

Sought to Build Socialist Organization in Ireland

Malachy McGurran—a Dedicated Revolutionist

By Gerry Foley

Malachy McGurran died of cancer in Dublin on July 27. He had been one of the main leaders of the "Official" republican movement in Northern Ireland since the start of the recent struggles in 1968-69. He was also one of the leaders of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, and an elected county councilor at the time of his death.

McGurran dedicated his life to making the Irish revolution, and when he was not incapacitated by his illness, he continued to work just as hard at his tasks even after he was told four years ago that he probably had only a year to live. He was respected and loved by almost all who knew him, including many revolutionists from other countries. The world revolutionary movement has lost a comrade and a brother.

Malachy was only forty years old, but his long experience in the republican movement made him seem older.

His premature death is even sadder because in the last years of his life he continued courageously to try to build an organization that had gone entirely off the track politically and was degenerating and dying. It was a grievous waste.

Malachy exemplified the potential and the tragic failure of the "Official" leadership. He was one of the central team, which consisted mainly of men who had been young guerrilla fighters at the time of the 1956-62 IRA campaign, and, as a result of their experience had adopted a socialist perspective and a mass-action orientation.

It was this group that played the decisive role in the attempt to make the republican movement into an organization that could lead social struggles and mount a campaign for socialism in Ireland.

McGurran is the third member of this central group to die in the last three years. Two others, Séamus Costello and Billy McMillan, were assassinated, as a direct or indirect result of the split that took place in the "Officials" at the end of 1974.

Malachy was one of the most thoughtful in the "Official" leadership, and one of those with the soundest revolutionary instincts. He was a franker and more open person than most of the others in the central team. He was also the one who developed the friendliest relationship with Trotskyists.

In particular, Malachy sought to promote closer relations between the "Official" republican movement and the Fourth International in the period 1970-72, when

the key nucleus was tending to move to the left of its old Stalinist advisers and was open, to some extent, to revolutionary Marxist ideas.

In this period, other key leaders in the "Officials" became interested in Trotskyist ideas. They were interested also in the example given by the Socialist Workers Party in the United States of how to go about the practical work of building a revolutionary party and giving revolutionary leadership to mass movements. They were interested in the alternative offered internationally by the Fourth International.

The "Officials" came in contact with the SWP by chance, through their attempts to build a support movement for the Irish struggle in the United States, where they needed allies on the left. But the existence of an international revolutionary movement was important for them.

The "Officials" had looked to the Communist parties for help, especially the larger European CPs. But these parties showed no interest in the Irish struggle, and in fact very little active interest in general in events outside the immediate political context of their own countries. The "Officials" did not find an international Communist movement ready to come to their aid, as they apparently expected.

Instead, those forces interested in the Irish struggle were generally those groups based on youth looking for an alternative to the left of the Communist parties. And of these, only the Trotskyists had any real international perspective.

Of all the "Official" republican leaders, McGurran knew the Fourth International the best. He had been in the United States in 1970, and came in contact with the SWP. In 1972, he went on a tour of France and Scandinavia that was largely organized by the European Trotskyists.

As a reporter for *Intercontinental Press*, I accompanied McGurran on his European tour. By that time, a strong personal and political friendship had developed between us. I had gotten to know him and other "Official" leaders on a number of visits to Ireland.

In traveling to Malachy's various meetings, we had many discussions about revolutionary politics in general and how to build the international support movement for the Irish struggle in particular.

The European tour was an exacting test of Malachy's political instincts, and they proved to be sound. A problem arose before

the tour even began. One romantic independent involved in the initial contacts had told the other organizers in Paris that an IRA man would naturally have to carry a gun "to protect himself." They were worried.

Malachy was worried by the story himself, as well as amused. It was a conditioned reflex for him to avoid anything that might play into the hands of police. But he continued to treat the individual who dreamed it up with the greatest tact and consideration.

In his talks, Malachy presented a political profile rather similar to that of the broadest layer of radicalized youth at the time. The anecdotes he told were all about guerrilla actions by the "Official" IRA. He mentioned an expropriation of a truckload of shoes in Derry City and the destruction of a coal shipment carried out in solidarity with striking miners. He contrasted the last action with the Polish government's shipping coal to countries where miners were on strike.

An Anti-Stalinist

Malachy obviously wanted to make it clear that he was an anti-Stalinist. And he genuinely was. He showed this in Sweden also, in his attitude to the Maoists there.

The "Officials" had built the tour by sending telegrams asking for help to all the left groups whose addresses they had collected. In Sweden, the main Maoist group had split some time before, and so two different and mutually antagonistic organizations with almost the same name had replied. One of these groups had a line modeled on the popular-front Stalinist policy of the 1930s. The other had a line modeled on the classic Stalinist ultraleftism and adventurism of 1927-33. The "Officials" unwittingly accepted invitations from both groups, thinking that they were the same organization.

So, when Malachy got to Copenhagen, he found that he was scheduled to speak at two different meetings at the same time in Malmö, the Swedish city just across the strait from the Danish capital. His response was to insist on unity, that there be one united meeting to which all those who supported the struggle against imperialism in Ireland could come and participate on an equal footing. He stubbornly maintained this position, much to the discomfort of both Maoist groups.

Under his pressure, the ultraleft Maoists, the smaller group, agreed to support the rally organized by the right-wing Maoists.

But this proved only to be a formal agreement.

In Malmö, the meeting began. McGurran had been speaking for about ten minutes when suddenly the sound of tramping began to rise from the street, as if a large number of people were marching on the building in lock step. The tramping started up the stairs to the hall, and in another minute the front lines of the group brought by the ultraleft Maoists burst through the doors in a flying wedge. A pitched battle began with the right-wing Maoist defense guard.

McGurran was astounded and obviously shocked by this display of sectarian fanaticism. Trembling with anger, he appealed for unity, forcing both Maoist groups to sit down and listen quietly.

Everywhere else in Sweden, he was confronted by the same war between the two Maoist groups, which agreed on only one thing—the Trotskyists had to be excluded.

The right-wing Maoists argued that the Irish solidarity group they had initiated was "the broad organization," and therefore should have the right to run all the meetings. They said that it was "broad" because it was organized on the basis of "democratic centralism," and therefore could expel any group or individual that presented positions going beyond the lowest common denominator.

The Maoist who put forward this argument worked very hard at putting on the appearance of a sincere, "reasonable" and "ordinary" youth.

Favored Unity in Action

Malachy rejected these arguments as totalitarian sophistry. He insisted that a broad front had to be based on the principle of nonexclusion. He found that the only group in Sweden that agreed with him and was willing to fight for this position was the Trotskyists.

In order to impress his point about the need for unity on the Maoists, I think, Malachy insisted on treating me as an ex-officio member of his entourage, always explaining that I was a Trotskyist. This was at a time when there had been some physical attacks on the Swedish Trotskyists by the ultraleft Maoists in particular, and threats of others.

But since Malachy insisted on bringing me along, I found myself inside the ultra-left Maoist offices, surrounded by Maoist leaders, mostly professors and students, who were obviously trying very hard to convince themselves that they were "tough" revolutionists. I don't know exactly where they looked for their models, but they all seemed to be playing characters in old American gangster movies. Perhaps that was their interpretation of the character of their hero, Stalin, the original "great helmsman."

The Maoists repelled Malachy. After we

left one Maoist headquarters, he breathed a sigh of relief and said to me: "Did you see all the Stalin they had in there!" He had no use for worshippers of dictators or for radical playacting.

Malachy was a product of a long revolutionary tradition, one deeply rooted in the Irish masses. He personified its strengths. Revolutionary struggle was not an abstract idea for him, or something that happened in a faraway exotic country. It was part of the life of the ordinary people from which he came, and had been from time immemorial. He had learned to be a revolutionist as naturally as a tree grows, and a practical, workmanlike attitude to revolutionary activity was in his marrow. Striking heroic poses was something totally alien to him. He saw it as a mark of inexperience or unseriousness, and just plain silly.

For historical reasons—isolation, social backwardness, the weakness of the Irish people relative to their oppressors—the tradition Malachy represented was an objectively adventurist one, and he remained basically within it. In terms of his underlying political ideas, he remained a guerrillaist. But the accumulated experience of the guerrilla struggle in Ireland and its popular character made him more politically serious and thoughtful than most representatives of such currents in other countries. I was struck by this when I first met him in New York.

McGurran was obviously impressed by the SWP's well-organized political activity. But that did not make a revolutionary organization as far as he was concerned. He said in effect: "This is all very nice, but are there any *militant* organizations in the U.S.?" I said: "The SWP is militant." He replied, "I mean, militant, you know, *militant*." It occurred to me what he might mean. Perhaps it was the way he jumped every time a truck backfired in the street that suggested it to me.

So, I said: "Well, there is the Weathermen group. Some of them were just blown up. The newspapers say they were boiling dynamite to extract nitroglycerin."

Malachy was shocked. He despised amateurism in "military matters" since he was dedicated, as he saw it, to raising the level of professionalism in the Irish revolutionary movement. He began explaining that no one was accepted into the IRA until they could assemble and disassemble a machine gun blindfolded. He asked no more questions about "militant" groups in the U.S.

Malachy had no resemblance to the popular image of an IRA man, although he was a veteran guerrilla fighter and had spent four years in prison on charges related to the 1956-62 campaign, and, as I later learned, lived a life of constant jeopardy.

He was a modest, sensible, down-to-earth person, not afraid to admit fears. He was

nervous about airplanes, for example, and expressed these feelings again and again, in emphatic terms, on his European tour.

In Paris, some organizers of his tour insisted on taking him from meeting to meeting on the back of a motorcycle "to elude the police." He told me that it was one of the more terrifying experiences in his life.

Malachy had an ironic attitude toward his experiences in the 1956-62 guerrilla campaign. I remember him telling other republican leaders that if he had "been old enough to have any sense," he never would have gotten involved. While continuing to think, basically, in a guerrillaist political framework, his experiences had deeply impressed on him that the traditional republican military methods had no chance of success.

A Historic Dilemma

He had thought deeply about the Irish tradition and the defeats inflicted over the centuries on the poorly organized and scattered Irish forces, who had no political program that could unite them and give them effective direction. He expressed this in singing his favorite song, "Sliabh na-Ban."

This ballad commemorates the defeat of a leaderless peasant force in the rebellion of 1798. It is one of the few surviving authentic expressions of the feelings of the Irish masses who had participated in the uprising and bore the brunt of the ruthless repression that followed its defeat.

It represents a deeper and older tradition than the ballad poetry of the mid-nineteenth century Young Irelanders and Fenians, who are the political ancestors of the IRA. To some extent, the nationalist poets in English drew on the older stratum, but they largely created a new folk history to fit the needs of the petty-bourgeois nationalist ideology that developed among the English-speaking intelligentsia of the towns.

"Sliabh na-Ban" does sum up, perhaps better than any other, the ancient dilemma

* The following is a rough translation of the original of this song, which was composed in the Irish language, apparently by a participant in a skirmish between Irish peasants and British forces during the period of the 1798 uprising:

"It is a sorrow to me that that day broke on the poor Gaels, who were slaughtered by the hundreds, that the rebels [this reflects the Jacobite tradition that the existing English government was illegitimate] are hunting us like wild animals, mocking our pikes and spears. Our major did not come to us before the dawning of that day on us. And we by ourselves were no more than scattered herds without their drove on the sunny hill slopes of Slieve-na-Mon.

"My sorrow it is that we were a helpless throng, that we did not wait for the rising, when the southern tribes and the men of western Erin would come together from our beloved land. Our camp would then have swelled with strong forces. The blessing of God would have been on

and tragedy of Irish resistance to British rule. Although the world of its anonymous author was shattered by the defeats of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and buried by the great famine of 1848, its words can still express the feelings of an Irish fighter reflecting on the present situation in Northern Ireland. That was evidently the way Malachy interpreted it.

It was at a Christmas Eve gathering in Derry City that I first heard him sing it. The location was an appropriate one. The contradictions of the Irish struggle are concentrated in Derry. This city originated as a fortified British trading settlement. The broad and deep Foyle River makes it an important inland port. As the native Irish society was destroyed, the older population came increasingly to settle beneath the walls of the British fortress, which became the new center of life. It was from the native community outside the walls that the modern Catholic ghetto, the Bogside, developed.

The various stages in the growth of the British state and the British empire, of the development of British capitalism, passed over the native Irish like a steamroller. They left few visible monuments of pre-conquest Ireland. Almost everything has been destroyed.

The latest stage of British capitalism has brought urban "renewal" that has made Derry an even more forlorn British industrial wasteland sprawling over the beautiful rolling Irish hills overlooking the Foyle.

But underneath the dreary exterior of the town, the tradition of Irish resistance has lived on with an impressive vitality and continuity. That struck me as I listened to Malachy sing "Sliabh na-Ban."

The song is very powerful, both in its words and in its melody. He rendered it with obvious feeling, and gave away what was on his mind even at such a time. Some

us throughout our lives, and I would not have to wait to avenge my humiliation until that coming day, but shouts of triumph would have echoed then on Slieve-na-Mon.

"The battle of Ross was our sorrow and defeat forever. A large part of us were left lying wounded. Our young children are burnt ashes [na leanbhaí óga 'na smólaibh dóigte]. And those of us still alive are left hiding in ditches or secret places. But I swear to pay them back with pike and spear. And I will make the yeomen tremble in their boots, and pay them back in full on the slopes of Slieve-na-Mon.

"Many an old man and vigorous strong youth have been taken captive. They lie tightly bound deep in dread dungeons, and their guards will not loosen their bonds, although they perish, nor give them a breath of air until they are tried in a land far away. But we will strike them free, when the day comes on the slopes of Slieve-na-Mon.

"The eager French in their well-stocked, high-masted ships are on the sea. Everyone says that they are coming to Ireland and that they will restore the Gaels to their rightful heritage. If I could believe this story, my heart would be as light as the winds on the sunny hill-slopes of Slieve-na-Mon."

of those present chided him for giving too "serious" a performance for the occasion. I remember his saying: "Well, I can't help it, it's a tragic situation," as if he were joking. But he clearly wasn't.

Malachy did not sing the song in Irish and I cannot remember all of the English version he used or find it anywhere. But I recall that it emphasized the lack of leadership of the Irish forces more than the original one. I remember the words, "We had no hero leaders." In singing the ballad, Malachy added special stress to this line.

From Spontaneous Resistance to Revolutionary Strategy

Malachy took the responsibilities of leadership very seriously, although his republican military training tended to give him a rather mechanical view of it. I remember standing next to him during a battle between Catholic youth and the British army in Derry on August 13, 1970. Malachy was disgusted at the apparent lack of familiarity with military tactics on the part of the Catholics. He pointed out that no forces had been stationed along the streets behind the front lines to prevent a British flanking maneuver.

In fact, the British troops did surround the crowd and make sallies through it. But they could not crush the resistance without making mass arrests, or shooting to kill, which, as a general rule, they were not yet ready to do. In any case, the population itself tended to fulfill the function of patrols and scouts.

A few minutes before the British started their flanking attack, I heard an old woman shout from a window in the new high-rise apartment building towering over the ruins of the old Catholic neighborhood: "Wee boys, wee boys, the soldiers are coming down the road over there."

Malachy did have an awed respect for the way in which the Irish people organized militarily on a certain level, almost by instinct. I remember his describing large republican families that were organized, he said, like clans or miniature armies, with the men and boys of different ages playing various military roles, and the women and girls operating as a propaganda and political department.

Desperate ghetto youth are difficult to organize and direct. But some friends in Derry told me later that Malachy was able to organize these youth effectively in some actions. They described an instance when he organized a crowd of youth and had them march in perfect order until, all at once, on signal, they launched a rain of rocks on the British soldiers.

But the republican commanders faced a more fundamental problem in Derry, as well as in the other Catholic ghettos in the North, than the uncontrollable belligerency of much of the youth. I could see that as I left the scene of the fighting on August 13, 1970.

Behind the British troops on the front lines, thousands of reserve troops were resting in the nearby streets. There must have been nearly as many of them as there are youth of military age in the Derry ghetto.

Unless the fighters in the ghettos can get support in the rest of Ireland and abroad, they have little hope of being able to defeat the British state. And as long as there is no real perspective of victory, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to raise the level of the fight beyond skirmishing or symbolic actions.

The Need for International Allies

Irish revolutionists still have the same tendency to look to hypothetical foreign allies, as the composer of "Sliabh na-Ban" looked to the French, to give them the help they need. If such allies do not exist in fact, they have to be invented, since otherwise there would be no hope.

As the "Officials" failed more and more obviously to provide that political leadership and strategy that could overcome the dilemma the song expresses, some of the "Official" leaders decided to stake everything on the hope of an alliance with the Soviet Communist Party and its client parties and movements.

To some extent, this move was a reaction to the fact that the young radicalized forces in Britain and Western Europe, while they took a more active interest in the Irish struggle than the Stalinists, failed generally to do effective work in building broad support for it in their countries.

At the same time, the "Official" leadership responded in a one-sided way to the contradiction they faced. They had learned from their own experience, and learned the lesson profoundly, that a traditional republican military campaign had no chance of success. They could see how the Provisionals' tactics were undermining the gains that had been made both in Ireland and internationally by the mass struggle for civil rights. But at the same time, they found that the Provisionals were gaining the bulk of militant nationalist support and leaving them increasingly isolated. They did not see that this was a result of their own political failures but tended to blame it more and more on a diabolic conspiracy between the right and the Provisional "militarists," plus the "ultra-left."

Malachy, sadly, had no more understanding of what was going wrong politically than the other "Official" leaders. His attitude to the Provisionals was completely subjective.

As one of the Northern command of the IRA, he had been personally involved in the split that led to the formation of the Provisionals. He was affected by the paranoia that accompanies conflicts within military organizations. I remember his telling me that if the Provisionals ever got

any concessions from the British, they would only take advantage of that to launch an extermination campaign against his own organization.

Malachy's dislike of the Provisionals, on the other hand, was increased by the humane side of his character. He was probably the warmest human being in the republican leadership. He was genuinely sickened by the killing and mutilation of innocent civilians that tended to accompany the bombings that the Provisionals carried out in the naïve belief they could accomplish something by disrupting normal life in the Northern cities. I could see his reaction on the European tour, as he watched the television news from Northern Ireland.

Malachy was also politically sensible enough to see the effect of these bombings on public opinion. He said: "You see the victims covered with blood and screaming, and then the British army rushing to their rescue. It makes it look like the Brits are the humanitarians."

Like the best of the "Official" leaders, Malachy had a seasoned practical feeling for politics. Also like them, this never really rose above the level of common sense, which proved increasingly insufficient. But he did not pretend to be a strategist. I do not remember his ever taking part in the discussions of general political strategy that occurred in "Official" meetings. He always stood apart and never expressed a position of his own on broad political questions.

Malachy was not a general. He was a captain, a loyal, devoted, and intelligent applier of the line. It was not that he was uncritical. He made a point of saying openly many times that he made up his own mind and didn't care what the Dublin leadership thought. Within his own sphere, that seemed to be true. But to my knowledge he never questioned the general political approach that was laid down.

On the other hand, he did not try to escape from the contradictions of the "Officials" line by a flight into dogmatism and fanaticism as the other "Official" leaders did.

When toward the end of 1972, some of the Stalinist-trained "Officials," in particular the editor of the organization's paper, lost his balance and launched a vehement campaign against the "Provo-Trots," Malachy stood up and fought against this. His influence was apparently one of the main factors that held back the complete Stalinization of the "Officials" for some time.

But when a fight opened up in the "Officials" in the fall of 1972 over the fundamental error in their strategy—its abstract and utopian concept of "working-class unity" between Catholic and Protestant workers in the North, and the logic that was leading the "Officials" to counterpose this vision to the real unfolding of the struggle of the oppressed population—Malachy failed completely to understand

what the issues were. He stood apart from the battle in bewilderment.

However what was at stake in the fight,



Jean Vertheim
MALACHY MCGURRAN

as has become clear since, was no less than the fate of the "Official" republican movement and the honor and political credentials of its leaders.

Turning Point for the "Officials"

The "Official" Sinn Féin convention that year was almost evenly divided between supporters of the old line, apparently led by Tomás Mac Giolla and Cathal Goulding, and a bloc pushing for a change in the organization's attitude to the political role of the national question, which was led by Séamus Costello and Seán Garland.

The programmatic document of the Costello-Garland bloc was entitled "A Brief Examination of the Republican Position: An Attempt to Formulate the Correct Demands and Methods of Struggle." It started out as follows:

The development of the Movement's consciousness, particularly its class consciousness, over the past few years has at times tended to put the National Question, as it is termed, in the background, not deliberately, but in our efforts to make up for former times and win the working class, North and South, to our revolutionary objectives.

The third paragraph gave a resounding rejection of the Irish Communist Party and their supporters in the "Official" republican movement itself.

It is feared that the people today are unable to distinguish between Republican and C.R.A. [Civil Rights Association] demands simply and solely because we have not been putting Republican demands before the Irish people, Catholic, Protestant or dissenter. The C.R.A. demands, which unfortunately people see as our ultimate

demands, fit in very well with the Communist Party concept of struggle—reforms not revolution, the gradualist approach, the "Don't Rock the Boat School." Remember the call for progressive Government in the 6 Counties which in reality meant 50 Unionists and 2 "Communists." Who in all reason wants that!

This position, the demand for a 6 County State, is of course occupied by Conor Cruise O'Brien and those left sectarians who propagate the 2 Nation theory in Ireland [that is, that the Protestants are a nation and have the right to self-determination]. To accept it, even in part, leads one inevitably to the position where, as one foreign observer pointed out recently, we expect and look to the British Army to play a progressive role in Ireland.

The "demand for a 6 County State" refers to the Stalinist concept that the civil-rights struggle would lead to a democratized Northern Ireland as the "first stage" in the struggle, preparing the way for an anti-imperialist struggle later on. On this attempt to divide the "democratic" from the national struggle, the document said:

In this country more and more the events of the past few years demonstrate that the struggle for democracy is also the national struggle since it is the British power and influence that maintains the undemocratic structures and it is the Nationalist population that suffers under this system.

The document also expressed an objective assessment of the reasons for the Provisionals' strength—to the best of my knowledge, for the first and last time, in the history of the "Official" republican movement:

Correct or not, but the feeling is abroad, that a lot of people in the country and many of our members have the idea that we are not in favour of the "National Struggle" or the ending of this "Struggle." This is one reason why the Provos are still a force today and why they will not fade away for a long time yet.

I remember trying, and failing, to convince Malachy that the civil-rights struggle was essentially national in character. The basic problem, it became clear, was that for him a national struggle meant a military campaign against the British army and nothing else. Since as a military man he could see that the conditions for such a campaign did not exist, therefore there could be no national struggle.

Virtues and Limitations of a Battlefield Leader

Sensible and practical as he was, Malachy lacked subtlety and a dialectical approach to politics. He understood only head-on political confrontations. Once he had decided what he was for and what he was against, he would hold his place in the "gap of danger" and keep swinging his claymore without a second thought.

Garland, the most political of the "Official" leadership, was torn by doubt, a real Hamlet figure. That worried Malachy, who by nature was a battlefield leader; he

would not let himself be slowed down by doubts.

But Malachy also did not have the makings of a fanatic sectarian. The worst he was capable of, to my knowledge, was spitefulness, a very human fault, as all his faults were. His subjective resentments, in fact, were usually the reverse side of the coin of his strong personal loyalties. But this weakness kept him from being the kind of revolutionary political leader that was needed.

His weaknesses came to the forefront at the time of the 1974 split in the "Officials," after which the process of degeneration in what was left of the organization reached depths that the authors of the 1972 document foresaw in a general way but went beyond the worst apprehensions they expressed.

Malachy's main reaction to the 1972 debate was fear that a treacherous conciliatory attitude toward the Provisionals was developing. But while his attitude was in general sectarian and defensive, he did not carry this to its logical conclusion, as the more politically conscious "Official" leaders later did.

I remember a discussion in which one of the ultra-Stalinist sectarians who later came to set the tone in the "Officials" argued in essence that only a totalitarian machine could make a revolution in Ireland. Among other things, he said something like the following: "If there is ever a socialist revolution in Ireland, the counter-revolutionaries will use the slogan of 'workers control' to divert it and only an iron-hard party will be able to prevent that." He then proceeded to argue that the "Officials" should "deal" with all those groups that were trying to "mislead people."

I remarked, as I recall: "It looks like you think that the only way you can make a revolution in Ireland is to shoot or beat up most of the Irish people." Malachy muttered in agreement under his breath.

But I was surprised to see that another, more political leader was nodding in agreement with the ultra-Stalinist.

The bloc between Garland and Costello was made essentially on the basis of principles and broke apart on tactical questions. Costello had clear insights into what was wrong with the "Officials" line, but his alternative was more guerrilla action, essentially a suicidal course, as Garland recognized. But at some point Garland gave up trying to develop a revolutionary political alternative and fell back on the old Stalinist-educated leadership.

Important in this process, apparently, was a visit by Garland to Moscow for a world peace conference. He seemed to be most influenced by discussions he had with representatives of guerrilla movements in Africa supported by the Soviet Union. These figures convinced him that guerrilla movements could get effective backing from the Soviet Union. The fact

that such arguments had an effect shows that Garland, like the other "Official" leaders, never really broke out of the guerrillaist framework.

Apparently, he did not realize that politically, it was quite a different thing for the Soviet Union to support guerrilla warfare in Ireland than it was to do that in the case of the Portuguese colonies. He also failed to see that what he would have to give up politically in adopting an orientation toward the Soviet Union was far more important than anything he could hope to gain.

In this respect, Malachy was superior to Garland. He had a firmer grasp of reality. He told me that he considered it foolish to think that the "Officials" could get any significant support from the Soviet Union.

Once Garland made his choice, he followed the logic of it with a fatal consistency. He tried to suppress opposition to a clearly failing policy by means of bureaucratic intimidation and old-fashioned republican gunman thuggery. The inevitable result was a violent split in the organization in which the "Officials" lost the bulk of their supporters. In a desperate attempt to stop the desertions, the "Official" leaders launched a war against the breakaway group led by Costello.

In the statements issued by the "Officials" at the time, I recognized the ultra-Stalinist attitude I had heard expressed a couple of years before, and said so in articles. McGurran, who stuck to his personal loyalties, was upset by these articles and took the trouble to call me from Ireland to make a protest. I told him that I would go to Ireland and listen to what the "Officials" had to say.

By that time, he had already been ill with cancer of the bone for some time. I visited him in the hospital. His illness seemed to affect him in a way similar to severe arthritis. This made him even more paranoid. He said that in the shape he was in, if he ran into a group of Costello's people, he couldn't even defend himself, and then went into an explanation of what he had had to do to "live as long as I have." Survival, he indicated, depended on a sharp eye, good reflexes, and a quick draw.

He was overflowing with personal resentment against Costello; and, on the basis of our friendship, he expected me to accept an account of the split that depended on believing that Costello always did the opposite of what he said. He regarded my criticism of the campaign against Costello as a betrayal and complained that the fact that Trotskyists were taking such a position was "embarrassing" him.

The Tragedy of the 'Officials'

There was, however, a certain objective basis for Malachy's fears. Once violence was injected into the split in the North, a

pattern of gang warfare developed. It was made almost unbelievably savage by the bitterness of Belfast life, and neither side could control it. Eventually, the Belfast commander of the "Official" IRA and Costello himself fell victim to adventurist gunmen who took advantage of the conflict to get into "the action." Garland narrowly escaped the same fate. He was shot several times in the stomach.

The last time I saw Malachy was in that hospital. I remember the obvious affection that the hospital staff had for him, despite his equally obvious cantankerousness.

Costello also was fond of Malachy. I remember that when I told him about Malachy's reaction to the conflict, he was deeply downcast. That impressed me. Because, unlike Malachy, Costello's temperament was not visibly softened by sentiment. He was a totally ruthless individual, but also objective and capable of rising above subjective feelings and many common human weaknesses.

Malachy, for example, suffered from a certain personal ambition, of a narrow kind. The rank he held in the organization to which he had devoted his life was important to him. The organization was his life, and he could not see beyond it. Costello was above such feelings. He was not interested in a position in an organization that was going down the wrong path. He was prepared to break with it and go his own way without a backward glance.

At the time of the split, Malachy's subjectivism and his personal loyalties blinded him to arguments, and made him close his ears even to appeals to him to use his influence to stop the fratricidal warfare. But at the same time, he was sensible enough to realize the damage it was doing, and was shocked by the outrages perpetrated by the dead-end Stalinist sectarians, who now had the ball in their hands.

When one of the "Official" leaders, an outspoken ultra-Stalinist, planted a story in a Protestant terrorist publication accusing the Costello group of assassinating Protestants, and then had it reprinted in an "Official" organ as evidence that the "Protestant workers" knew who their friends were and who their enemies were, Malachy recognized how demented this action was. He told me that this crude attempt to sic the Protestant killer gangs on the rival group would "horrify the Celtic people."

At least up to a year after the split, I know that Malachy continued to maintain a degree of independent judgment. He understood what the so-called Peace Movement that arose in Northern Ireland was, and predicted accurately that it would not last long. This was at a time when other "Official" leaders interpreted this British propaganda operation as a "revolutionary" upsurge against "sectarian warfare" and marched in the "peace demonstrations." Nonetheless, Malachy remained one of the main "Official" spokesmen and

the real heroes of the Irish struggle. The greatest failures have been at the highest political level. It is the captains like Malachy who have shown what kind of revolutionary movement can be built in Ireland if the necessary kind of political leadership and support develops.

Although at the end of his life, Malachy was cut off from the rising generation of revolutionists in Ireland, the qualities he represented will be carried on. They grow

out of the rich tradition and experience in which he was deeply rooted, out of the ancient and still vital mass revolutionary experience of the Irish people.

As the Irish revolution advances, there will be more and more Malachys. They will be organizing and leading all sorts of actions and campaigns, carefully trying to prevent mistakes and to perfect the discipline of their forces, studying every available example with an open and thoughtful

mind, and applying the solid practical sense that comes from strong links with the people.

And when the long hoped for allies, the Irish people appear and the Irish fighters get the generals they have been awaiting for centuries, hundreds and perhaps thousands of Malachys will organize and lead the hosts that will finally raise the shout of triumph on the sunny slopes of "Sliabh na-Ban."

Title: Malachy McGurran - A Dedicated Revolutionist

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