of the major Western communist parties. It was an understandable response, in the particular conditions of southern Europe, to the threat of a return to severely repressive regimes. But it is now faced with a crisis born of its own contradictions. Being forced to confront the reality of a mass working class revolt against a state, which they all regard as more or less socialist, the eurocommunist parties face a test which they seem unlikely to survive completely intact.

Writers Note: I have used terms like “communism” and “communist movement” to describe the things which call themselves that, not in order to make a judgment on their claims to those titles.



The Bullring in Lisbon

Art and the Conspiracies of Choice

Tom O'Connor's article "Arts: for the people or by the people" in the last issue created a good deal of controversy. MOLLY KALLEN continues the debate.

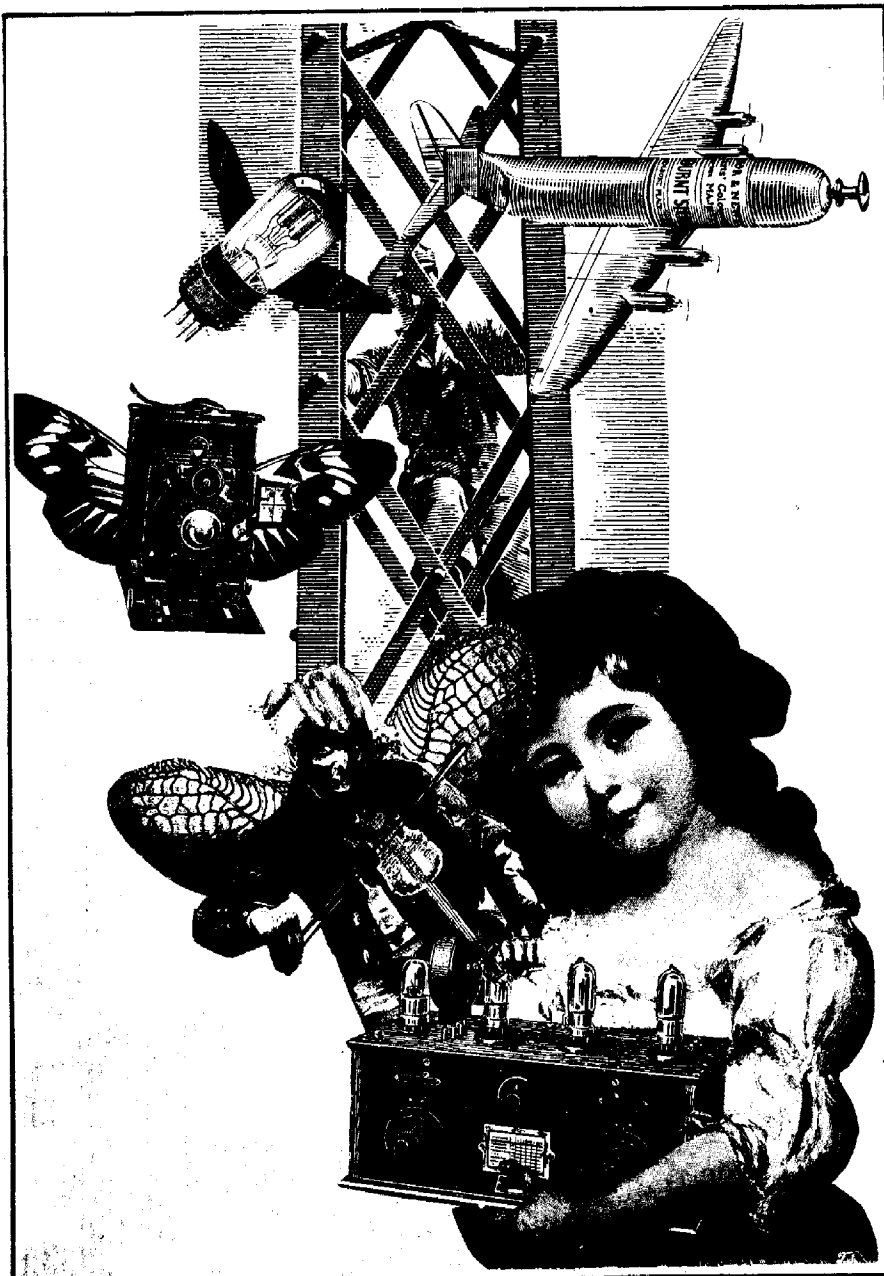
Have you ever wondered just who gets invited to gallery openings, film previews, or private poetry readings and those private festivities which follow these functions? Perhaps you hang around Sheehan's regularly in pursuit of inclusion, or, by virtue of your occupation and social connections, actually belong to the guest ticket set and attend these activities out of sociability and the prospect of free wine. If you are an artist, film-maker, or writer, you depend on these gatherings for self advancement in a society which values art as one commodity among others, to be sold as the market demands after advertising yourself as a necessity.

The gallery opening is dependent on the participation of critics, journalists, and venue owners — those who do not create, but extract a living from artistic production through the élitism of the marketing system. After all, if everyone could attend these opening functions, what would be the use in publishing reviews of them? The critic is the financial advisor to would-be investors; even the wealthy are not encouraged to trust their own tastes.

The background to this politically static condition of the fine arts must be looked for in the social and economic history of Ireland and Europe. Though I will discuss history briefly, my main enquiry is into the accuracy of equating the class aspects of the art market with an élitism inherent in the very concept of fine art.

It is easy to dismiss that in which we are not invited to participate as superficial and pretentious, rather than to challenge the structure of property exchange which profits from excluding major sections of society. Reserved access to cultural activities means reserved access to economic democracy, and if we are to break down the inequality in our current political system, we must begin by questioning the boundaries that divide 'fine art' and people's culture.

That the arts and aesthetic philosophy of the cultural élite have evolved outside the domain of ordinary people yet contribute to the political structure in which all must abide is not at question in



contemporary social thinking. However, there is a major divide at the interpretation of cultural self-determination. One view asserts that any systematised 'official' culture involving state or private patronage runs contrary to the interests of the majority because it is a conceptual imposition having been extremely composed by an élite class.

Within this view, popular culture is a powerful weapon by which the majority may usurp the previous élite minority, therefore eroding the structure of class division. Popular culture is therefore seen as democratic and revolutionary.

The other view, which represents the trend of liberal viewpoints on this island, maintains that patronage (state or

private) of the arts, even those which appeal only to an educated minority, serves the needs of humanising a society which has become enslaved by materialism, and thereby challenges the status quo. They believe that state and private 'goodwill' donations can make abstract work accessible to the public, and so can raise the level of education and 'taste'.

As I propose to demonstrate, both of these well-intentioned viewpoints serve the system of cultural divisionism, which I believe antipathetic to a socialist democracy. They both depend to a large extent on class patronage and internal class cohesion, for they encourage class separatism as a means for each side to vie for cultural dominance. Cohesion leads to stagnation in the arts, whether popular or 'high brow', and reflects an unwillingness to allow social evolution. Therefore neither side challenges the political structure that engineered the divide in the first place. It is an open ended debate, because there exists no political model which does not check aesthetic evolution in some manner in an effort to maintain economic control.

No one has defined adequately what a democratic art form should entail, for tastes are limitless and any doctrinaire elevation of a particular art mode over another instantly redefines a cultural elite. To add to the difficulty, no matter what the political views of the artist, it has rarely been in his or her interests to challenge the economic structure within which an income (sometimes substantial) can be derived by creative output. Rather than questioning the inequity of cultural reserves, it has been simpler for the artist, critic, and collector to dismiss the majority of people as unfit to fathom works of subtlety, thereby ensuring that a low level of participation remains the standard.

In the same way, popular culturists cling strongly to the view that they are represented by popular, as opposed to 'elite' culture, thereby feeding into the 'bandwagon' approach of the advertising business, the way children may feel represented by Ronald McDonald. I question whether cultural self-determination is possible within a political system that profits by this very polarisation — that divides us by our individuality and notions of class, discouraging enquiry, and biasing our view of the quality in the others' domain.

A brief discussion of the relationship between art, capitalism and feudalism illustrates the history of cultural divisionism. In the 16th and 17th centuries, science emerged as a distinct philosophy contradicting art and aesthetics, which are viewed as effete and nonproductive by the evolving merchant class. Art represented the inefficacy of the feudal

regime that had just been toppled, as science represented the relative democracy of the future. However, like religion, romance played a strong trump and the pre-capitalist lifestyle of the aristocracy in the form of 'high culture' was elevated to a position of reverence in addition to being used as a status enhancer. Aesthetics, once safely separated from function so that it could not influence social order, became a method of consuming surplus capital, so finding its place in the structure of capitalism.



The themes of easel painting so beloved by the feudal and bourgeois society were largely unrelated to work on production, unless utilised in a romantic way to comfort excrescences of conscience about the conditions of those employed. In the 17th century, however, the capitalist evolution of wage labour allowed the poor to be viewed for the first time 'realistically' — that is, in a degenerate state, thereby proving capitalism's moral necessity. Dutch painting of this period provides an excellent example.

At the same time, the evolution of printing processes were providing the basis for the first artificially created popular culture — that is, works created for mass consumption but with the message tightly controlled by ruling interests, who owned the means of production. Workers were portrayed dispassionately in a visual sense, but captions were moralising encouragements to obey the god-given power of the master. The tactics of advertising haven't altered significantly since the printing press was invented in the 1400s. This political manipulation through popular culture in the form of print also gave rise to the mystique of originality — anything mass produced immediately stopped being art and became propaganda.

The potential of popular culture has always been carefully controlled for maximum impact and saturation,

with a minimum of attendant enquiries. Only in times when mass production has been in the hands of those both politically and aesthetically aware have mass produced works allowed for a merger of idea and process. Since the development of photomechanical printing, attempts to tie production into consumption have been sporadic and brief. The revolutionary idealism of Russian Constructivism (1914-1922) is a good example. One of its foremost artists explained thus: 'constructivism is (an) attempt to organise a utilitarian deployment of materials. Constructive life is the life of the future. It is time for art to flow into the organisation of life.'

The constructivists were rather to the left of the political order that took control in the USSR, and many of their achievements were shelved or modified to conform to the needs of state capitalism, which has no need for revolutionaries. Revolutionary art, whether visual or auditory, presents change in the active process of occurring, which is an anathema to power structures, state or private.

Some socialist critics believe that contemporary popular culture, like rock music, mainstream cinema, and best selling novels, represent a grass roots aesthetic revolution, but this argument is more often used by capitalists, who call it 'giving them what they want.' Commercial popular culture is slanted towards the weakest instincts: the realms of guilt, fear, and violence that are products of the controlled alienation of people from processes (how else can one explain the popularity of the horror film?). Popular culture is no less a conceptual imposition than 'high brow art,' and all the more insidious for having invited a false sense of working class solidarity.

It has been suggested that popular culture has value in its reflection of contemporary social conditions — I maintain that popular culture *controls* those conditions. Where high culture may be escapist, romantic, and non-realistic, popular culture encourages the belief that we are represented, while presenting us with a very narrow range of options, the most destructive of which implying that we suffer from a fundamental inadequacy that can only be overcome with continuous material additions. When material gains are harder to come by because of an economic slump, pitting consumers against each other is necessary. Have you noticed how many contemporary films portray 'decent citizens' fighting back against crime, vigilante fashion? These divisionary tactics are the foundations of racism, sexism, and every form of class separatism. The so-called realism of popular culture does not encourage a search for the real culprit, which is the social order that organises our alienation.

The difference between people's culture and popularity imposed by capitalism can be deceptive: powerful art forms are often syphoned off from folk tradition and molded into marketable form through the industry of commercial taste. A good example is country-western music, poached from the pre-industrial folk music of U.S. southerners and sold back to them as 'Rocky Top' nostalgia as they move north and west in search of jobs. To become marketable and an effective divider of workers, popular culture must be drained of any content that might stimulate ideas or action, encouraging instead a hankering for the past, and an inclination to reactionary politics. Ersatz tradition is successfully packaged to wage earners as the voice of freedom — the freedom of cow-eyed kids pissing into the river, painted on velvet. How simply our revolutionary instincts are channeled into a non-threatening form!

Commercial popular culture does engineer a certain type of socialisation — witness a hundred people thinking the words to the same tune on the Muzak system of your local supermarket. It is well to be aware that even the illusion of collective contact can be manipulated in the interests of profit.

Some people believe that the proponents of high culture are terrified by the popular variety, because it represents their lack of grip on the masses. My point is that the holders of power know precisely the value of popular culture, as it was they and not 'the people' who invented it. Advertising is one of the highest paid professions in the world. The value of controlled tastes is marketability, which means class, defined in economic rather than social terms, and which is the root of all power in capitalist society.

Popular culture maintains a power structure that thrives on people's ignorance, for knowledge invites questioning, and so is the strongest revolutionary weapon against class divisionism. Pink Floyd's 'Brick in the Wall' from a few years back provides an excellent example of the undermining possibilities of popular culture, promoting the belief that in avoiding the institutions of education, one is somehow freed from a system of oppression. The song was a hit in Bulgaria too, by the way; the appeal of anti-intellectualism as an antidote to 'thought control' is as much a part of the capitalist intention as the bandwagon method of advertising.

High culture,' that is, classical music, gallery art, abstract literature, plays and cinema etc., is not an easy commodity to manufacture profitably, for it is a limited market. Like folk art (traditional music, handicrafts, folk narratives, etc) it is a minority interest no longer determined solely by class

background, but on an educated preference and disenchantment with commercial standards. Along with subculture art (like new wave art and music or experimental film and theatre) it represents a challenge to the machinery of capitalism because it lives for the most part outside of the marketplace.

In the past, 'high culture' reflected the classism preceding capitalism's 'democracy' — it was a private reserve for the well-to-do — and there are still remnants of this in cultural circles today. But for many people, these alternative cultures, whether 'high culture,' folk culture, or subculture, are an expression of free choice that the commercial industry would prefer to restrict, as they must be severely altered in content before they could become profitable. Is it really because of sexual censorship laws that one has to belong to a private club to view a large part of the quality films shown in Dublin? Or is this censorship part of a wider process of restricting cultural access? My point is this: capitalism is at war with high culture — if it cannot succeed in eliminating it altogether, it must strive to maintain those classist elements that separate high culture from the masses.

To control intellectuals and artists, another method is employed by capitalism in the art forms of nihilism. These may be intellectually appealing, conceptual and abstract, but encourage only destruction and futility as a method of dissipating rage. Anarchy is preferable to organisation — it can easily be dispersed. Ernst Fischer puts it well: 'in time of revolutionary upheaval... nihilism becomes indispensable to the ruling class (as) direct eulogies from the bourgeois world provoke suspicion. But the radical tone of the nihilism... strikes 'revolutionary' echoes and so can channel revolt into purposelessness and create a passive despair.'² It is easy to see this trend in much 'subculture' art of the last few decades.

However, this is not a suggestion that we should reject art forms that are critical, shocking or undecorative, for the truth must necessarily reflect changeability and the natural entropy of human design, represented in the political limitations of any given area. To know the difference between nihilism and revolutionary criticism, we must carefully consider the level of analysis that goes into any act of creativity, and what its effects on the viewer will be. Trotsky wrote, 'the Marxian method affords an opportunity to estimate the development of a new art, to trace all its sources, to help the most progressive tendencies by a critical illumination of the road, but it does not do more than that. Art must make its own way and by its own means.'³

New ways of seeing and hearing do not evolve independently of social and technological change; improved sensory perception and intellectual cognizance depend on social and scientific conditions. Art is no longer a slave to magic by imitation as in a tribal society, or to the requirements of a ruling class, who maintain their power by the profitability of their own productions, which require an ever expanding market. Marcuse, in his essay 'Art in a One Dimensional Society,' says, 'The realisation of art as a principle of social reconstruction presupposes fundamental social change. At stake is not the beautification of that which is, but the total re-orientation of life in a new society... This image of art as technique in building or guiding the building of society calls for the interplay of science, technique, and imagination to construct and sustain a new system of life.'⁴

It is the responsibility of artists to use all the means open to them to achieve this revolutionary purpose — to allow technology to multiply those means and to be willing to forego those which have lost progressive relevance. Artists must present reality in the process of development in as abstract, contradictory, and dialectical a way as the times demand, now that the goal of human symbiosis (which is the underlying principle of socialism) has been established.

In this decade the artist must make a conscious decision to augment reform or destruction; 'art for its own sake' is only a mirage to which one attempts to retreat when confronted by the necessity of making a political commitment. No culture is objective — it remains rooted in historical context. Avant garde-ism which is intrinsically nihilistic, cannot progress; neither can the honest subordination to capitalism which is the foundation of popular culture.

The social responsibility of the artist lies in testing the boundaries of social, political, and spiritual limitation, through modes of expression — we are the mediators between humanity and the unrealised future. Art, if it is to be effective, must represent the process of ongoing change so as to assist the evolution of social democracy and prepare human beings for imminent technological transitions. We must try to get technology into our control, as technology is production. In this way we increase the range of aesthetic options available to every person without being bound by cultural limitations, and with radical social reform, we can make democracy a reality.

Books

Joyce's Politics

JOYCE'S POLITICS.
Rutledge Keegan and Paul.
£14.50.

When handed a copy of Marx's *Das Kapital*, Joyce found the first sentence so absurd that he immediately returned the book to the lender. Yet, on the other hand, his very first piece of writing at the age of nine was avowedly political, dealing with the "betrayal" of Parnell and his consequent downfall. And writing to his brother Stanislaus in 1905, Joyce claims, "It is a mistake for you to imagine that my political opinions are those of a universal lover: but they are those of a socialist artist."

Manganiello in his book, *Joyce's Politics*, points to the political influence and preoccupations in Joyce's life and art. That these should have been almost totally ignored in the recent fanfare of Joycean celebrations is hardly surprising given that Joyce remained bitterly sceptical of the confessional nature of the Free State. The moves by SPUC to amend the constitution in the centenary year of Joyce's birth are, ironically, more than the banquets and the symposiums, a tribute to Joyce's analyses in *Ulysses*, *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait Of The Artist*. His repeated condemnation of Irish nationalism for its failure to realise that Rome was as much an enemy of genuine liberation as London remains relevant today.

Joyce's choice of Bloom, a Jew, as the main character in *Ulysses*, was partly inspired by his opposition to the student anti-semitism of Gogarty and Griffith's public support for Father Creagh, the priest who inspired the anti-semitic riots in Limerick in 1904. In Bloom's exchange with the Citizen (modeled on Michael Cusack, founder of the GAA), the radical and clerical prejudices that colour Irish nationalism are shown up and rebuked.

The situation in Trieste (where Joyce stayed), an Italian city under Austrian rule, paralleled that of Dublin, an Irish city under British rule — with Italian irredentism as the counterpart of Irish nationalism. Joyce was particularly interested in Italian socialist politics and in particular the syndicalist ideas of Arturo Labriola.



Joyce, once scorned by the establishment, now has Lord Mayors planting telephone poles in his honour.

This interest betrayed a larger concern with the ideas of anarchist writers. His library contained works by Malatesta, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Stirner, Most and others. But it was the individualistic, pacifist anarchism of the American, Benjamin Tucker, that Joyce was most attracted to. Tucker conceived of government as, "the subjection of the non-invasive individual to an eternal will" and in *Finnegan's Wake*, Earwicker is described as, "anarchistically respectful of the liberties of the non-invasive individual."

Though aware of the link between political and artistic freedom, Joyce was hostile to allowing his art to become propaganda whatever the cause. He was as deeply suspicious of Lady Gregory's Celtic Twilight as he was of the fascist sympathies of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis. This suspicion however, contrary to

what establishment critics would have us believe, does not imply that Joyce had neither political interests or ideas. It is rather an attempt to portray the artist as socialist, allowing him to be both without sacrificing the one for the other.

Shem's (generally taken to be Joyce's) opposition to Shaun (who frequently represents De Valera) in *Finnegan's Wake* is as much political as artistic; an opposition to the insular, confessional politics of De Valera and the resistance of the writer to political subservience of any kind. Choosing writers like Dante and Ibsen as artistic models, Joyce was intrigued by the former's response to exile and the church and by the latter's attempt to imaginatively liberate the minds of men and women.

Manganiello's book is comprehensive without being ambitious. It has a tendency to catalogue rather than interpret and where interpretation does appear, it often tends to be politically naive and critically somewhat dubious. The section on Joyce in Trieste is the most helpful, while the most striking omission is a proper discussion of Joyce's position with regard to European avant-garde movements.

In *Portrait Of An Artist*, it pains Stephen that, "he did not know well what politics meant". The pain creatively remained.

Michael Cronin

Derek Spears (Report)

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Memories of Costello

SEAMUS COSTELLO 1939-1977: Irish Republican Socialist. Seamus Costello Memorial Committee. £2.00.

This 76-page pamphlet is a collection of reminiscences, tributes and speeches which together form an introduction to a life cut short by the assassin's bullet. The Committee who have published it, have included articles by former associates; Tony Gregory, Eamonn MacThomas, Ross Connolly and Bernadette McAliskey. They have thus not restricted themselves to a Party view but, as a result, the whole turns out somewhat patchy and repetitive.

The Republican tradition of biography has always been approached hagiography. For the most part, this particular work manages to avoid creating a saint. May Hayes recalls being told by Costello to sell the *United Irishman*: "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."

She excuses this as "a momentary feeling for him and in no way characteristic" but it does in fact illustrate an authoritarian streak in Seamus's character produced by his absolute dedication. Unfortunately, his conviction that he was right and his refusal to compromise, meant in practice the frequent departure of party colleagues worn out after a few years and the break-up of a couple of united fronts in Bray when he tried to adopt the sort of centralised discipline more appropriate within a single party.

If Seamus had achieved nothing else, he would still be the most revolutionary local councillor that this State has seen. His organisation of protest activity outside the council chambers in conjunction with his activity inside is outlined by Tony Gregory. And if sometimes the people's organisations were too much the creature of the councillor rather than he their creature, he nevertheless remains the path-breaker.

It is when we come to his break with Official Sinn Féin that we are left a little in the dark. Official Sinn Féin, we are told, had gone reformist and economic — insisting on working class unity as a

prerequisite for a struggle for national liberation. Ite Ni Chionnaith tells us of Seamus at the 1972 Ard Fheis: "Mhinigh sé go paiseanta an tabhacht a bhi leis an troid ar son saoirse naisiunta . . . Glacadh seasamh laidir ar an gceist naisiunta ag an Ard Fheis sin agus ag Ar Fheis 1973."

Was Seamus simply staying with Official Sinn Féin's original thesis: first national liberation, then class struggle? "The British presence in Ireland . . . is the principle obstacle preventing the emergence of class politics in Ireland", he said, "We see the ending of British imperialist intervention in Ireland as an essential prerequisite for the development of class struggle between left and right in this country." Or, was he talking about "the unity of the anti-imperialist and socialist struggle" (James Daly); a struggle for national liberation "that must take place side-by-side with the class struggle . . . the national and class questions as one struggle" (unsigned tribute).

The Memorial Committee intend to publish a full biography of Seamus Costello. It is hoped that this question — fundamental to the existence of the party he founded — will receive further attention there.

John Goodwillie

The politics of ecology

ECOLOGY FOR BEGINNERS. Stephen Croall and William Rankin. Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative. £1.95 (UK).

This book is the latest in what the publishers call, "a popular encyclopaedia of ideas in a comic-strip, documentary format". This one manages to be both a stimulating and depressing guide to the history and present misuse of the world — complete with little cartoons of the globe in poses of agony and despair.

It starts 4,600 million years ago when the earth was formed out of hot gases and cosmic dust, cooling into 'a beautiful blue orb, slightly squashed at one pole but still easy to fall in love with'.

Much later, only about a minute ago (if the life of the world is seen as a month long), homo (et femina) sapiens was first seen hunting and gathering and eating one another.

The first humans contributed to their environment as much as they took from it. But the development of agriculture, the rise of a class

THE SHAME

- I AM:** A T.D. I sit in the Dáil.
A Councillor. I vote for Fianna Fáil.
A Banker. You owe me your all.
A Bishop. I answer God's call.
- I HAVE:** A favoured constituent to fix up with a phone.
Five hundred more acres of land to rezone.
A fly-by-night company to provide a loan.
To legitimize all with a religious tone.
- I WISH:** To continue the Corridors of Power to infest
That in rezonable land I may chance to invest.
To continue to live on the public's interest.
That the work of these others may always be blessed.
- WE SAY:** At night don't forget to look under your bed
Lest crouched in there hiding there might be a Red.

Kieran Furey

who took control of the agricultural surplus and the growth of towns resulted in increasing conflicts with nature.

'Big urban centres demanded food, fuel and timber . . . Pressure on the peasants built up and consequently land-care often went out of the window. Nature was abused and misused.' Forests were cut down and hence protection against floods weakened. The Bible blamed floods on God's wrath and similar myths were created in the Americas, Polynesia and India. Everywhere, exploitative agricultural methods eroded the soil and plantlife; deserts appeared.

Of course, capitalism messed it all up on a grander scale. Peasants were forced from the land into factories which spewed chemicals into the air, water and soil. Capitalism substituted monotonous wage-labour for work which has been at least partly geared towards providing for the needs of one's own extended family. New technologies were able to strip nature of its resources at a faster rate. The age of unlimited consumption was nigh and the previously "unlimited resources" became more expensive, energy-consuming and difficult to extract.

Multinationals control the world's food, energy and metals; worldwide, 30% of landowners own 80% of the land. These monopolies, now a law unto themselves,

have built their position on cheap energy and raw materials. As these become scarce and the Third World struggles to hold on its own assets, today's "peaceful" methods of exploitation will no longer do the trick. To survive, industrial capitalism will have to embark on new and even more destructive "crusades" in the "southern biosphere".

Socialism is the answer, say the authors. But they are critical of the "industrial progress" of the Soviet Union and China after Mao. "Soviet nuclear reactors . . . lack safety containments and emergency cooling systems. But the public hears no hint of the risks so there is no public opposition".

However, I think the authors would agree that more democratic societies with real control by workers and small farmers would be responsive to people's demands for meaningful work, breathable air and food that doesn't just melt in your mouth. The answer for the authors, is "Struggle". "The labour movement must be involved and radical political parties must pursue an ecological line".

Ecology is an issue for everyone who wants to improve the way we live now and this book is excellent in showing that it is a class issue.

Sara O'Hara.



Arts for the people

Dear Gralton,

In his article "Arts; for the people, or by the people?", Tom O'Connor first portrays art as oppression and then moves on to a vision of art as propaganda. In the process he misses most of what art is about (basically the creation of objects or events which, through their beauty and perceptiveness intensify and enhance life), among other things confusing it with entertainment (the pleasant passing of time).

He mentions but does not confront the problem of the reactionary nature of working class art, failing to place it in the context of the reactionary nature of working class culture as a whole. In political terms this means that while socialism offers a more just distribution of wealth than the present system, most of the people who would benefit from the chance do not want it, or believe it to be impossible in spite of the power of numbers in a liberal democracy.

To counteract this failure of desire and confidence we must first understand it:

"But what they (the working class) expect in their own situation in any foreseeable future is very little: they may want more, they may believe they have a right to more: they they have learned and they have been brought up to settle for a minimum. Life is like that, they say.

Their foreseen minimum is not purely economic; it is not even

principally economic; today the minimum might include a car. It is above all an intellectual, emotional and spiritual minimum. It almost empties of content such concepts (expressed in no matter what words) as Renewal, Sudden Change, Passion, Delight, Tragedy, Understanding. It reduces sex to a passing urge, effort to what is necessary in order to maintain a *status quo*, love to kindness, comfort to familiarity. It dismisses the efficacy of thought, the power of unrecognized needs, the relevance of history. It substitutes the notion of endurance for that of experience, of relief for that of benefit."

(Extract from John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Fortunate Man* (Penguin 1969) p. 142.

While this would require modification to apply strictly to Ireland it clearly describes the stultifying inertia, the dead weight of the past, which far outweighs the lure of present opportunity.

This explains why, for example, so few working class people make it to university even during the mid-seventies when grants had not been devoured by inflation and summer jobs actually existed. Some may have been put off by the fear of what "toffee-nosed West Brits" would "make" them feel, but most were deterred by the attitudes and expectations of their parents and peers. Any text on educational sociology will confirm this.

Similarly, in the arts, self-exclusion is more important than the snobbery of the élite or the price of tickets in preventing working class participation. Theatre and 'classical' concert tickets cost far less than those for rock concerts or soccer internationals.

Attempts to "bring" art to the people meet resistance for the same reasons that socialism is not readily accepted; beauty like justice is outside their expectations. Feminism is perhaps the most vital of current democratic ideologies precisely because it seeks to raise expectations above the 'minimum'. It seeks political change in order to enable people to live for 'the "maximum", a maximum in which beauty and perception surely play a part.

Tom O'Connor's socialism offers not a maximum but an alternative minimum, for a socialism which reduces art to collectively executed murals and 'agit-prop drama' would merely substitute one banal way of life for another; and Justice would be added to Berger's list of concepts which are emptied of content.

Yours, etc.,
Mark O'Neill,
Flat 3,
44 Grove Park,
Rathmines,
Dublin 6.

Gralton Forum

Dear Gralton,

I would like to make some comments on the issues raised at your 'Gralton Forum' on 15/6/'82. (Entitled "How Socialist are the Socialist Countries?").

Arriving late, I found the discussion degenerating into the old Stalin v Trotsky controversy. I realise that in its time and place there is a validity, a necessity for this. It is not my purpose, however, to rake up these old ashes.

My first criticism is of the level of the debate. The first speaker whose views I heard in full, put forward the proposition, that the Soviet Union is nothing more than a fascist state. Naturally, this irked those members of the CPI present at the meeting. The best defence that these could muster was (1) that since the Soviet Union is the first state in which the workers seized power . . . it must be the greatest thing since Fried Bread and (2) all their support of progressive movements and regimes is more proof of the same.

I felt the arguments swung from the ridiculous to the childish. Firstly, the hallmark of a fascist state is a militarised state machine protecting a capitalist class producing for the market and the absence of civil liberty. Where is the capitalist class in the Soviet Union? And production for the market is still severely limited. Secondly, there are aspects of life in the Soviet Union which must give any rational worker cause for concern: the lack of democracy throughout the society and in particular the absence of independent trade unions and shop floor democracy.

This is the point I wish to make: without something first being done other things cannot follow. For example, we know that humanity lived for hundreds of years in the (happy?) belief that the earth was the centre of the universe. You could be excused for supposing that Ptolemy, the man who formulated

and brought to its zenith the theory of the earth-centred universe, was a right old reactionary. This is not necessarily the case. To Ptolemy the overwhelming weight of evidence seemed to prove his theory correct.

Furthermore, despite being incorrect, his theory was historically progressive. How? Because as knowledge of the nature of the 'heavenly bodies' grew (through the telescope and the study of elliptical rotation of the planets) the contradictions in the earth-centred theory became more and more evident. But without Ptolemy's attempts to rationalise his universe would these contradictions have become so evident?

Eventually the Copernican-Newtonian theory of the universe was itself modified by Albert Einstein's special theory of relativity. And there is no way of knowing when this too will have to be radically altered. Only blind idiots stick to a theory as if it is certain to retain its validity throughout the ages.

What has this to do with the nature of the Soviet Union as being progressive or otherwise? This: when the Bolsheviks decided to transform the Russian Empire into a Socialist Republic they were historically correct. And if in this process Lenin and later Stalin made errors then this was inevitable. But they went ahead and tried, that's the point. And if their attempt to establish a progressive working-class state may not now be what workers would desire, what of it? The contradictions will become too much and (barring a nuclear conflagration) a newer, higher form of democracy will be attempted. And this new system will carry in it, its own entropy.

But *must*, *will* be accomplished.

Ending, I would like to say that I am not comparing the Soviet Union to the Ptolemaic Universe. I'm saying that it was necessary, inevitable!

Perhaps if this is accepted, the Great Debate might be conducted on a more rational level.

Yours etc.,

Paude Rowan,
321 Casement Road,
Finglas West,
Dublin 11.

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People ask, "Was it worth it, then?" It's a very good question. You spend months planning, weeks organising, four days marching. You've persuaded over thirty unemployed to walk from Waterford to Dublin and a long list of workers' bodies and other organisations have put up the money so you can do it. And now it's all over, the march is done and the question remains.

There's no easy answer. It's far too soon for an "objective assessment". The People's March For Decent Jobs was, what's called in the trade, an "initiative". The intention was that the March would initiate a more serious approach to anti-unemployment agitation in Ireland than has been shown so far by the labour and trade union movement. That remains to be seen. What we have now is just impressions, some clues to the future.

If you were in Maguire's pub at six o'clock on Saturday July 3rd, you would not have even thought to ask any marcher such a stupid question as, "Was it worth it?" The walking had stopped, the Dublin demo was over... and we were on the news! Not Redneck Roundup now, the real news. Yellow jackets, banners, hundreds looking like thousands. We felt that we'd finally made it. You could even forgive RTE for translating our slogan of "Decent Jobs" into "Peace and Jobs" — surely a genuine mistake unless a certain party... No, a genuine mistake.

The thing is, like it or not, publicity is all important to a venture like the People's March. If your purpose is to stir things up a bit, to get your message across, then media coverage is essential. We didn't do too bad. Once on TV, once on national radio, local radio, good stuff in the local papers, bits and pieces in the nationals... and then there was the *Irish Times*. They actually sent a reporter, Judi Doherty, to walk with us for a day. And she actually *talked* to us and then they actually printed *what we said*. Now anyone who has been on the Left five minutes knows this is such an extraordinary sequence of events that just maybe we can all agree that the March was worthwhile on this score alone.

But we had other moments too. The real climax of the March was maybe not the Dublin demo but the day before when the March hit Clondalkin to be met by the Clondalkin Paper Mills workers and a contingent from De Lorean in Belfast. Here met the leaders of the resistance to unemployment in the working class with the nucleus of the unemployed fightback. It was an expression of that unity of employed and unemployed that the March was all about. Mutual backslapping, words of encouragement.

March for Jobs

THE FIRST STEPS ...

John Cane

A happy March moment and maybe even one to tell the kids about.

Kilkenny was the other side of the coin. It was all arranged; the Fieldcrest Action Committee, campaigning to save their factory, were to meet us outside of town. We were to march in, hold a public meeting, drink and talk. But they didn't turn up. We went out to the factory the following morning when the last workers were being laid off. They saw no real hope, no reason to fight. Maybe something could be done in the Dáil, maybe not. We wished each other good luck and

went our separate ways. Nobody felt like asking them how come they never met us. There was no point. A sad March moment — the other side of the coin.

But all this — the media, Clondalkin, Fieldcrest — was the public side of the March. Most of the time it in fact seemed a good deal less important than the private side: the coming together of 30-odd people for six days of a little politics and a lot of *craic*.

If we were, through the March, to start laying the foundations of a national network of unemployed action groups — and this was one of

the objectives — then it was essential that everybody got on together, swapped ideas, mucked in, took decisions. We needed a lot of that famous "self-activity of the working class" that lefties (some anyway) are always on about. By and large, I think we got it.

There were tensions, of course. Perhaps the main one was between the more idealistic and the... uh... slightly less so. The idealists tended to come from Dublin, more political, more middle class. They wanted more actual walking (we didn't walk every step of the way — no point in wasting the message on cows and some feet would just not take it). They wanted more discussion, more help with the washing up, more everything. They were in a minority. The rest just wanted to do the necessary agitation and enjoy themselves as much as the limited funds allowed. And, what the hell. The necessary agitation was done, willingly and democratically. "Raising consciousness" is a laudable but awkward kind of thing best approached slowly.

Thus far in our search for clues as to whether it was all worth it, I think maybe we're doing okay. Some fairly good publicity, some good link-ups with rank and file workers (though some missed) and definite signs of unemployed organisations beginning to happen. But what of our impact on the official labour and trade union movement? It's a crucial question because that's where the *main* problem lies in anti-unemployment work.

For a group of people dubbed as "unofficial" at best, and (incredibly) "anti-union" at worst, by many in influential positions in the unions, we have attracted a hell of a lot of genuine and "respectable" support. Sponsorship from union executives, trades councils, branches (around 30 in total), on-the-march support from two Lord Mayors and two senators — personally, I even got to shake hands with the Bishop of Ossory (never mind that he was on his way to address a SPUC meeting at the time!). The point is that all these people and organisations have been willing to give time and often money to what they feel is both a genuine and, at the same time, *militant* response to the unemployment situation.

Let's continue to hope that that other genuine and militant organisations like the Dublin Trades Council will eventually see their way to supporting us as well. Because one thing is sure: that both the ideas and the organisations that were bound up with the People's March will not only continue but grow. On reflection, that original question is perhaps not as hard as it first looked — yeah, it was worth it.



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