

THE REPUBLIC



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The Republic aims to provide a forum for discussion, debate and analysis of contemporary and historical issues. Irish and international matters across a range of disciplines will be addressed. Republican ideas and principles will shape and inform the contents of the journal. Our aim is to serve a general rather than a specialist readership.

The opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily represent those of the Ireland Institute.

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IRELAND NOW

EDITORIAL

The Republic is the journal of the Ireland Institute for Historical and Cultural Studies. The Ireland Institute was established in 1996 with the objective of promoting republican ideas and thinking, and self-determination (in the broadest sense) in Ireland. What concerns the Institute are the republican principles of liberty, equality and fraternity; democracy, citizenship and internationalism.

This journal is part of the programme to further these objectives. It will be a forum for serious thinking and new approaches; theory, debate and research will all find a place. While the journal will promote standards of quality and excellence, it is not intended to be exclusive or élite. Republican ideas and principles will shape and inform the contents of the journal.

The Republic will bring this approach to bear on a wide range of contemporary issues. In this first issue contemporary Ireland is held up to the scrutiny of this perspective and while republicanism has often been misunderstood or misrepresented in modern Ireland, the articles here show the continuing relevance and potential of its ideals and principles. In five commissioned essays the contributors address aspects of culture, history-writing, economics, politics and international issues in an Irish context. There are also six shorter pieces from invited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with some of their concerns.

COLM RAPPLE argues that a lack of leadership and vision is leading to greater inequality, more exclusion and less democratic control in the economy; he sees a need to reassert a positive role for the state in economic management and for greater use of what democratic control remains with the government.

The fragmentation and lack of opportunity for collective discourse and action in contemporary society dismays THEO DORGAN; but he sees hope in the resistance strategies of individual poets and the many points of social interaction in everyday life.

LIAM O'DOWD asks how ideals of democracy, sovereignty and independence can be defended when economic and political structures are becoming increasingly globalised; he envisages a role, however, for the promotion of these ideals in alerting people to the problems associated

with globalisation, and in finding democratic solutions.

The premise that both states in Ireland have failed to deliver in terms of equality, independence and democracy is the starting point for KEVIN MCCORRY; he proposes a new political formation to advance a radical alternative agenda and including republicans, socialists and others.

MARY CULLEN describes a rich tradition of feminist ideas and involvement which has been excluded from the writing of history at some cost to movements for democracy and equality; she argues that renewed dialogue between feminists, republicans and socialists can reinvigorate these ideas and movements.

Modern republicanism can trace its origins back to the Enlightenment and the eighteenth-century revolutions in France and America. The articles here make clear that its ideals and principles retain their vitality and validity today. Certainly the contributors found the task we set them challenging: how to address contemporary issues from the perspective of republican ideas. Equally there is no easy agreement about the precise content of each of these ideals and principles. Democracy, sovereignty, equality, independence and the rest, are ideas as hotly contested today as in the past. But what emerges from these essays is a conviction that republican thinking and ideas can provide an important critical perspective on the contemporary world, point to its shortcomings and problems, and help suggest ways forward.

In future issues of *The Republic* we will be inviting contributions to help us develop and expand this approach. Over time a deeper understanding and wider recognition of the importance of republican ideas can result. Republican ideals will themselves be developed, refined and invigorated through challenge and debate, and a broad-ranging republican critique of contemporary and historical issues may emerge.

These are the tasks that we have set ourselves. We hope that readers of *The Republic* will participate in the argument and discussion that will follow. Through this debate we can find ways forward to the possible republics the contributors in this issue point towards.

Introductory Article

Beyond Nationalism: Time to Reclaim the Republican Ideal

FINBAR CULLEN

Republicanism is a term which has long been misused in Ireland and largely separated from its meaning and origins. It has been equated by many with militant and armed nationalism and an absolutist rejection of any British government in Ireland. This confusion of republicanism with nationalism needs to be unpicked and their very different principles, programmes and objectives need to be understood. It is only in such clarification that what would constitute real self-determination in Ireland can be grasped and the task of promoting the republican agenda can properly begin.

The confusion of republicanism with nationalism has meant that almost all thinking in this area has been directed towards the examination of nationalism. Even a year of commemoration of that great eighteenth-century republican movement, the United Irish societies, failed to spur on more than a few commentators to a recovery and reappraisal of the rich republican tradition in Ireland. Instead their gaze has been fixed firmly on nationalism.

Approaches based on nationalism tend to pose problems though, particularly at times of change such as this. One recent trend in addressing such problems has been to advocate a theory of 'nationalisms'. The plural is seen as a way of reconciling the existence of negative tendencies in nationalism alongside positive ones. But this is evasive. It seeks to resolve an apparent contradiction through a linguistic shift or semantic manoeuvre.

A better solution begins by disentangling the concept of nation from that of nationalism. Once we achieve that, we can begin to examine nationalism itself, its objectives and its limitations and the need for other answers to the questions we face in Ireland today. One answer can be found in republicanism.

Nation and nationality

Nation and nationality are real, material things. They are not just imagined or constructed at an ideal or conceptual level. This is not to say that the ways in which particular communities and peoples define and describe themselves do not involve creative acts of self-imagination. What it does mean, is that such acts of creativity are performed on a concrete basis; there is a reality in existence to which the label of nation has been attached.

Nation is essentially a form of community, and nationality a form of identity derived from belonging to that community. The word nation first entered the English language in the fourteenth century and is derived from the Latin noun *natio*: birth, tribe, from *nasci*: to be born. Belonging to a nation arises simply from being born into it. Clearly this cannot by itself account for the existence of different nations nor the differences between them. It is the combination of a wide range of factors – historical, geographical, climatic, economic, social and others – that gives rise to the form of community that is a nation.

These factors have definite outcomes in terms of constituting and defining particular communities or nations. Climate and geography create different economic possibilities in different places; these in turn create social and cultural possibilities; and all of these will have considerable influence on historical developments.

Nationality is simply the form of identity that comes from belonging to a particular nation. Like nation therefore, nationality has a material element which is prior to any act of imagination. We are born into a particular community with its own economic, social and cultural arrangements. No matter what attitude we adopt to these later we cannot escape this reality or their influence. But we are free to engage critically with nationality and nation. We can create identities for ourselves that embrace the nationality we are born into; we can reject elements of it or try to mould or reshape them; we can borrow new or different elements from other nations and nationalities; we can choose to regard that part of our identities that is connected to nationality as unimportant or dispensable. Amidst all these possibilities for self-imagination, however, what we cannot do is make ourselves re-born, free of that nationality into which we were originally born. Rejection of our nationality to the extent of believing that we have in effect erased it is to live in denial.

It is also the case that nation and nationality are not static and unchanging. The factors that contribute to the emergence of nations are themselves subject to change over time, and as they change the nation and the nationality they help to form will of necessity change with them. Furthermore, contact between nations and peoples, their cultures and

economies, cannot leave either party untouched or unmoved. It is inevitable that ordinary interaction between nations will give rise to ongoing and mutual change.

What is important this far is twofold. Firstly, nation and nationality have a prior existence upon which any subsequent acts of self-imagination take place. As forms of community and identity they are inescapable and apply everywhere. Secondly, they are subject to our shaping and choosing as we go along. They are not static and unchanging over time, nor are they immune from the influence contact with others brings.

It follows from this that nation and nationality, as forms of community and identity, should be welcomed and respected, though not uncritically, and they should continuously be examined for the good and the bad they can contain. Viewpoints that regard them as solely imagined constructs are difficult to sustain, while conservative ideas of unchanging and unchangeable nations and nationality are contradicted by reason and experience.

Nationalism

There is some difficulty about the definition of nationalism. In the first instance many of those discussing it avoid providing a definition or feel no need to do so. This is unhelpful and leaves the question of what nationalism is floating there, subject to the biases and preconceptions that different viewpoints bring to it. A second tendency is to equate nationalism with the feeling of belonging or sense of identity that we have discussed as nationality above. But if we define nationalism only in terms of feeling or sentiment, or even identity, it ceases to be a primary political force or vehicle for political action. It becomes instead secondary and must attach itself to some other doctrine or ideology in order to have effect or influence. While there may seem to be some merit in this – other ideologies almost always exploit the gaps in nationalism – our experience of nationalism as a potent force in history and the world suggests that this approach is not sufficient either.

So, what is nationalism? If we accept that nationalism is a primary political force, then we must treat it as we treat other political forces. It is a system of ideas about how political life and society should be organised. In this sense, nationalism is an ideological force or doctrine. Like many other ideologies it is more the creation of political and historical processes than of any formal setting-down of its principles and contents. It developed as a response to real political circumstances and served particular interests. And as with socialism or capitalism, or republicanism, it is all the more potent and vital because of this.

All political doctrines systematise ideas about how society should be organised. Nationalism is a political ideology which makes nation and

nationality the principles of political organisation. What are essentially forms of community and identity are elevated into organising principles in society. The dangers here should be obvious. If one community and the identity attached to it are to become the basis of political organisation, then the first question that arises is how the state will relate to and accommodate other communities and identities which may be either within the same territorial boundaries, or external to them, or both. This is not just an academic question. It has been the cause of huge problems in the world and will continue to be as long as nationalism remains a significant political force.

Nationalism categorises the world only in terms of nation and nationality. It ignores other categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and more. But these categories already exist in the nation and the world and so the state that nationalism creates will reflect the existing relationships in these categories. The inequalities and injustices that exist are likely to be continued and reinforced by the implementation of a nationalist programme. If we consider any category, gender say, or class, what position can nationalism adopt towards it? Nationalism proposes that the state should be based upon the nation and rights derive simply from nationality. If there is a conflict based on gender or class, in what way can an appeal to nationality as arbiter resolve that conflict? The only answer it can find is one which is already contained within the nation, and it is this which inclines nationalism towards conservative and authoritarian solutions and a propensity to favour the powerful and privileged.

It is in this sense that nationalism is a type of identity politics: political questions are addressed in terms of nationality, i.e. identity. But even in areas where politics based on identity seem useful, there is much that is problematic. Questions of culture constitute such an area. If identity in the shape of nationality is to be the arbiter of cultural issues, then culture will be divided into culture that is an expression of the nation and culture from without. Culture from outside the nation will seem alien and to some degree will be interpreted as threatening to the national culture. Two further points are worth considering. Firstly, while such politics based on identity are familiar to all of us, they are at such odds with life and experience that they cannot stifle the impulses for openness and democracy that are everywhere. And secondly, the placing of culture in the national sphere, responsible for the expression of national identity, can lead to a narrowing down of democratic space, and an exclusion of identities that cross national boundaries.

A recent development has seen the emergence of a theory of nationalisms. This is in response to the apparently different ways nationalism manifests itself in practice. One form of this response has been to talk of Irish nationalism, British nationalism, English nationalism, French

nationalism, and so on. While this is not particularly challenging – it does little more than identify the nation to which nationalism must always be attached outside of theory – it does serve the purpose of reminding us that nationalism is at work in places where it has not always been acknowledged.

Another version of the nationalisms argument can be summarised as 'good nationalism' versus 'bad nationalism'. It identifies nationalism at work on both sides of colonial or imperial conflicts. There is a nationalism that fuels colonialism and imperialism and is oppressive and chauvinistic. However there is also an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist nationalism, which is progressive and democratic. Nationalism, it is argued, is simultaneously liberating and oppressive, cosmopolitan and chauvinistic, democratic and undemocratic. The usefulness of a concept which can contain such opposing meanings at the one time is doubtful. If, instead, we hold fixed the definition of nationalism as a political doctrine which has the nation as its central organising principle, then we will have to find another explanation for the seeming contradictions which the nationalisms approach identifies.

That explanation can be found in a simple formulation: nationalism is the same everywhere, with the same agenda; it is the location and the context which have clouded the viewpoints of some commentators. Resistance to colonialism and imperialism has almost always adopted a nationalist guise. While nationality (like religion and language) may be an important criterion in allocating privilege in a colonial system, it is never the case that it is the motivating factor in colonial domination and expropriation. Economic needs and ambitions, and political considerations are the decisive factors. So, the problems that oppressed people face – lack of democratic control, lack of economic control, the absence of equality and justice, etc. are problems that may not be resolved by the assertion of national autonomy. But because the political order is imposed by outside forces it seems to many that a nationalist programme is the answer. In fact the progressive and transformative tendencies in the resistance derive from those elements that are anti-colonial and anti-imperial, the part that is oppositional. It is the location, being in opposition to undemocratic and oppressive forces, that is the source of democratic and progressive ideas in national movements. On the other hand, while nationalism offers a convenient unifying point, its programme of building a nation state is essentially conservative and runs counter to the other transformative trends. Ironically, the nationalist part of the movement proposes to build a state which is the mirror image of what the struggle is against: it is only the nationality of the state which will be different.

This also helps to explain what has been the widespread failure of national liberation movements to find answers to the problems their

peoples and countries face. Great hopes have been raised in the period of opposition, progressive programmes have been advanced and democratic transformation promised. But as soon as the period of opposition has ended, nationalism is left with only the project of building a state based on the nation. In many cases this has brought the mainstream national movements, now in power, into conflict with groups which want more democratic change, in economic and social life, and in questions related to equality and gender and class. In response to this, nationalism in power has often been intolerant and authoritarian, co-opting opposition where possible, squeezing it out where necessary, and often resorting to violent repression.

One more point worth considering is the extent to which all types of groups, movements and even states have been willing to embrace nationalism or at least try to harness it to their own purposes. Communists, socialists, democrats, republicans and others have all tried to ride the back of nationalism as a step towards other goals. The extent to which nationalism has triumphed and other programmes have been discarded should be a warning to those who would choose this route.

An Alternative

Up to this point we have looked at the ideas of nation and nationality, and nationalism. Disentangling these concepts leaves us with, on the one hand, nation and nationality as forms of community and identity which are welcome and valued. Alongside this we have a political ideology, nationalism, which transforms these concepts into principles of political organisation. In this transformation the welcome and valuable aspects of nation and nationality are changed into a programme which is conservative and closed. Clearly there is a need for a different answer to the problems and issues which face us in Ireland today and elsewhere. A political programme that can respect different communities and identities while advancing inclusive, democratic strategies for the state is needed. One such programme is provided by republicanism.

Republicanism

In Ireland republicanism has long been problematic and controversial and for most people the term has come to be emptied of its true meaning and content. In the last thirty years it has become common to equate republicanism with militant or armed nationalism and an absolutist rejection of any British involvement in Ireland. For some it became a term of abuse, and many who might have shared the goals and principles of republicanism, retreated from the word itself. Perhaps now with the end of the armed conflict and the continuing peace process there will be more space to challenge this. Already people are reaching out to the word again,

and some to the ideal. We must try to ensure that it will never be co-opted again for undemocratic or chauvinistic purposes, or to serve the goals of nationalism.

The republic, literally the public thing, is a form of government, in which sovereignty rests with the people. From this simple but fundamental idea, the principles of modern republicanism were developed over time. While these principles are basic and lacking in controversy, their implementation would be fundamentally challenging and transforming. The principles of republicanism are democracy, citizenship and internationalism; liberty, equality and fraternity. They were developed from the foundation proposition that the people should be sovereign, and in the course of the historic movements for republican government, particularly in America, France and Ireland.

The democratic core of republicanism rests on the sovereignty of the people. Democracy is simply government by the people and a republic without democracy would not be a republic. Government by the people is, in intention, participative rather than representative; plural rather than majoritarian; diverse rather than homogenous. Neither democracy nor the republic refer to the nation or nationality. It is membership of the polity, the republic, that confers rights and obligations and is the source of republican citizenship.

The purpose of republicanism is to provide good government in the interests of the common welfare – ideas of the common good and the commonwealth are central to the meaning of republicanism. In seeking to advance the welfare of the people and in the historic development of republicanism, the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity were added to its programme. The internationalism of republicanism also has its roots in this history where the links and solidarity between America and France and Ireland in the eighteenth century were extensive and important. But the principle of cooperation, understanding and solidarity beyond the boundaries of the nation and the state also has origins in republican thinking and the recognition that interests are shared across borders. The implementation of republican and nationalist programmes lead to very different outcomes.

The republican principles of democracy, citizenship and internationalism challenge the usurpation of nation and nationality as principles by nationalism. Attaching rights and obligations to a common citizenship leads to more open and democratic outcomes than attaching them to nationality. The democratic allocation of sovereignty in the republic means that each person has a right to be self-determining and to a share in government. And the purpose of this is to advance the common welfare of the people. Nationalism, however, collapses all these rights into the rights of the nation. The right of the nation to be self-governing is placed above

the right of each person to be self-governing, and the welfare of the nation, which usually means the interests of the dominant section, is placed above the common welfare of the people. Finally, the internationalism of republicanism challenges the inward focus of nationalism. It also challenges the nationalist idea that interests can be confined within national boundaries.

The inability of nationalism to deal with categories other than nation has been noted. When confronted with problems based on gender or class or ethnicity, it can only appeal to nation and nationality for a solution. In contrast, republicanism has a programme which can address any category or political question. It simply asks what is the democratic way which maximises the control of people over their lives? What promotes liberty and equality and fraternity? Certainly people will find different answers to these questions, but they do provide an open, progressive approach to problems, where looking for them within the nation or within nationalism cannot.

While republicanism rejects the idea that nation and nationality should be the basis for political organisation, or that nation should be equated with the state, it does respect and welcome them as forms of community and identity. It sees them as arising out of ordinary human activity, social, economic, cultural and political, and as such they are part of ordinary democratic development. Neither does republicanism favour one nation over another, nor believe that nations should be territorially contiguous. It treats all nations equally. It follows that republicans should have a democratic respect for their own nations and nationality, supporting what is good and challenging what is not.

Republicanism offers a way forward for Ireland today. Its principles provide an approach which is relevant to contemporary issues everywhere in the world. Using these principles, democracy, citizenship and internationalism; liberty, equality and fraternity, we can ask:

- How are these principles advanced or impeded in economic, social, cultural and political matters?
- How would the implementation of these principles affect outcomes in any situation?
- What would a republican society look like?
- How can we move forward towards such a society?

Republicanism is ultimately an open political doctrine. It proposes great principles but it is not about providing a blueprint that must be followed detail by detail. Rather than claiming to be the final answer, it tries to provide a route towards those answers. While its important principles are non-negotiable, space is left for democratic debate about what the meaning and content of those principles are or should be.

Ireland Now

Poetry and the Possible Republic

THEO DORGAN

Our first attempt to build a republic in Ireland has been at best a partial success: limited to 26 of the 32 counties, the state we call the Republic was founded on a republican ideology which was at best *ad hoc*, and which was suborned and diverted as a political project almost from the first. We live now in a form of flat oligarchy, ruled not by ourselves in some kind of pure democracy, nor by our deflected legislature – though they make the laws – but by supra-national forces and by the shifting interest groups which control world capital, including the comprador formations which manage their specific interests in Ireland.

We have no monarch, we have a constitution which affects to value each and every citizen equally, we have a reasonable separation of powers, universal suffrage and a party political system which at least makes a token attempt to go beyond the cursory two party system – though in practice, as with the notorious US system, there is little or nothing to distinguish the parties ideologically from one another. We have the outward forms of a republic, but not the living, internal dynamic which has its root in the ancient Latin formula, the republic as the *res publica*, the public thing, with its implicit promise of politics as process, as a living art and truth.

The idea of a republic necessarily implicates us in a form of collective self-attention, an ongoing interrogation of past and current practice, a willingness to dispose of our social, intellectual and moral futures inside a frame of values collectively debated and agreed. It is at least arguable that in the infancy of the state theorists as diverse as Connolly, de Valera, Larkin, Collins and the broad spectrum which operated under the Sinn Féin umbrella had, in some form or another, a kind of political organisation in mind which would be centrally based on, or at least incorporate some of, these features. We have no such arrangement now among ourselves, and I do not see that it will be possible in the foreseeable future to construct such an arrangement.

It has been argued that a number of crucial, disabling mistakes were made right at the inception of the Free State: the entire civil service apparatus was adopted from the departing colonial power; the adversarial courts system, the education system, the systems of local government, all of the social and political engines of control and command were allowed to remain in place, to consolidate the distribution and management of power in society, to blunt and deflect every kind of revolutionary energy. I am not entirely sure it is enough to see these errors as simple mistakes: we had already by the turn of the last century a state class with its schools and clubs and university traditions, and it would be naive of us not to see how seamlessly, when the heat and dust of battle was done, the managers and the owners blended the apparatus of former power into the management of the new state. The republic was abandoned not least in the ossification and suffocating airs of a theocratic, monolithic Catholic state. Let anyone who doubts this latter point take as a starting point for their reading in the area John Cooney's recent biography of John Charles McQuaid.

It is true that the internal power dynamic of the Catholic church inside Ireland is weakening. Equally, and as a consequence, it is true that this weakening represents and enacts the weakening of a model of power which is authoritarian and exclusionary; clientelism, the system by means of which key individuals mediate for the believer or for the citizen in her or his negotiations with a higher power, is only one of the means by which the church model inflected and perhaps ultimately shaped the citizen's understanding of how the state was to be dealt with, and in turn the state's understanding of where it stood in relation to the citizen.

It is also true that the average individual in the state today is considerably more assertive of self than were their parents or grandparents.

It is not true, however, that the propensity to question authority, the drive towards increased self-assertion, leads necessarily to a widespread demand for more power in the organising of the state, more willingness to construct political demands, more appetite for a republic in theory or in fact.

The leading élites in the Republic have re-defined the state as the apparatus which controls, manages and organises the economy, and they have been extraordinarily successful. What is good for the state is what is good for the economy, and the economy is increasingly defined as a manufacturing and distributive apparatus which has its being in some curious disjunction from our actual experience of ourselves as human beings, individual or in collective. The language tells it all: men and women are not deliberately put out of work for the benefit of shareholders – jobs are, somehow, unaccountably lost; it isn't that miners in Tara are asked to work longer hours, and thus put themselves in more physical

danger every day – they are asked for a productivity deal; it isn't that our schools, our health services, our housing are improving – it's that GNP is increasing, and therefore things must be getting better all round. We know, and they know, that this is smoke and mirrors, but we collude with the real beneficiaries of this new madness in agreeing that the Republic is becoming wealthier, and therefore a better place for us all as human beings, when we know and our owners know that our meagre bank balances, and their obscenely-enlarged bank balances, are the most impoverished index possible to what really matters – our experience of what happens to us as sentient human beings between birth and death.

Why we collude I do not know.

What can be done about this I do not know.

My purpose in the remainder of this article is to reflect on some of the ways in which some of us have seceded from this process, or worked out a relationship with the state which is in essence subversive of those values on which the state is at present predicated. I will want to suggest that in the aggregate of values subversive of the status quo we may find the embryonic forms of some possible republics. Since it seems sensible to concentrate on what I know best, I want to consider the situation of poets and poetry in Ireland.

Poetry is at best marginal in official Ireland today, despite the fact that we have upwards of 250 poets with works in print. The average book of poems is published in an edition of 1,000 copies, though Heaney, Durcan, Mahon, Montague, Longley and Boland will exceed that, as will a small number of the younger poets; except for a tiny handful, though, poets are not so valued that it is possible to make a living from the craft. We have a small number of indigenous publishers to bring work before the reading public, and we have a certain level of support from the state mediated through the Arts Council in the form of bursaries and grants for the individual poet as well as grants to publishers and to support organisations such as Aosdána, Poetry Ireland, The Irish Writers Centre and Ireland Literature Exchange. Poets who write in Irish may also receive some financial assistance from Bord na Gaeilge and Bord na Leabhar Gaeilge. None of this is so systematic as to put us in any danger of nurturing régime poets, as was the case in the former Soviet Union, say, though there are undoubtedly a handful of poets who share the values of our present temporary ruling class and embody their preoccupations in their work. Such poets, thankfully, are few, and their work is generally bad, so they need not concern us very much.

Poetry is marginal to the state's concerns inasmuch as the level of investment is a minute percentage of, say, the grant support on offer to the robber barons of the beef industry. Poetry is marginal to the state's concerns, also, in that – to judge by their speeches, policy documents,

manifestos and general utterances – our politicians and owners, to say nothing of their lackeys, display a quite remarkably low level of general literacy. A sense of fairness demands that I note some handful of exceptions, who will please excuse themselves from the general observation should they happen to read this, but by and large the established politician, industrialist and manager of today considers himself well-read if he can get through a balance sheet and a leading article without moving his lips.

This is healthy for poetry, since it means that what the poets are writing is all but invisible to the state, always a good thing. The reflex of the autocratic or oligarchic state, even a baby oligarchy like our own, is to commodify and therefore control whatever swims into its ken. In extreme cases, as in the former Soviet Union for example, or China today, the state will do the poet the honour of considering her or him a danger to power, and deal with the problem accordingly. Here, though there are probably some who crave a little light martyrdom, the state is indifferent to what we do: they realise that in civilised societies art in general is considered a good thing, and so they make some little money available so that we may not be shamed before the sophisticated world, but in truth, and again with a few honourable exceptions, they are indifferent to what it is we say and do. I repeat, this is a good thing. There are autonomous literary organisations, arts centres, festivals, publishers and others who have managed to suborn a certain level of financial aid for poets, it would be good if it were more of course, and the para-state agency The Arts Council has a constrained ability to put money in poets' purses – though without as yet any marked commitment to democratisation of the decision-making power when it comes to doling out the grants and bursaries. But there is no Ministry for Poetry, no official poets union, no line which, if followed, will lead to reward.

Internally, in the community of poets, there is considerable liberty. A poet may write what he or she likes, with a reasonable chance of getting it published, a reasonable chance of reaching an audience. True, because publishers are few, there are chokepoints in the process, and we are at the mercy of the tastes of those who own and control the publishing houses, but the technology on the kitchen table is now such that this is hardly the insuperable problem it once was. Further, there is no particular leading fashion to dictate subject or form, and no single audience exercising a veto on who is read or who is not. People swim in and out of the public eye, as far as I can see, in a more or less random fashion. Ironically enough, the only external demands made on poets as poets tend to come from marginal, ideology-driven groupings all of who seem to display a tendency to prescribe to artists as the one thing they have in common, besides powerlessness of course.

When W. B. Yeats wrote 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot' he wrote as a man deeply implicated in the welter of debate about Ireland's independence. In common with lesser poets like McDonagh, Pearse and Plunkett, dramatists like Synge and, somewhat later, O'Casey, in common even with the great self-exiled Joyce, Yeats had contracted with himself to engage his gift with the matter of Ireland. I put it like this because it was, I think, a deliberate decision for him and for those others to engage with Ireland as drama, to seek their themes and the wider stage for their imaginings in an Ireland which was at that point in history on the point of synthesising its conflicting histories. Yeats was to be brutally disappointed, abandoned and scorned by the first inheritors of independence, and in his turn scornful of 'the sort now growing up'. He proved himself, as a citizen, a loyal member of his class, as O'Casey would prove loyal to his class, and Joyce with his petit-bourgeois predilections would prove prophetic of the coming age and its anti-romantic scepticism.

There has been no national poet since Yeats, and I doubt that there will be again, since the idea of the nation has become almost untenable, and since the poets have tasted the wider world. Consider: Heaney, almost an Antaeus of County Derry, is as influenced by Hopkins and Wordsworth, Frost, Milosz and Walcott as he is by any poet from Ireland's past. Montague and Kinsella acknowledge certain roots in tribal Gaelic Ireland, but Kinsella is an urban poet of mordancies and doubt, Montague shaped and influenced by French and American poetry of the mid-century. Mahon is our first radical dandy since Wilde, Boland's nearest kin is the great American Adrienne Rich and even Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill is closer in sensibility to Marina Tsvetayeva than she is to any Irish poet since Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill. All these and many more write matter-of-factly about the Ireland of today, few if any acknowledge a responsibility to history, especially remote tribal history, as an obligation of identity. It is possible to go further, and say that Muldoon, Carson, Meehan, McGuckian and many others set out to destabilise the possibility of a mono-Ireland, however that might be framed or proposed.

And it is from this point that we turn back towards the possible republic.

It isn't that poets have lost the sense of engagement with history so much as the fact that the poets, in common with most of their fellow-citizens, have lost faith in a dialogue between personal preoccupation and the constituting myth of a republic that might unite us in a common frame of reference. Yeats was right when he said that we make poetry from the quarrel with ourselves, rhetoric from the quarrel with others – and this is an anti-rhetorical age. The poets, even when they deal with 'political' subjects, have turned inward, they enact rather than propose political positions, they tell the stories but refrain from pointing the moral. Paul

Durcan is often proposed as a model of an *engagé* poet, and it is true that his long discursive poems often deal in hyper-real and recognisable dramas of the day-to-day, yet what is fundamental to a Durcan poem is that his most profound quarrel is always with himself. Even at his most scathing (and he is, in a good sense, a scold) he finds the point of view in the poem in self-doubt. Ciaran Carson's Belfast is a city riven by war, but not defined by war; a former Antrim hurler, an accomplished traditional musician, reared speaking Irish on the Falls Road, he is nonetheless first and foremost a free subject, a man who owns his tribal roots but owns no determined loyalty to the tribe. Eavan Boland, daughter of an ambassador, is of Ireland in the sense intended by Mary Robinson when she quoted 'I am of Ireland' in her inaugural address. That is to say, Boland refuses a circumscribing identity, finding no place for herself as a woman in any given Ireland, assuming as part of her project of a life in poetry the burden of making a new identity for herself which may (or may not) be enabling for other women of Ireland. Paula Meehan has an unshakeable loyalty to the class and kin who are the foundation of her world view, but this is a site of difficulty, a necessary tension to be engaged with, rather than a set of shorthand permissions to reach escape velocity by appealing to the social guilt of her readers. Rita Ann Higgins as a matter of deliberate poetic tact sets and frames her stories of the underclass in the language itself of that underclass; this tactic shifts and undermines any sense there might be in the culture of 'poetic language', thereby enriching both poetry and language while often discomfiting the would-be priests and explainers of poetry. Thomas McCarthy's prudent and elegant eviscerations of Fianna Fáil have been often represented as propaganda for that party – which sets me scratching my head, I must confess. McCarthy is to Fianna Fáil what Solzhenitsyn was to the Communist Party. What these poets, and many, many others, in both languages, have in common is a willingness to set personal liberty above and beyond all other obligations. What kind of Republic might it be, that would encompass in its politics the debates with self these poets conduct in poetry? And if we then factor in more Parnassian poets like Moya Cannon, Peter Fallon, Vona Groarke and a host of others whose preoccupations are perhaps more consistently personal, where might they in their turn take us?

I am framing the question in this way because, of course, there is no answer, or at any rate no easy answer. I do not think we will again, in my lifetime, have a consensus on Ireland, let alone on an Irish republic, which will provide a master-text for poets or poetry. I do think, however, that taken in the aggregate, the worlds of those poets now at work can be encompassed in an over-arching republic if we can invent a citizenry to debate with itself in some of the ways these poets have found to argue with

themselves. The business of poetry is with language, more exactly with the dance between self and language. Each poet must forge a language for herself, adequate to her existential predicament, supple enough to allow for growth and change, precise enough to persuade us to perception; but that language is a language we hold in common with others, it comes down to us all from the same sources and flows away like a river into the sea of the unknown future. The business of poetry is to do with truth to self in a language we share with others – or truth to language in a world we share with other, equally-valuable selves. Is there not, perhaps, a model here for how we might think of ourselves as citizen-individuals seeking a common language with our fellows? And is it not likely that any possible republic can only come from such new roots? If we are to make a republic it will involve us in an act of transubstantiation; the republic will be an overlay and interpenetration of many visions, a poem of poems, a vision of visions, constantly undermining and reconstituting itself in the way a poem does, day after day, without cease.

We must arm our minds and hearts with visions if we are to build this possible, quarrelsome, protean republic. We could do worse than steep ourselves, as a preparation, in the words of those fellow-citizens who struggle each day with failure and with themselves in the battle to make a clear, simple, resonant poem.

Or painting, song, sculpture, novel, story or play.

I make no special case for poets or for other artists. A great number of people in Ireland today have turned away from the formal political debates which animated the early days of independence. The conditions of our lives today are such that first and foremost we think and act as self-motivated individuals, in many cases almost completely cut off from the state. Yet, in the arts and other voluntary organisations, in sports clubs and in a wide range of associations-by-affinity we find ourselves deeply and complicatedly involved with each other. In the language we use to conduct these socialised lives is the beginnings of a new language for politics. In the reality we often avoid, that many of these organisations depend on the state for funding, despite what we might call in most cases an institution-alised aversion to the state, is another lesson: the owners and managers of the state, no matter how successful they may appear to be in alienating us from our own, can never be wholly successful – in the end, we own them, and not the other way around. If I say that in the diverse narratives of poetry we find a more generous possibility of ourselves, I would also wish to say that in the practice of poetry we can find models for repossessing ourselves as human, the first and most urgent precondition for building a republic.

The Changing World Order and the Republican Ideal in Ireland

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Introduction

The republican ideal of governance in Ireland and elsewhere now faces major challenges. The growth of transnational governance, as represented in the European Union and the proliferation of transnational institutions, corporations and social movements, is posing fundamental challenges to democratic accountability and popular sovereignty. In Ireland, over the last 30 years, the Northern Ireland conflict and the ongoing debate between 'republicans' and their opponents have served to pre-empt a more fundamental debate on whether the republican ideal can or should survive in the new world order and within Ireland in particular. The fate of the republican ideal is not solely a matter for particular political parties, movements or groups but has far reaching implications for what it will mean to be a citizen in both parts of Ireland in the twenty-first century.

A 'barebones' definition of the republican ideal is 'government by the people for the people'. It invokes the Enlightenment principles of popular sovereignty and self-determination and subscribes to majoritarianism and representative democracy within fixed territorial boundaries. Its roots in popular sovereignty mean that it is either secular or theistic in that it rejects appeals to religious authority as a means of informing the practical day-to-day governance of the state. It advocates, therefore, the separation of powers and the autonomy of civil society *vis-à-vis* the state.

The basic reference points of republicanism, therefore, are the 'people', the 'territory' within which they reside, a written constitution and a system of laws under which all are to be treated equally. A republic has come to presuppose representative democracy periodically accountable to the people but which ensures that elected representatives remain subject to the same constitution and laws as the people generally. By definition, therefore, republicanism is opposed to arbitrary rule as represented by monarchies, autocracies or parliamentary dictatorships. The core ideal, if

not always the reality, is equal citizenship, for all those residing in a particular territory.

Of course, like other political ideals, the republican ideal is never realised fully in practice. The universalisation of citizenship rights to whole populations was achieved through a series of partly successful popular struggles such as those over the franchise, the rights of workers and welfare recipients. Even in contemporary democratic republics much of the population, women, children, gays, non-nationals, the working class and the poor remain unequal in terms of their substantive citizenship rights.

Moreover, republicanism as an ideal does not constitute a comprehensive 'stand alone' philosophy. As Tom Paine recognised as early as 1792, in his response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, republicanism is an ideal or principle of government, rather than a fully fledged form of government or a complete political ideology. Today the label republican can be applied to a wide variety of states including the 'first republics' of the US and France, 'old' post-colonial states in Latin America, newer post-colonial states in Africa and Asia and emergent states in Europe. The label is claimed by political movements as diverse as the Republican Party in the US, Sinn Féin in Ireland, anti-monarchists in Britain and supporters of the Islamic Republic in Iran. It has been associated historically with a variety of different ideologies such as nationalism, socialism, liberalism and even popular forms of Catholicism and Islam.

The republican ideal has been too often confused with these ideologies although they have clearly shaped its practical expression in specific historical contexts. A further difficulty is that the appropriation of the label republican by those states and political movements which are anti-democratic in orientation, has drained the term of its original and particular meaning.

Whatever its forerunners in ancient Greece and Rome, or in the Italian states of the Renaissance, the modern republican ideal owes much to the historical rupture marked by the American and French revolutions and to tracts such as Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*. 'Pure republicanism' envisaged a world of secular, democratic states, treating each other as equals, with a sharp distinction between the private and the public spheres and between foreign and domestic affairs. Claims to self-determination, involved, in principle at least, a willingness to recognise and respect rights of others to self-determination. Indeed, one of the more positive legacies of Irish republicanism, since the 1790s, is that, apart from short-lived opportunist alliances, its adherents have sided with those who supported the demise of monarchy and the fragmentation of the great European empires.

When addressing the prospects of the republican ideal in Ireland, it is

necessary to deal simultaneously with both the specifics of the Irish context and the wider global trends which are altering our conventional understandings of self-determination, sovereignty and democracy. Too often discussions of Irish republicanism concentrate on the former, while the impact of the new world order is ignored.

Globalisation, identity and insularity

One of the consequences of globalisation is the increasing unsustainability of a sharp distinction between internal, i.e. domestic, affairs and international or foreign affairs. For member states of the European Union (EU), this distinction seems even more problematical given its promulgation of shared sovereignty, co-decision making and the regulatory role of EU institutions. The consequences for the republican ideal, the national state, popular sovereignty, self-determination and democracy are far reaching.

The difficulties of adequately addressing these questions in Ireland are exacerbated by an insular dimension to Irish political thinking. In particular, republicanism and nationalism are frequently considered as if they are only to be found in Ireland. The debates raging over Irish nationalism, and the peculiar strain of British nationalism that is today's Ulster unionism, have encouraged a 'cult of uniqueness' which underlines the insularity of both. Similarly, the prolonged intellectual navel gazing about Irish identity and culture sometimes gives the impression that it is the unique destiny of Irish people to be wrestling perpetually with their culture and political identity. One is almost left wondering if any people, besides the Irish, have such preoccupying cultures or identities¹.

In this insular mode of thinking, change is typically cast in the role of the 'king over the water' who has the potential to bring salvation or redemption, or to be the conduit of imminent or insidious threat to a preferred status quo. Thus, in the ideological battles over the Irish 'national question', salvation, or threat, is associated with 'external' agencies in Brussels, Westminster or Washington. More wide-ranging interpretations of Irish social change frequently imply the need for Ireland to 'catch up' with modernising, 'external' trends, or alternatively to resist them.

Of course, the 'internal' versus 'external' distinction is quite ahistorical. It posits a view of a self-contained tradition, identity and national sovereignty that never existed in reality. The other side of the coin is equally ahistorical, i.e. those commentaries which imply that the novelty of contemporary globalisation has rendered a distinct Irish state and society redundant. This ignores the extent to which economies, people, and ideas have traversed national and cultural borders in the past without eliminating them. Moreover, it fails to recognise that the extent of border

crossing has varied between historical periods. For example, people and goods moved more freely across international borders in the late nineteenth century than they did for much of the twentieth century, especially between the 1920s and the 1970s.

Three challenges

The following discussion addresses some of the current challenges posed to the republican ideal in Ireland in the context of the blurring of the distinction between internal and external affairs in the contemporary world order. Three distinct, if interrelated, challenges are examined in turn. The first arises from a legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict that has served to identify republicanism as uniquely Irish and uniquely prone to political violence. To many observers, the conflict has made republicanism synonymous with communal nationalism and a matter for a number of working class and rural areas within Northern Ireland rather than for the country as a whole. The second challenge has its origins in the problem of territorial boundaries, i.e. what are the appropriate territorial parameters for democratic politics? This is a problem shared by many political ideologies and has long been widespread throughout Europe. The third challenge arises from the growth of transnational governance. While this growth provides a solution of sorts to the 'boundary problem', it promotes functional governance at the expense of its territorial counterpart in ways that threaten to undermine representative democracy and popular sovereignty.

The legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict and the republican ideal of governance

At one level, the Northern conflict has frozen thinking about republican governance by forcing it into the straitjacket of the debate between constitutionalists and physical force republicans. Constitutionalists have come to largely identify themselves as nationalists rather than as republicans. The mainstream parties in the South have largely expunged the latter term from their political vocabulary, despite the republican constitution of the state and the official name of the largest political party, Fianna Fáil, the Republican party. Republicanism has become largely associated with Sinn Féin, the IRA, and a number of smaller groupings.

Partly in response to the Northern conflict, much effort has been expended by historians, journalists and other intellectuals in downgrading the role of republicanism in Irish history, or alternatively, in stressing the discontinuity between contemporary republicans and their precursors in Irish history. These accounts underline the historical failures of Irish republicanism, its fissiparous nature, its elitist and militarist tendencies and its theological or mystical preoccupations with the abstraction of the

'Republic'.

While much of the criticism has been directed towards dissident republicans, it has been directed also at those who have seen themselves as constitutional republicans. For much of the history of the Irish state, the democratic, constitutional politics of Fianna Fáil and smaller republican parties are also seen to have failed – in ending partition, establishing a secular constitution, reviving the Irish language, creating equal citizenship, and establishing a viable economy.

Since 1970, however, Northern Ireland has provided the context for a revitalised republican movement. Heavily influenced by republican failure since 1921, Northern republicans have sought to re-frame this experience in a more positive light – as a story of popular resistance which resonates with the circumstances of a marginalised minority in Northern Ireland. They have been able to sustain a military and political campaign, international networks and a level of popular electoral support beyond anything previously achieved by dissenting Irish republicans. Nevertheless, Sinn Féin has remained a minority political presence in the North and on the island.

Meanwhile, despite the establishment of a formal republic in the South by 1949, constitutional parties have tended to minimise their republican heritage to the point of being ashamed of it, partly because of the association with political violence in the North. Just as the Northern Ireland conflict is a reminder of the coercive origins of failed British state-building in Ireland, so also it is an embarrassing reminder of one of the greatest historical failures of Irish republicanism. The integration of the Irish state into the EU has also served to marginalise republican preoccupations with national sovereignty and democratic accountability. Little wonder then, that republicanism has dropped out of the vocabulary of the mainstream political parties.

One of the consequences of the Northern Ireland conflict has been to further enhance the confusion between republicanism, nationalism and Catholicism. Despite the key role of non-conformists, Protestants and free-thinkers in the founding of Irish republicanism, since the middle of the nineteenth century most of those who have claimed to be republicans happened to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as nationalists and Catholics – most recently in Northern Ireland since 1970. Of course, broad-based or successful political movements are seldom carriers of 'pure' ideals or ideologies. They are typically an amalgam of frequently contradictory ideologies and beliefs which influence the extent to which the republican ideal can be realised in any particular context.

Those who see twentieth-century Irish republican movements as irredeemably tainted by failure, militarism and disdain for democratic politics seldom question whether the republican ideal of governance is also

redundant and irrelevant in contemporary Ireland. The challenge is different for those who see themselves as republicans or who envisage themselves as allies of republicans. The question for them is what priority can, or should, be given to the republican ideal of governance in pragmatic political alliances, especially with nationalists. Attempts to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict have resurrected a broader alliance between republicans and nationalists in a so-called 'pan-nationalist front' – this, despite the distinction between republicans and nationalists at political party level in the North. This alliance is reminiscent of the loose coalition of forces between republicans, nationalists and others in the very different circumstances of 1916 to 1921. But the tensions remain.

Nationalism prioritises the 'nation' and questions of national identity and it aims to make nation and state congruent. Republicanism prioritises the 'people', the state, citizenship and a particular ideal of government. Republicanism is even more territorially focused than nationalism in that qualifications for citizenship arise from residency within a bounded territorial state. Nationalism, on the other hand, recognises and engages nations that are scattered across several state boundaries.

Nationalism has proved extremely malleable and adaptable to the changing international system as is evidenced by proliferating nationalisms in Europe. By comparison, the foundational principles of republicanism seem to be at much greater risk from the intensification of transnational governance. For example, Irish nationalism has adapted successfully to the onset of free trade, the EU and the growth of transnational networks. The Irish nation is being redefined more broadly and flexibly to include its components in North America, Britain, Northern Ireland and elsewhere – and the links between its dispersed components are being strengthened by return immigration, the Americanisation of the Irish economy, the communications revolution and by concerted attempts to advance the Northern Ireland peace process. On the other hand, the republican ideal of 'government for the people by the people' within fixed territorial boundaries is threatened by non-accountable shared decision-making within the European Union or by the global strategies of huge business corporations and appeals to the primacy of the 'market' – or of the global economy – over society.

In the new world order, discussions of the republican ideal of governance can no longer be confined to national states. States are now part, not just of an inter-state system, but of a global (and European) order characterised by a considerable measure of supranational governance. The fate of the republican ideal in Ireland therefore will not be determined merely by the legacy of Irish history as conventionally understood but also by Ireland's role within the new world order. On this wider front, it is clear that one of the weaknesses of the republican ideal is the extent to which it

can be adopted by quite opposed political movements, some of which are explicitly anti-democratic. On the other hand, the frequency with which political movements and states associate themselves with the republican ideal is also a clue to its strength and to the enduring appeal of its core components, popular sovereignty and accountable democracy. These concerns are not solely matters for Irish republicanism but are of pressing relevance in the new world order of which Ireland is a part. They raise critical issues about the location, nature and changing significance of the territorial boundaries within which the republican ideal might survive and prosper.

The boundary problem

Since the advent of modern republicanism over two centuries ago, a key problem has persisted, i.e. how, and where, to fix, or maintain, state borders that are most conducive to the establishment of popular sovereignty and accountable democracy. Posed as such it is a problem which has been shared by a great variety of nationalist, socialist, liberal and conservative movements. The boundary problem for all democrats, republicans included, rests on a paradox of origins. Few if any states are constituted democratically – instead their boundaries are set by violence, coercion, invasion, or dynastic settlements without reference to the populations affected. For democratic governance to flourish, people must forget the non-democratic origins of the territorial unit in which democracy is established.² In the new world order of globalisation and European integration this problem has become more, rather than less, acute. Even long-established, taken-for-granted borders are being challenged by the rise of movements for secession or greater regional autonomy. Simultaneously, it is becoming clear that national sovereignty no longer means what it did even three decades ago.

Political borders continue to proliferate under conditions of globalisation. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Europe. The prolonged fragmentation of the multinational empires and states has continued throughout the twentieth century. The collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia are only the latest in a long process which has seen the successive demise of the Ottoman, German, British, French and other lesser empires. Border change has seldom rested on democratic plebiscite, it has been a violent phenomenon associated with wars, invasions, dynastic claims or with the machinations of powerful elites. As Benedict Anderson³ observes the violence of building and maintaining the great empires has been even greater than that employed by their opponents. For example, whatever the current identification of Irish republicanism with violence, it is an incontrovertible fact that more Irish people have died fighting for the imperial British state than have died fighting for Irish

independence.

Most political ideologies have had to deal with the boundary problem, frequently settling for *ad hoc* solutions. Socialists have found it difficult to marry a universalistic programme with the reality of having to build socialism in specific states. Liberal democracy, an ideology shared by many republicans and nationalists, requires territorially-bounded states for the rule of law and representative government to work. But the principle of self-determination provides no rules for where borders should be drawn. Nor does it provide guidelines on why there should be a multiplicity of states or for belonging to one state rather than another.⁴ The American political scientist, Robert Dahl observes that 'the majority principle depends on prior assumptions about the unit: that the unit in which it is to operate is itself legitimate and that the matters on which it is employed properly fall within the jurisdiction of the unit'.⁵ Majority voting presupposes agreement on political boundaries and power assignments, as it affects the sovereignty of states.⁶

Nationalism has proved to be the dominant territorial ideology of the twentieth century partly because it can express the fluidity and volatility, as well as the fixity, of borders. Its chameleon qualities allow it both to challenge and maintain existing borders. Nationalists have always recognised that 'nations' do not coincide with existing borders – a fact that helps to legitimise border change but also enables state nationalists to support the status quo by turning state citizens into a nation. The question for nationalists is who belongs to the 'nation'; for republicans, it is who are the people?⁷

For republicans, in particular, the boundary question is: how are 'the people' to be defined and within which territorial boundaries. In other words, what are the optimal territorial units within which representative democracy, equal citizenship and majority rule might apply? In practice, of course, no historical republic emerged from a *tabula rasa*. Like others, republicans have had to live with a legacy of state-building and the balance of power within the inter-state system which owed less to the 'the rule of the people' than to war, invasion, colonisation, and other forms of coercion.

Defining citizens of a territorially delimited republic inevitably meant exclusion as well as inclusion, raising the difficult question of what principles might be used in this process. Nationalists sought to construct criteria of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' for groups of people concentrated in place with a shared sense of their own past and their own historical destiny and with common characteristics of language, religion or culture. Such nation-building requires much intellectual effort, institution-building and the designation of an 'Other'. It is unsurprising that nation-building has proved to be a welcome resource for many

historical forms of republicanism. Appeals to nationhood, however, frequently conceal, rather than offset, the arbitrariness of the territorial borders of states, and fail to provide guidelines for adjudicating competing claims for self-determination within one territory.

Compared to nationalism, however, republicanism puts greater faith in the rights and duties of citizenship creating a cohesiveness, regardless of culture, national origins, language or religion. Yet, such an abstract and rational ideology, however compelling as an ideal in the late eighteenth century, was insufficient to constitute a comprehensive ideology subsequently. The relationship of the state to civil society began to change fundamentally over the next two centuries. States became ever more involved in, and constitutive of, civil societies. States and state borders came to be of greater significance, therefore, than ever before in the regulation of the everyday life. Over time, the goals of state governance have expanded in response to political struggles and demands. They now involve defending and protecting citizens, developing the rule of law to regulate markets, defining human rights and limiting state power. States also have sought to be carriers of identity and providers of channels of political participation as well as redistributors of wealth through systems of social welfare. In effect, the expansion of the state's role made the problem of where to draw borders more rather than less significant because of the expanded scope of citizenship.

The response of contemporary republicanism has been to widen the notion of citizenship to include economic and cultural rights as well as political rights narrowly defined. This is an attempt to resolve contemporary boundary problems by accommodating the multiple or plural nature of identity within an overarching ideology of political citizenship. The boundary problem remains, however, i.e. where to draw borders around citizens in order to maximise the value of their citizenship while minimising the consequences for the rights of those excluded.

Despite the impression given by some of its more vociferous critics, the 'boundary problem' is not a unique preoccupation of Irish republicanism or even of republicanism in general. On the contrary, the problem of state borders has pervaded twentieth-century European history and its dominant political ideologies. As the source of the modern state system, Europe has proved to be a particularly fertile producer of state borders and the paradoxes associated with them. One of the characteristics of Europe as a continent of old settlement, is the newness of its state borders. According to one estimate, more than 60 per cent were created in the twentieth century and Central and Eastern European countries have generated over 8,000 miles of new political borders since 1989.⁸ In geographical terms, of the 48 sovereign states in existence in Europe in 1993, 36 came into being in this century compared to 12 in the three previous centuries

combined although this account underestimates the extent of border change in that they do not allow for adjustments to the borders of existing states. On one count only ten European states (of which by far the largest is Spain) had the same boundaries in 1989 as they had 100 years earlier.⁹

The delineation of state borders territorially remains, therefore, a key issue for politics in Ireland and Europe generally although its political significance may vary between long-established states and those of more recent provenance.¹⁰ However, the growth of transnational governance and accelerated forms of globalisation are now altering the functions and significance of territorial borders as such. In other words, it is changing the nature of the boundary question within the inter-state system. With the growth of transnational governance the key question becomes what can it mean to be a self-determining, territorially bounded citizenry in a world where the functional principle of governance is challenging the primacy of the territorial principle. Here again political republicanism is less adaptable, at least in theory, than a cultural nationalism which is more compatible with fuzzier borders and the increasing importance of transnational communities.

Transnational governance: where or what is the republic?

Since 1945, and particularly since the 1970s, transnational governance has developed dramatically as part of substantial increases in flows of trade, transnational investment, financial commodities, information, knowledge, tourism and pollution across state borders.¹¹ The engine behind the growth of transnational governance has been global capitalism although a host of functions, other than the economic, have been transnationalised also – for example, human rights as in the case of the UN and the Council of Europe, military alliances as in NATO, immigration control, workers rights, and citizenship entitlements in the case of the EU.

As ever larger transnational corporations, mainly of US, Japanese and European origins, develop global strategies, they wield enormous economic, cultural and political influence in the domestic affairs of national states. For example, it makes little sense to see multinational companies or EU institutions as 'external' to the Irish economy. The specialised remit of transnational institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – more recently the World Trade Organisation (WTO) – is to regulate a global economy which transcends the territorial borders of states. Functional borders seem to proliferate even faster than territorial borders in Europe, overlapping or cross-cutting the latter in ever more complex ways. Thus in the EU alone, the borders of 'euroland' are not those of the Single Market (which itself now even includes a non-EU state, Norway), or those of the Schengen zone. [Schengen abolished

border controls.] The geographical borders of NATO, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are different again, even if there is considerable overlap.

New forms of transnational governance have been termed 'neo-medieval' because of their overlapping and increasingly complex form. There appears to be a parcelling out, or 'unbundling', of functions previously represented by state borders and carried out (at least aspirationally) by the national state. Malcolm Anderson, for example, describes the outcome as an emergent 'mixture of old, new, and hybrid forms – territorial, transterritorial and functional forms of association and authority coexisting and interacting'.¹²

At the root of the new world order is the ideology of economic neo-liberalism and 'free trade' which seeks to 'construct' global markets and macro-regional trade blocs like the EU and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The market is an engine of 'competitive' pressures that discipline and constrain the actions of elected governments, forcing them to compete for, and facilitate, transnational investment and trade. This transnational market discipline increasingly constrains the redistributive role of the state, the role least directly affected by the growth of transnational governance. However, the latter's indirect effect is growing as the taxation options of states become more constrained and the 'non-market' sector (e.g. health, education, welfare, defence and security) becomes more open to 'market forces' and privatised provision. As national economies are constituted as increasingly differentiated units in a global market place, the citizenship rights associated with political republicanism are increasingly subordinated to 'market rights' for consumers and producers alike.

Clearly the implications for the republican ideal of governance are far reaching. This new world order would appear to greatly modify conceptions of national sovereignty, self-determination and the accountability of government to the people of specific territorial states. Despite the popular challenges mounted by transnational social movements, national and transnational governance is increasingly a matter for technocrats, professionals and interest groups with little direct accountability to an electorate. Although transnational regulations and norms proliferate, there is no systematic or consistent way of implementing them. The sources of transnational regulations are typically separated from the agencies charged with implementing them. EU institutions, for example, generate hundreds of regulations but implementation is largely a matter for the member states.

While the UN may elaborate human rights norms and principles of non-interventionism, the extent to which these norms are enforced still rests to a large degree on the arbitrariness of power and coercion, whether it be

that of a Saddam or a Milosevic, a Yeltsin or a Clinton. Thus, the US and its allies can intervene in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo but not in Chechnya or Algeria, or Afghanistan. Transnational governance is not republican, therefore, in that it scarcely operates on constitutional or legally enforceable principles. Neither is it a war of all against all.

Stated in somewhat stark and overgeneralised terms, therefore, republican citizenship, popular sovereignty, accountable democracy are limited by incorporation into a world system dominated by huge corporations and the military and strategic interests of the US. The central public good under this dispensation is not the discovery and implementation of the general will of classical republicanism but rather the effective functioning of capitalist market relationships. Governments have become just one actor among many within the system of transnational governance.

Issues for Ireland, North and South

The challenges posed to the republican ideal in Ireland seem to be particularly far-reaching. As a small state and an integral part of the EU which represents the densest complex of transnational governance on the globe, the Republic's economy is one of the most open in the world. It is heavily export-dependent and its spectacular economic growth rests on the attraction of transnational corporations. In Northern Ireland similar conditions apply, although the UK government compensates for the relatively lower levels of transnational investment by a massive subvention from central government.

One of the consequences for Ireland, North and South, is that the ideal of popular sovereignty, republican citizenship and accountable government is being threatened by a 'permanent' form of governance dominated by officials and specialist agendas associated with capital accumulation and Ireland's role in the EU. Elected governments and representatives effect little more than a coordinating or mediating role between a variety of interest groups, aimed at managing economic development and Ireland's role within the wider framework of the EU and global governance more generally.

One telling example of this form of governance is the successive partnership agreements, designed to promote economic growth by helping the Republic compete for transnational investment and markets. The growth of 'partnership governance' has been incremental. A report in the *Irish Times* (5 January 1991) was entitled 'Fifth Estate of social partners seen as a threat to the Dáil', citing the then backbencher Charlie McCreevy and others, warning against the dilution of the powers of elected representatives. After several years of the Celtic Tiger economy, such reservations are seldom heard as representatives of business, trade unions, the unemployed and the voluntary sector reach agreements with government

representatives on a wide-ranging agenda involving taxation, social redistribution and wages. Perceived economic success seems to have greatly restricted debate on democratic accountability or representativeness. Increasingly marginalised, the elected representatives in the Dáil are reduced to exploring with varying degrees of enthusiasm the 'corruption of the democratic process' by illicit relationships between officials, business interests and elected representatives. The investigative tribunals established provide media spectacles and 'market opportunities' for the legal profession, but appear to be costly and inefficient in promoting public accountability and imposing sanctions on law-breakers.

The form of governance represented by national partnership agreements is partly replicated at the level of localised partnerships, and also in the participation of Irish officials, interest groups and elected representatives at EU level. This form of government is increasingly deliberative – a process of negotiation and discussion between interest groups in multiple arenas, local, national and transnational. Here the influence of the EU as a form of transnational governance is increasingly pervasive. Largely the preserve of élites, and suffering from lack of popular identification and democratic accountability, EU institutions provide a framework for regulation, coordination and deliberation largely governed by the principle of market competitiveness. The EU is not so much an embryonic super-state, as a new form of transnational political system or polity that is increasingly conditioning governance in the member states.

Elected governments in Ireland and elsewhere are primarily concerned therefore with attempting to influence the key actors which shape Irish domestic affairs – such as multinational investors, other EU governments and institutions. The strategic decisions left to elected governments of EU member states, such as those over taxation, security, environmental questions and military alliances are increasingly constrained and channelled by participation in the various functional arenas of transnational governance. Some areas, such as monetary, agricultural and fisheries policies, are more a matter for European than national governance.

A considerable body of research demonstrates that states still vary considerably in terms of welfare spending, their tax regimes and their pursuit of neo-liberal or social democratic policies. This variability is affected by the specific history and political economy of the states concerned. Transnational governance in the form of European integration and globalisation is differentiating rather than homogenising – the distinctiveness of states is underpinned by the niches and roles they establish for themselves in global divisions of labour and global markets. There is even some evidence that smaller, relatively homogeneous states have proved more flexible and adept at benefiting from European integration than their

larger counterparts.

Flexibility and discretion, however, are not to be confused with 'government of the people by the people'. Clearly, we have moved a long way from the republican ideal of governance to a relative lack of democratic accountability as understood in the conception of popular sovereignty. For example, how accountable are multinational corporations, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, professional organisations, committees of officials and experts, even national governments, to an electorate of the 'Irish people' (or even EU peoples)? How meaningful are elections now, within any given territorial unit? Decreasing electoral turn-outs, and lack of real choice between government and opposition parties, imply one answer to this question.

One answer to these criticisms is that they pose the wrong questions. The implication is that the republican ideal is simply outdated in the context of structural factors which are encouraging functional forms of transnational governance, diminishing political accountability, representativeness and popular legitimacy. Parallel arguments assert the 'final' victory of neo-liberalism and capitalism. To paraphrase Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no other alternative', and thus we arrive at Fukuyama's 'end of history'.

Another response is to argue that 'representative democracy' is being, or should be, replaced by participatory or 'inclusive' democracy. Participatory democracy is about deliberation, negotiation, consensus formation, at local, national and transnational levels. For the most part, it presupposes no fixed territorial unit or 'people', rather it involves interest groups and experts appropriate to the issue to be decided. Participatory democracy is about argumentation, dialogue, and learning about other's point of view, allowing for goals and interests to be changed in the process of deliberation. Legitimacy in this model comes not from majoritarian decisions, but from a transparent, open, and fair process of deliberation, which produces a result that allows for further deliberation in the future.

Interestingly, the new institutions proposed in the Good Friday Agreement are premised on notions of participatory democracy or partnership. They allow for a multiplicity of institutional arenas, fora and geographical frameworks, within which dialogue and deliberation can occur. In this, they reflect the influence of EU models of governance which is also evoked in partnership governance in the Republic. The Good Friday Agreement was explicitly designed to solve the 'old' boundary problem deriving from the competing majoritarianisms associated with the Irish national question. It is premised on recognition of cultural and national identities, and functional interests which are to be accommodated with a complex and interlocking set of institutional arenas, with different, if overlapping, territorial remits. In this way, the significance of borders is

reduced and the 'people' become redefined according to the issue or government function involved. National or religious identity remains a resource here, for mobilising across a number of issues but it becomes harder to maintain a consistent definition or understanding of the overall national or communal interest. The overall goals of maintaining the Union or creating a united Irish republic are to be made subordinate to complex processes of deliberation and argumentation, on a range of issues pursued within clearly understood and agreed procedures.

The benign scenario of participatory democracy depends, however, as in the case of social partnership agreements in the South, on the nature and extent of inclusion. Two major difficulties arise – firstly, there is a real prospect that 'inclusion' or 'participation' is confined to élites whose involvement in the processes of deliberation cause them to become distanced from their respective constituencies, be they party or organisation members, voters or workers. Secondly, there is a danger that those with decisive power do not bind themselves to the rules of participation and deliberation. In Northern Ireland, for example, the role of the Assembly is extremely circumscribed, as the powers of policing, taxation and suspension are retained by a British government which continues to operate on the basis of majoritarianism and the primacy of the territorial principle. Similarly, the Republic's partnership agreements, however much they might help economic competitiveness, are subject to the often arbitrary power of global market forces.

Conclusion

Transnational governance is here to stay, as is the interlocking of domestic and transnational affairs. At the turn of the twenty-first century, therefore, Irish republicanism finds itself in an altered context, radically different from that which shaped its origins and most of its development. The new context is marked by the strengthening of the functional principle of governance, at the expense of the territorial principle associated with traditional republican ideals. Uncritical proponents of the new dispensation have little difficulty in contrasting its successes with the perennial failures of Irish republicanism. Whereas republicanism (in its constitutional, military and 'verbal' manifestations) can be associated with decades of economic stagnation and emigration, contemporary forms of governance seem to be associated with unprecedented economic success. Republican separatism, isolationism, even neutrality, seem to many to be outdated as Ireland becomes, once again an integral part of a large economic and political entity (the EU) which is in some ways a successor polity to those of imperial Europe.

New forms of governance also hold out the prospect of resolving, or at least of moderating, the Irish boundary problem – one of the major

obstacles in the path of Irish republicanism. The Good Friday Agreement, clearly inspired by EU institutional models, promises to replace the politics of zero-sum territorial claims with the politics of trans-border, functional governance and associated forms of participatory and deliberative democracy. This in turn promises to marginalise the negative effects of the Northern Ireland conflict on Irish politics generally.

Is there any role for the republican ideal of governance in the emerging political and economic dispensation in Ireland? Much political commentary seems to implicitly accept that the price of success in meeting the challenges faced by Irish republicanism, is the very demise of the republican ideal of governance itself. Enthusiastic supporters of the new order can point to the way in which the new forms of governance have helped offset the failures of historic Irish republicanism over Northern Ireland and the Irish economy.

But, such assessments are based on a double fallacy. The first is that the problems of Northern Ireland, of delineating territorial borders and advancing economic development have been the sole responsibility of Irish republicans. In fact, the militant opponents of Irish republicanism in Britain and Ireland, are equally, if not more, responsible for the failures or delays in addressing these issues. And their responsibilities for military violence and slaughter in twentieth-century wars, would seem much greater – in part because they have wielded far more power and influence than their republican opponents. The second fallacy is that the republican ideal need be replaced entirely by the new forms of deliberative or participatory democracy. In fact, there is scope for both to interact to mutual advantage.

The continued relevance of an updated republican ideal should be considered with respect to the three interacting logics inscribed in the new transnational forms of governance: the logic of profit and capitalist competitiveness, the logic of power and coercion, and the logic of participation, deliberation and argumentation. Eighteenth-century republicanism did not see the logic of profit and competitiveness as a concern of popular sovereignty – it was assigned to civil society that had autonomy from the state. This position is now difficult to sustain, given the extent to which economic and corporate actors influence, and are influenced by, the state and by transnational bodies like the EU. In terms of governance, the key issues here are those of regulation and deregulation of the market. These issues are increasingly a matter for expert committees and officials working closely with market interests at transnational level. Their accountability is to some poorly specified ideal of 'economic competitiveness', rather than to the 'people' or their elected representatives. Moreover, the institutional source of regulations (e.g. the EU or the WTO) are seldom charged with implementing them.

At best, therefore, economic governance is subject not to representative democracy, but to processes of deliberative, or participatory, democracy, operating, for example, in the hundreds of committees which link national administrations to EU institutions. There is scope even here, however, for strengthening the scrutiny powers of national parliaments, and republicans might expose the arbitrary power of the huge global corporations. This means interrogating the consequences of 'economic competitiveness' and its implications for equality of citizenship, both within and beyond the borders of the EU. A critical republicanism must also address the implications of the new boundaries between a more tightly integrated EU and the poorer states to the South and East, where the vast majority of the world's population lives.

The logic of arbitrary power and coercion in the new forms of governance might also be exposed and challenged by a critical republican perspective on the relationship between transnational norms of human rights and the degree to which they are ignored or implemented within national states. Similarly, the new and highly selective doctrines of interventionism, as practised in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, raise the spectre of neo-imperialism and have implications for Irish government policy on neutrality and the prospects of a militarised European Union. The latest 'remote-controlled' wars in the Gulf and eastern Europe are in part driven by media-induced nationalist frenzies which are as transient as they are profoundly anti-democratic. There is considerable scope here, for countering these tendencies with a politics based on humanitarian and republican principles.

Finally, the logic of a democracy predicated on participation, deliberation and argument might also be usefully examined in the light of republican ideals of governance. Those who deliberate and argue may find themselves in talking shops, remote from the actual exercise of real power and strategic choice. This is a fate which threatens not just the various institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement, but also all elected parliaments in the EU and elsewhere. Participatory democracy usefully offers inclusion and recognition and therefore appeals to those who prioritise national or ethnic identity. However, it does not necessarily facilitate equal citizenship. Here republicans might address the limits and the outcomes of participatory and deliberative bodies, including so-called 'partnership' government.

The republican ideal of governance does not constitute a fully fledged alternative to emerging forms of transnational governance. As in the past, it is not a 'stand-alone' ideology, but it retains a democratic potential especially when linked to progressive socialist and liberal politics. There is a strong case for preserving and renewing a republican dimension to governance in the face of the three logics identified above. It provides a

necessary critique of the arbitrariness of power, whether it be of the 'market competitiveness', multinational corporations, or strong states seeking to reshape the new world order (including Ireland), to advance their particular interests. It also has the potential to alert citizens to new forms of the 'boundary problem', and to the complex consequences of the incorporation of Ireland into the new networks of transnational governance.

Notes

¹ Of course, a more cynical view might be that such cultural and identity preoccupations have proved to be quite a useful tool in the armoury of an ever more confident middle-class intelligentsia riding on the back of the Celtic Tiger. It is also quite remunerative in the new global order, as Irish identity has been marketed successfully on a global scale, in the form of music, dance, books, pubs, films, or in terms of the Tourist Boards' hard sell of the beauties of the Irish landscape or the friendliness of the people. It might be suggested that a neat trick has been accomplished – Irish people's preoccupation with their own uniqueness has been commodified successfully in the context of the global culture, entertainment, and leisure industries. Indeed, it might also be asked why a low-intensity conflict, directly affecting a mere 1.6 million people in Northern Ireland, in a small area of little strategic importance, has attained such prominence in international affairs in comparison to far more devastating conflicts elsewhere.

² Connolly, W. 'Tocqueville, Territory and Violence', *Theory, Culture and Society* 11, 1994, pp. 19-40.

³ Anderson, B. 'The New World Disorder' *New Left Review* 193, 1992

⁴ Anderson, M. *Frontiers: Territory and State Formation in the Modern World* (Oxford: Polity Press 1996), p.8

⁵ Dahl, R. *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1989).

⁶ Eriksen, E.O. 'The Question of Deliberative Supranationalism in the EU', *Arena Working Papers*, WP99/4, 1999, p.5

⁷ One of the ironies of Northern Ireland is that one of the more popular loyalist slogans is, 'we are the people', i.e. the Ulster (Protestant) people. While this excluded a large section of the actual people, it was conceived in quasi-republican terms as a 'voting people' (or majority) committed to maintaining the Union. David Ervine of the PUP adverted to this slogan in a recent lecture at Queen's University and said he now thought an appropriate slogan might be 'we are a people'. Of course, this has implications for how the 'Irish people' might be defined.

⁸ Foucher, M. 'The Geopolitics of European Frontiers', in M.Anderson and E.Bort (eds) *The Frontiers of Europe* (London: Pinter 1998), p. 235.

⁹ Davies, N. *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1996); Wallace, W. *The Dynamics of European Integration* (London: Pinter 1992), p.14.

¹⁰ Anderson, J. (ed.) *The Modern State* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf).

¹¹ According to one count, in 1909 there were 37 Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) and 176 International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). By 1996, the numbers were 260 and 5,472 respectively. Between 1946 and 1975, the number of inter-governmental treaties more than doubled from 6,351 to 14,061, while the number of treaties embracing IGOs increased from 623 to 2,303 (Held, D. et al *Global Transformations* (Oxford: Polity Press 1999), p.53). While the numerical growth is significant, two qualifications are necessary. Firstly, there has been a growth in the number of states, and secondly, some transnational institutions, such as those of the EU, have been far more significant than others, as the source of regulations shaping the domestic affairs of states.

¹² Anderson, M. *op.cit.*, p.149.

Beyond the Boom: Towards an Economic Policy for Welfare and Security

COLM RAPPLE

The Irish economy has been booming in recent years and, although the gains have not been evenly spread, the vast majority of people have enjoyed a significant improvement in their material standard of living. Gross National Product (GNP) has risen by about 46 per cent in the past five years – and that's after allowing for the massive outflows of profits, etc., to the foreign-based owners of much Irish enterprise. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which includes those profit outflows, rose by about 54 per cent.

By either measure we have been doing reasonably well. But they shouldn't be the only measures. Economic performance is not necessarily a good indicator of social well being. A certain degree of material wealth is essential for human welfare, but there is no direct correlation between the two. Maximising welfare in a society involves much more. Welfare involves a sense of place, of security, of participation, of personal fulfilment.

In Ireland the growth in wealth has undoubtedly been accompanied by a decline in welfare. There has been a reduction in the areas over which the Irish people can exercise democratic control. And, at the same time the cohesiveness of Irish society has been weakened by a widening divergence in both levels of income and ownership of wealth.

Some diminution of our national sovereignty is inevitable given the globalisation of the economic environment. But, in many areas, control that could be exercised by democratic mandate has been ceded to an imperfect market mechanism in compliance with an ideological belief in the primacy of the market place.

The promotion of greater cohesiveness within our society is well within the control of the Irish people, but progress can not be measured in terms of growth in GDP or GNP. They are not even perfect yardsticks of economic progress. New benchmarks are needed as an expression of objectives, a guide to policymakers, and a measure of human progress.

GDP and GNP only measure that which people can put a price on, not what people put a value on. Every economic student knows the story of the man who reduced national income by marrying his housekeeper – the work of a paid housekeeper is included in GNP, while the work of unpaid mothers is not.

But the anomalies and shortcomings go well beyond that. National income takes no account of the distribution of income – a key element in promoting welfare. Greater inequality is likely to make many people more grasping, greedier, more socially disruptive, and less happy – even if all are wealthier.

GNP is actually increased by extra spending on security and prisons, even though the spending reflects an increase in criminal activity that actually reduces human welfare. The depletion of national resources is treated as income rather than as consumption of capital. The creation of pollution is not seen as a cost, although spending on cleaning up is included as income.

The problems are recognised by the economists, but since agreement can't be reached on assigning values to such items, they'll continue to be ignored in the national accounts.

As material wealth increases, the divergence between wealth and welfare widens. It is impossible to quantify that divergence in money terms. There is no acceptable measure of welfare or human happiness and fulfilment. Such measures will only be devised when national objectives are set in terms of something more than growth in national income.

The objectives must reflect a growth in society rather than a growth in wealth, a growth that may be encapsulated within the concept of nationhood; not of a nation as an entity in itself, but rather as a collection of individuals with common interests and common concerns, i.e. a community. Nationhood has been lauded as a political ideal for centuries, but its promotion has never been very evident in economic policies or management. And that divergence between stated ideals and actuality predates the establishment of the state.

One obvious example was the push for peasant proprietorship in the 1880s. At the time there were three classes based on the land, the landlords, the tenant farmers, and the labourers. Michael Davitt recognised that peasant proprietorship offered benefits only to one of those classes – the tenants. The landlords had to go, but under peasant proprietorship so too did the labourers.

'Human nature being the same in all classes' he said in 1882 'we are forced to reason that if the landlords, having the tenants in their power, treat them unjustly, the tenants, when they have the labourers in their power, will deal with them in the same way'.

'I consider', he added, 'that all alike should share in the benefits to be

derived from the abolition of landlordism'.

But that wasn't to be. The great 'victory' of Parnell and the Land League was far from a victory for the million and more landless labourers. They often found the Irish peasant proprietors no more sympathetic to their plight than many an absentee landlord had been to the plight of the proprietors in their earlier existence as tenants.

Agricultural labourers had all but disappeared as a class by 1922. Between the censuses of 1871 and 1926, the rural population of Ireland fell from 4.2 million to 2.6 million. Most of that fall was due to emigration. The urban population rose by only 355,000 over that period, to 1.6 million.

Another Land League leader, Matthew Harris, warned that when tenants got ownership of the land they would look to the boundary of their farms as the boundary of their country because, he said, 'farmers as a rule are selfish men'.

Both he and Davitt were right, of course. The British solution to an Irish problem created a conservative and reactionary force in Irish society. The interests of individual farmers were not at one with the interests of the country. There was no pressure on inefficient or incapable farmers to pass the land onto someone more efficient or capable.

Agriculture should have been the main engine of growth in the new state, but output remained stagnant. In 1954 it was estimated that the volume of agricultural output was no higher than it had been at the turn of the century.¹ About the same time, an agriculturalist reporting to the Irish government wrote of the excellence and potential of Irish land, but added that he had seen 'hundreds of fields growing as little as it is physically possible for land to grow under an Irish sky'.²

A stagnant agricultural sector was not the only reason for the dismal economic performance of the new state, but it was a major factor. Even if the new government had wanted to live up to the republican ideals expressed in the Democratic Programme of the first Dáil Éireann, the task would have been made difficult by the general economic stagnation.

The Democratic Programme is worth reproducing in full. It encapsulates a view of nationhood and community that is still occasionally articulated by some politicians but, unfortunately, the sentiments expressed are not as obvious as they might be in social and economic policies.

We declare in the words of the Irish Republican proclamation the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies to be indefeasible, and in the language of our first president Pádraic MacPhiarais, we declare that the Nation's sovereignty extends not only to all men and women of the Nation, but to all its material possessions, the Nation's soil and all its resources, all the wealth and all the wealth-producing processes within the

Nation, and with him we reaffirm that all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare.

We declare that we desire our country to be ruled in accordance with the principles of Liberty, Equality and Justice for all, which alone can secure permanence of Government in the willing adhesion of the people.

We affirm the duty of every man and woman to give allegiance and service to the Commonwealth, and declare it is the duty of the Nation to assure that every citizen shall have opportunity to spend his or her strength and faculties in the services of the people. In return for willing service, we, in the name of the Republic, declare the right of every citizen to an adequate share of the produce of the Nation's labour.

It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland.

The Irish Republic fully realises the necessity of abolishing the present odious, degrading and foreign Poor Law System, substituting therefor a sympathetic native scheme for the care of the Nation's aged and infirm, who shall not be regarded as a burden, but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration. Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well being of the Nation.

It shall be our duty to promote the development of the Nation's resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs, and fisheries, its waterways and harbours, in the interests and for the benefit of the Irish people.

It shall be the duty of the Republic to adopt all measures necessary for the recreation and invigoration of our Industries, and to ensure their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative and industrial lines. With the adoption of an extensive Irish Consular Service, trade with foreign Nations shall be revived on terms of mutual advantage and good will, and while undertaking the organisation of the Nation's trade, import and export, it shall be the duty of the Republic to prevent the shipment from Ireland of food and other necessaries until the wants of the Irish people are fully satisfied and the future provided for.

It shall also devolve upon the National Government to seek co-operation of the Governments of other countries in determining a standard of Social and Industrial Legislation with a view to a general and lasting improvement in the conditions under which the working classes live and labour.³

The ideal that really informed economic and social policy during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s was a good deal different. It was articulated best by Alexis Fitzgerald in a reservation to the majority report of the Commission on Emigration published in 1954. He wrote:

I cannot accept either the view that a high rate of emigration is necessarily a sign of national decline or that policy should be over-anxiously framed to reduce it. It is clear that in the history of the Church, the role of Irish emigrants has been significant. If the historical operation of emigration has been providential, providence may in the future have a similar vocation for the nation. In the order

of values, it seems more important to preserve and improve the quality of Irish life and thereby the purity of that message which our people have communicated to the world than it is to reduce the numbers of Irish emigrants. While there is a danger of complacency I believe that there should be a more realistic appreciation of the advantages of emigration.

High emigration, granted a population excess, releases social tensions which would otherwise explode and makes possible a stability of manners and customs which would otherwise be the subject of radical change. It is a national advantage that it is easy for emigrants to establish their lives in other parts of the world not merely from the point of view of the Irish society they leave behind but from the point of view of the individuals concerned whose horizon of opportunity is widened.

Long before John Kenneth Galbraith outlined the concept in his book *The Culture of Contentment*, that culture was very obviously alive and well, and operating in Ireland. Alexis Fitzgerald had the courage to say what others thought. Emigration was acceptable as a means of ensuring the living standards of those who remained. And that failure to pursue the greatest benefit for the greatest number didn't go away despite the economic initiatives of later decades, beginning particularly with Dr. T. K. Whitaker's *White Paper on Economic Development* and the subsequent *First Programme for Economic Expansion*.

In 1967 there was another study on full employment, prepared this time by the National Industrial Economic Council chaired by Dr. Whitaker. The final paragraphs pointed out that:

A national endeavour as long-range as full employment, which is backed by no compulsive national or personal need, can only succeed with the active support of the whole community.

In the last resort, then, the questions raised in this report concern the will and conscience of the whole community. To harden the will and arouse the conscience of the community will require dynamic leadership and sustained backing from political and religious leaders, from trade unions, from employers' associations, and from all the other organisations and institutions which influence and form public opinions and public attitudes. Without such leadership, particularly in the political field, the policies which will raise living standards and expand employment will not be chosen and implemented.

It would be nice to think that the employment advances of recent years owe something to the type of leadership called for in the NIEC report. But the evidence is against it. Not much has really changed.

- People are still viewed as an economic input – one that has to be managed like any other resource to maximise wealth production.
- Distribution of income and wealth is becoming more inequitable – often as a result of government policies.
- The ideological belief in the market has intensified. The market is increasingly seen as a near replacement for the state as a manager of the economy and a shaper of society.

There are plenty of examples to confirm these contentions. While the Democratic Programme envisioned a participative citizenship where everyone contributed to the common welfare and, in return, enjoyed the right to an adequate share of the wealth created, today's reality is far different.

Many economists, businessmen and politicians see the shortage of labour as a threat to our economic growth. Some advocate importing skilled labour – and only skilled labour – from abroad. Others urge cutting taxes on the low paid, not in order to increase their incomes, but so that their employers can encourage more people to work for less.

Instead of being seen as the potential beneficiaries of economic growth, people are seen as just another economic input. People are, of course, essential to generating wealth. But creating wealth is not an end in itself. The common view of people as simply an economic resource ignores that crucial fact.

Some would claim that creating wealth is simply one side of the coin. Dividing it is another. That is undoubtedly true, but it is the same coin and since workers tend to get their share through wages, the two sides are far from independent of each other.

The workers who, it is often claimed, have been the main engine of economic growth in recent years have been losing out.

A growing proportion of the extra wealth generated by our buoyant economy is simply flowing out of the country. It highlights a vulnerability in our tiger economy and suggests that the workers who are feeding it may not be getting a fair share of the extra wealth being created.

Between 1994 and 1998 profits more than doubled – rising by about 120 per cent. Over the same period the national wage bill rose by only 49 per cent. In each of those four years profits rose much faster than wages. And the national wage bill, of course, overstates the increases enjoyed by individual workers since it also reflects the growing numbers at work.

Wages are spent for the most part within the country, but a growing proportion of the profit is going abroad. The net outflow of money during 1998 was £7,454 million – up a sharp 18 per cent on the 1997 figure, and more than double the net outflow recorded for 1994.

While workers as a whole have been losing out, some have been faring far better than others despite the operation of national wage agreements.

In the ten years to 1998 GNP rose by 117 per cent, but average industrial wages – the male adult rate – rose by only 56 per cent. Since consumer prices only rose by 27 per cent over the ten years, that represented a very real improvement in living standards. But the gains to workers have been very unevenly spread. The belief that national wage agreements favour low paid workers who may lack industrial muscle is not borne out by the figures.

The pay of top civil servants jumped by 74 per cent over the ten years, while shop assistants only managed an increase of 32 per cent.

There is little hard data on income distribution in Ireland, but what there is suggests a widening divergence of incomes with those at the bottom of the pile – the growing number of part-time and atypical workers – losing out.

There is even less data available on the distribution of wealth. But there is no doubt that the spiralling rise in asset values has greatly widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. Those who own their own homes, and that's 80 per cent of all households, are doing very nicely, thank you. More than half of those – 45 per cent of the total – own their houses outright while 35 per cent have mortgages. But the average mortgage is less than £40,000.

Included in national income is a notional figure for the benefit enjoyed by those homeowners. They've invested in their home and enjoy a tax-free benefit in the form of rent-free accommodation. The value of that benefit has been going up rapidly in line with house prices, and now stands at over £2,500 million.

That massive tax-free benefit enjoyed by existing homeowners doesn't include the capital gains accruing from soaring property values. And, of course, the more valuable the property you own, the greater the benefit enjoyed. It's indefensible, of course, that the benefit is enjoyed tax-free, but of more immediate concern is the extent to which house price inflation is widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

And, of course, owner-occupied houses are only one small element of wealth holdings. Other assets have also spiralled in value. Soaring profits have produced additional accumulations of wealth. This increasingly unequal distribution of wealth stands in stark contrast to the vision in the Democratic Programme, and to some extent in the constitution, that private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare, and that each citizen is entitled to justice, equality and an adequate share of the wealth produced.

Far from attempting to create a greater equality, successive governments have moved in the opposite direction. Inheritance taxes on business and farm assets have been effectively abolished, while the rate of capital gains tax has been halved to 20 per cent. In the December 1999 budget Charlie McCreevy abolished inheritance tax on all family homes – a measure that went far beyond what was needed to redress the anomalous situation that affected cohabiting couples and the hardship previously faced by a small number of individuals who were left valuable family homes. Official Revenue Commissioner figures indicate that even without that change, only about 17 per cent of family homes would have attracted Capital Acquisitions Tax if left to a single child. Far fewer would attract the tax if

left between two or more children.

Charlie McCreevy also greatly increased the thresholds for Capital Acquisitions Tax, abolished the higher rates of tax, and eased the aggregation rules in a way that only benefits people who get two or more inheritances.

There is little opposition, even from the Labour Party, to the prevailing ideologically based view that the state should tax as little as possible and spend as little as possible. The state hasn't always got it right. Indeed, it has made some disastrous spending decisions over the years. But so too has the private sector, and the costs of its blunders are often passed on to the exchequer.

The plain fact is that there are spending decisions best left to the state. A private company will take account of only very short-term considerations. At best it will base a decision on the likely impact on its own profitability over the course of time. That, at least, has some economic rationale. But it is just as likely to base a decision on the likely short-term impact on its share price or on its bottom line.

It doesn't make sense for the private company to take account of the broader impact on the society in which it operates. The state can, however, take that broader and longer-term view, so its decisions are more likely to maximise the welfare of society as a whole.

Unfortunately, Irish governments have progressively relinquished their ability to make such decisions at both the macro and micro economic levels. Economic sovereignty has been partially ceded to Brussels and Frankfurt, while at the micro level state enterprises are being passed out of state control for no other reason than to satisfy some right-wing ideological premise.

Monetary policy was ceded to Frankfurt with our entry to the European single currency, the euro. So neither exchange rates nor interest rates will in future be set in Dublin. But the loss of control goes further. The Central Bank is unable to force mortgage lenders to comply with guidelines on maximum mortgage levels – even when exceeding those levels simply pushes up house prices.

We still have control over fiscal policy but this government is intent on curtailing its powers in this regard. The intention is to put a set portion of revenue each year into a state pension fund. That must reduce budgetary flexibility each year. In addition, the money in the fund is to be managed with an eye to maximising the return to the fund, rather than the return to society as a whole.

It's a clear case of a government abdicating its role in economic management.

A similar abdication is evident in the sell-off of state assets. There are three possible reasons for selling off a state company. One is to promote

competition. Another is to encourage greater efficiency. And a third is to raise money for the exchequer. None of those reasons could apply in the case of Telecom Éireann.

There was already competition in the telecommunications business. The company had already trimmed itself down and the exchequer was awash with money.

Telecommunications will play an increasingly crucial role in the overall development of the Irish economy and Irish society. Yet control over the major player in that market is likely to pass into the hands of shareholders interested only in bottom line profit – and not profit necessarily within Ireland but within an international grouping.

National, social and environmental objectives can rank equally with monetary profit in the decision making of a state company. A private company, on the other hand, will view national, social and environmental considerations as costs and constraints hindering progress towards the real goal of shareholder profit.

These arguments are strong in the case of Telecom, and overpowering in the case of Coillte, which is another possible contender for privatisation. No other corporate entity controls so much of the Irish environment. It owns over a million acres. That's six per cent of the land mass of the country - equivalent to the size of two average counties.

Given that single fact, it is amazing that the privatisation of Coillte has even been suggested. Maybe the possibility of the largest estate in the country passing into foreign ownership hasn't really sunk home yet. Many farmers, in the west particularly, have little time for Coillte and the advancing Sitka spruce forests. They'd have a lot less if some foreign-controlled company owned the land.

It's not all that long ago that the transfer of agricultural land required the permission of the now defunct Land Commission. Farmers were willing to let that protection go for the gains of EU membership, although elsewhere in Europe, the Danes managed to insert in the Maastricht Treaty a special protocol protecting laws limiting foreign ownership of second homes along their coasts.

There is another overpowering objection to the sale of Coillte. Its value to the state is undoubtedly higher than the value that any private investor would put on it. The state can take a long-term view. A private company discounts future benefits to present day values. In some circumstances the state should give equal weight to future benefits. Retaining ownership of over a million acres of land is undoubtedly one of those circumstances.

The value of land, including the maturing trees, is currently put at a little over £1,000 million in the Coillte balance sheet. That's about £1,000 an acre. On the basis of current profitability the company might be valued at much less. It made £15 million last year.

But whatever price Coillte would make on the market, it would never be enough to convince our children's children in a hundred or two hundred years time that the right decision was made.

Another national asset has already been effectively sold for a pittance. That's the natural gas field discovered by Enterprise Oil off the County Mayo coast. The find doesn't significantly improve the security of energy supply in Ireland and it will be a long time before any tax revenue flows into the exchequer. Nothing much will be gained during the development stage either. Very little of the money spent on exploration ended up in Ireland. The rigs were for the most part serviced from Scotland and the same is likely to be true during the development phase.

So although the Irish people own this valuable natural resource, they are going to gain very little from its exploitation. It can all be blamed on a lack of foresight when the licensing terms and tax provisions for offshore exploration were last revised in 1992.

There will be no royalties, and before any tax revenue starts to flow, Enterprise will be allowed to write off all its exploration expenditure in Irish waters, the development costs of this field, and the likely future costs of decommissioning when the gas runs out.

And Enterprise hasn't got to even land the gas in Ireland. It would cry foul, no doubt, if the tax rules are changed at this stage, but then the Irish people have an equal right to cry foul if the rules aren't changed.

We've come a long way since the First Dáil agreed its Democratic Programme, but unfortunately not always in the right direction. The rhetoric is sometimes still the same, but the reality is different – much more akin to the one-sided thinking that endorsed the movement for peasant proprietorship in the 1880s.

Notes

¹ *Reports of the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems 1948-1954.*

² Holmes, G.A., *Report on the Present State and Methods for Improvement of Irish Land* (p No. 9248)

³ According to Dorothy Macardle in *The Irish Republic*, a draft for a social and democratic programme was prepared by Thomas Johnson, then secretary of the Irish Labour Party and William O'Brien, of the Dáil. About half of the draft, she says, was included in the programme as reproduced above. It was written by Seán T. O'Kelly.

Towards a Politics of Democratic Renewal

KEVIN McCORRY

Despite claims about the 'modernity' of the 'Celtic Tiger', the Republic remains a bureaucratic and highly centralised society, characterised by petty patronage, corruption and jobbery in local politics, and gross inequalities of power, wealth and privilege. The main reason for this state of affairs is the failure of progressive politics to devise an alternative with mass popular appeal. Attempts were made to do this in various ways by the Republican Congress in the 1930s, by Clann na Poblachta in the 1940s, and by the united republican movement in the 1960s.

The common feature of all these attempts was the effort to construct a republican, socially radical alternative to the left of Fianna Fáil, but which would in the short to medium term press Fianna Fáil into adopting more progressive policies on the national question and on the economy. The situation in the country still requires the construction of such a radical alternative politics but the environment in which it would operate has become more complex than before.

For most of the period of partition, the political scene in Ireland was characterised by the dominance of Fianna Fáil in the South and the Unionist Party in the North. There is general agreement that that era has ended for good, and that the two large, catch-all parties will no longer dominate the political scene. Already, both parts of the country have had a taste of the new dispensation. This involves coalition governments in the South, and institutionalised power sharing in the North. It is assumed that this will be the pattern of government for the island for the foreseeable future, if the Good Friday Agreement institutions can be put together again.

The conventional wisdom is that in this era of 'Celtic Tiger' prosperity and 'consensus', it will prove impossible to develop any realistic challenge or alternative to the dominant agenda. The conventional wisdom may yet prove wrong.

It is by no means certain that the Good Friday institutions can be put together again. The institutions were predicated on an accommodation between nationalism and unionism. That accommodation does not exist.

No one can predict what the long-term consequences of failure to reinstate the Northern political institutions could be.

In the South the basis of social 'partnership' is threatened by the obvious failures to solve problems of gross inequality, poverty, social exclusion and quality of life, compounded by unease and disquiet about the continuing erosion of national independence, and by continuing revelations about the specifically Irish dynamics of corruption in business, political and civil society.

Historically, Fianna Fáil was able to dominate politics in the twenty-six counties, because it was able to continually reinvent itself as the representative of the aspirations of a broad cross-class social bloc. It did this by developing a series of programmes, which seemed to put coherence on the world and also seemed to address the needs of a constituency, ranging from the working class to the industrial, capitalist class. It also operated a system of clientelism, which helped to dampen down the obvious conflict of interest which existed between sections of its supporters. As a consequence, it was able to develop an unmatched organisation which mobilised its supporters to usually devastating electoral effect.

This political universe of Fianna Fáil has altered dramatically over the past twenty years, but not as dramatically as that of unionism. Civil rights effectively challenged the coherence of unionism. While the veto on constitutional change remained until the Good Friday Agreement, the veto on civil rights reform was undermined by the civil rights movement in the 1960s and then later destroyed by the advance of nationalism. The main obstacle to the full implementation of a programme of democratic change in the North is now to be found in London rather than in Belfast. But this does not mean that unionism has fully accepted the change in its influence. Stripped down to bare essentials, the essence of unionism remains sectarian top doggery. 'Civic' unionism can never become a majority strand within unionism. However, given the right set of circumstances, it might become part of a new civic democratic majority politics for the North. It was in the hope that such a politics is possible that republicans and nationalists negotiated and threw their weight behind the Good Friday Agreement.

The starting points for any consideration of the possibility of the development of a radical alternative politics on the island must be the nearly 40 per cent of Southern voters who defied the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Progressive Democrat and Labour Party political establishments and voted against the Amsterdam Treaty. Despite the claims of revisionism, the defence of democracy, independence and sovereignty raised by the Amsterdam Treaty was seen as being central to the future progressive development of the country.

The lack of any serious debate among the main political parties about

Maastricht, Amsterdam and, latterly, membership of the so-called Partnership for Peace revealed that much of what passes for political controversy is simply a smokescreen to hide the reality that nothing really fundamental divides the major parties in the South. For example, the most important single cause of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy is that in the years 1993-1999 the Republic followed an independent currency policy. The resulting floating currency exchange rate has made Irish exports and home production highly competitive in relation to Ireland's trading partners, so boosting economic growth. In 1999 the main Dáil parties agreed to abolish the independent Irish currency, in principle, forever, and with it any possibility of an Irish interest rate and exchange rate policy, by replacing the punt with the euro from 2002. The European Central Bank in Frankfurt will determine Ireland's interest rate, credit and exchange rate henceforth, in Germany and France's interests not ours.

Brussels has also signalled its intent to remove key elements of the one remaining state economic power, taxation, from the national to the European Union (EU) level. As a result, this country's ability to determine fundamental economic policy is effectively ended. A similar process is at work in relation to defence and foreign policy. An essential element of a people's ability to determine their own affairs, is the ability to determine their own independent defence and foreign policy. Article 29 of the Constitution commits the country to the principles of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations, founded on international justice and morality. Traditionally, this has meant a policy of neutrality. Essentially, neutrality means non-membership of military alliances. In the Amsterdam Treaty, there is a commitment 'to the framing of a common defence policy. ... which might lead to a common defence, should the European Council so decide'.

The country's neutrality was further seriously undermined by the decision of the government to join up to the NATO led Partnership for Peace. Despite the claims to the contrary, membership of that organisation signalled a turn towards a role as one of the satellites of NATO. So far, the actual consequences of membership have been minimal but undoubtedly, over time, membership will mean increased military expenditure, higher taxes and more purchases of military equipment from the arms industries of NATO and the European Union.

During the period leading up to Ireland's accession to the Partnership for Peace, elements of the Labour 'Left' tried to position themselves just slightly outside the mainstream Dáil consensus by counterposing common EU defence to membership of the NATO-led organisation. As a consequence of this opportunism the Labour 'Left' is now tied into supporting what has been described as 'the foundations for a European Defence Union'. Last December the EU agreed to establish a military

force of 60,000 by 2003, based on the Amsterdam Treaty. The purpose of this force is not to defend the EU states against attack, but to intervene in, and attack, if necessary, states outside the EU.

Irish 'neutrality' now means an unwillingness to come to the aid of other EU states, in the unlikely event of one or all of them being attacked, but a willingness to support an attack on another, usually weaker, non-EU state.

It is ironic that at a time when the Dáil parties are urging the republican movement to 'decommission', they are signing up to measures which include the virtual integration of the European Union and the nuclear-armed Western European Union, and also the development of a pronounced military dimension to the European Union with the objective of military intervention in the affairs of other states. The next EU Treaty is now being drawn up, and will, amongst other things, reduce Ireland's voting weight on the EU Council of Ministers. It is already being called the 'Treaty of Nice' and will go around next year for ratification. The government clearly wants to avoid a referendum on it.

Another irony, which is not lost on nationalist opinion in the North, is that when it suited the major Dáil parties, they described the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement as an exercise in 'self-determination'. They warned that no one in nationalist Ireland could ignore such a clear statement of the will of the people. At that time, it suited an anti-republican rhetoric to treat the referendum in that way because it was claimed that the republican position on decommissioning was contrary to the will of the people.

There has been no such talk since the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland unilaterally suspended the Northern Ireland Executive. Mr Ahern expressed 'concern' at the action, and said that any 'significant extension' of the suspension 'could make the situation more difficult'. Up to then, progress had been made to create a political dispensation for Northern Ireland based on consent and the protection of the civil, individual and cultural rights of all citizens. Many problems remained to be resolved, but this required the willingness of the pro-Agreement political parties to work together, on the basis of accommodation, equality and mutual reliance.

This raises the nature of the agreement entered into on Good Friday. For any agreement to come about, there has to be an acceptance by the parties that agreement is better than any alternatives around.

Once the republican movement adopted the political, as opposed to the armed struggle, road towards a united Ireland, it was inevitable that some sort of transitional stage towards its long-term objective would have to be constructed. The Hume/Adams talks and the republican peace strategy followed on logically from this turning point. Implicit in the approach was recognition that in order to go forward it is sometimes necessary to take a

few steps back. The logic of international events, such as the ending of the Cold War, as well as developments within Britain and Ireland, made republicans realise that some form of united Ireland was on the cards in the longer term. The question for them was whether the political establishments in London and Dublin could bring this about while continuing to exclude and marginalise them. They rightly determined to prevent this happening.

The unionists lacked a similar optimism about the long term. The core of the unionist case is that the unionist bloc constitutes a political and cultural majority in the area of Northern Ireland, and that therefore the area can only be governed in accordance with their aspirations and traditions. Any recognition of nationalist traditions or aspirations has only been grudgingly conceded. Unionism refuses to recognise the legitimacy of these aspirations and traditions, holding them to be essentially irrational in nature. The fear is that there may come a time when the unionist bloc no longer constitutes a majority. Various fall-back positions have been contemplated. The most logical one is the total integration of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom. That would represent the clearest guarantee of the union. The problem with this option is that no British government is prepared to adopt it. Other options are even less certain.

The siege mentality of unionism is often commented on. That is both its greatest strength and its greatest weakness. As a strength, it gives backbone to unionist resistance to attempts to foist unwelcome measures on it. But as a weakness it is particularly dangerous. It makes it impossible for unionism to really compromise with nationalism, much less with republicanism.

Republicans and nationalists were prepared to recognise and accept *de facto* that a united Ireland was not an immediate possibility, as long as there was equality between nationalism and unionism in the short term. Unionism was only prepared to allow nationalist and republican participation in the governing of Northern Ireland if they accepted *de jure* the 'Britishness' of the area's major institutions. In addition they saw the 'consent' principle only in terms of a weapon to prevent a united Ireland. They do not see it as a necessary principle to give democratic legitimacy to power-sharing institutions.

The situation in the North will continue to be stalemated until London makes a reality of the consent principle in a programme of democratic reform, based on the Good Friday Agreement and designed to carry it forward. The British government is the sovereign authority for Northern Ireland and it continues to have a special and distinct responsibility to ensure that political progress resumes. The best way that the British government can ensure this is to implement, without delay, those parts of the Agreement relating to equality rights, policing, justice and socio-

economic policy. This will strengthen the position of the pro-Agreement forces in Northern Ireland and must be done in cooperation with the Dublin government, and in consultation with pro-Agreement majority opinion in Northern Ireland.

This would mean that the British government recognises that the majority pro-agreement forces in Northern Ireland represent a distinct and developing force. London can let these forces wither and decline, as the support for Trimble unionism crumbles away, or it can take all the necessary steps to strengthen and support them. The issue of decommissioning is at the cross-over between the old Northern politics and the new. David Trimble's approach is classic old-style Northern politics. Essentially he is telling republicans that they must dance to his tune on the question of arms. The Good Friday Agreement placed the issue in a wider, and more realistic, context of partnership government between nationalism and unionism. The question is which position will the British government ultimately back.

The measures outlined below are ones the British government might adopt to support the pro-Agreement majority. They do not represent some new programme, but are in fact measures which have been left outstanding for decades. The failure of successive British governments to introduce them in the past has contributed to the present malaise. Measures that must be introduced include legislation at Westminster to protect equality and cultural rights in Northern Ireland. This legislation would be in addition to measures already introduced as part of the Good Friday Agreement, and together with them would constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

The idea of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland first saw the light of day in the late 1960s. The Civil Rights Association, the British Trades Union Congress, elements of the Northern Trade Union Movement and many political parties favoured the measure. It always had cross community support. Yet British government after British government failed to introduce such a measure. As a result, they wasted many opportunities to provide for peaceful democratic advance in the North. The Bill of Rights should explicitly guarantee individual and community equality before the law, affirmative action to end discrimination and inequality, and equality of treatment of nationalist and unionist traditions and culture.

The policing and justice system in Northern Ireland was inevitably tarnished by the years of conflict, civil unrest and the attacks on civil liberties. Police reform, if it is to mean anything, has to address what measures are required to ensure that policing is properly representative of the community it serves, in terms of religion, political belief, gender, class and race, and properly accountable to the society it operates within. The Patten recommendations go some way along this road, but the British

government has still to prove that it is fully committed to the changes in the policing function which are necessary to create a police service that is recruited from across the community, is unarmed to reflect the new political and security realities, and is committed to putting in place an effective independent system for dealing with complaints against it.

The bottom line for many people in Northern Ireland is a recognition that if policing is to function in harmony with new political structures a new organisation is necessary. The use of plastic bullets should be banned as part of the British government's contribution to the peace process because they have killed 14 people, including seven children, and severely injured hundreds of others. The right to a full and fair defence is a basic tenet of any legal system, yet charges of intimidation against civil liberties and defence lawyers continue to receive scant attention. The question of responsibility for the deaths of Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson has still to be properly investigated. Members of the Northern Ireland judiciary have never been as alert as they might have been, in preventing and challenging the erosion of human rights protections within the criminal justice system, and this is illustrated by the legacy of outstanding cases where a miscarriage of justice has been alleged.

The government, as part of its reform of the criminal justice system, should:

- abolish the Diplock Court system
- repeal all emergency legislation
- introduce audio and/or video recordings of all interrogations
- comply with international standards in relation to allowing access to legal representation
- restore the right to silence.

These are measures which have been demanded since the early 1970s. Reform of the judiciary should be carried out in tandem with the reform of the police. Among the issues of concern to civil liberties groups are questions of selection and training of the judiciary.

The government made a commitment in the Good Friday Agreement to new regional development and economic development strategies for Northern Ireland. Affirmative action measures should form the core of new thinking towards disadvantaged areas and the socially excluded. The trade unions rightly demand that the British government should pursue a policy of affirmative action towards the unemployed and long-term unemployed. The trade unions also demand financial support for employers willing to agree affirmative action in their recruitment of the long-term unemployed, the setting of targets within public contracts for the recruitment of the long-term unemployed, the provision of affordable childcare and a tax allowance for childcare costs, as well as other, more focused, measures to target social need.

These measures form the basis of a programme to renew the Good Friday process. The political battle within the North is no longer just about the differences between nationalism and unionism: it is also about creating a politics which can transcend these differences. It is only in the context of such a politics that the issues of decommissioning can be resolved. Decommissioning will only take place within a framework of overall democratic transformation. The issue will remain stalled as long as democratic advance remains problematic and conditional.

Any discussion about the possibility of a radical alternative politics in Ireland must start with an examination of Sinn Féin. Can Sinn Féin gain further support in the North, and make a breakthrough in the South? It is possible that in the next 26-County general election Sinn Féin will make the same sort of gains which it made in the local elections last year. At the very least, it should have several more TDs elected. It is very clear that Sinn Féin has not maximised its electoral potential in the North or in the South. But Sinn Féin's problem is that it carries too much baggage to be able to build up a mass based political alternative to the present political set-up by itself.

In the light of where it has come from, the Sinn Féin view of politics sees developments in the North as the core issue for national democracy in this country. This means that everything is subordinated to making political progress there. This is sometimes worked for at the expense of equally important national democratic issues in other parts of the island. Recent illustrations of this have been the party's failure to mount an effective opposition to Ireland's involvement with the euro-currency, the militarisation of the European Union, and membership of the Partnership for Peace.

Clearly, Sinn Féin must be at the centre of any new radical politics in the South and North. The party's key position has been hard earned. But its reluctance to give a lead on a number of key national democratic issues, particularly relating to the South, points to the necessity of developing organisational forms beyond Sinn Féin. Even within the North, if the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement are re-established, Sinn Féin will have to work out a strategy to cope with a situation whereby it will be both a party of government and also a party of opposition. In both the North and the South, there will be strenuous attempts made to co-opt Sinn Féin into the political consensus, while the Sinn Féin hope would be that it will be in a position to influence a minority government in the South.

No other radical party, in either the North or the South, comes anywhere near Sinn Féin in terms of size of organisation or in electoral support. There will be a temptation for many radicals to join the party on the basis that it represents the only show in town. This is understandable and is, in many ways, inevitable. However it is also important that enough radicals

maintain a degree of independence, and work towards the development of campaigns on issues such as the erosion of national independence and neutrality. These issues transcend the traditional divisions of left and right and campaigns around them should not place themselves into a left or right straitjacket.

The coming period will see further erosion of democracy, sovereignty and national independence. For the first time, this country will become a net contributor to the European Union, as opposed to being a net beneficiary. It is highly unlikely that the 'Celtic Tiger' will go anywhere near tackling the gross inequalities in Irish society or ending poverty. Sections of the workforce who have lost out in the 'social partnership' framework will become increasingly restless at their situation. Jobs will come into the country, and jobs will go out, in our 'revolving door economy'. The revelations about corruption will continue to undermine the legitimacy of the institutions of the state and the consensus political process generally. If there is a downturn in the US economy, this country, which in many ways is merely an offshore adjunct, will suffer and unemployment could become a major issue again.

In that situation people will start to demand an alternative. The alternative might come from a racist and fundamentalist right, or from a national democratic political formation which offers a real alternative.

Such a formation would unite democrats, republicans, socialists and greens around a programme of defence of national independence, independence from military power blocs, economic and social equity, and democracy at all levels of society. In relation to the economy, it would advocate that general economic policy should be directed and guided by the state in the context of democratic planning. It could allow for members of political parties to be involved in its work, while at the same time remaining in their own political parties. It must also be open to both individual and group membership.

Usually discussions about this type of political formation centre on the need for a 'forum' where various strands of radical opinion can come together and exchange views. Any new formation must have both an educational – and a campaigning – function. It must have a democratic structure. But it would not be a new political party. It must be attached to no political party.

Realistically, such an organisation will not emerge overnight. Nevertheless, serious thought should be given to it now. Certain essential national democratic principles or themes should govern its prospective remit: principles of sovereignty, national unity and reconciliation, opposition to neo-liberalism, independence from military and political power blocs, economic, social and educational equity, emphasis on democratic values, popular participation in decision-making at central and

local level, opposition to overly centralised bureaucracy, strengthening of local democracy, opposition to sexism and racism, and affirmative action against discrimination and marginalisation.

Such a formation would not be restricted to a narrow vision of politics, but would also seek to unite scientists, technologists, artists, writers and *Gaeilgeoiri*, in support of a progressive, secular, national, democratic culture free from any taint of sectarian domination. The danger with single-issue campaigns is that they usually lack the coherence necessary to take them beyond a certain stage. This is because they usually lack a clear ideology to guide them. When they reach that stage, they usually fade away. Developments over the next number of years, in areas of democracy, national unity and independence, will require a clear ideology and campaigning commitment if progressive politics is to make an impact in this country. These developments will be resisted, but unless enough people see that there is a realistic alternative, the resistance will end in yet another 'glorious' failure. The time is long past for making a start to building that alternative. The question is who is going to take the first tentative step?

'Rational Creatures and Free Citizens': Republicanism, Feminism and the Writing of History

MARY CULLEN

Modern republicanism and modern feminism both trace their roots back to the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century had caught the imagination of intellectual Europe, marking a further stage in the move from reliance on received authority to reliance on the power of the human mind, allied to systematic observation, to discover truth about the material world and the universe. Enlightenment thinkers applied the admired scientific methods to human beings and the organisation of human societies. At the level of the individual, they emphasised the rational aspect of human nature, the ability to think and reason, to decide between good and evil, and to make responsible and moral decisions about individuals' own lives. Since reason was an attribute of every human being rather than a monopoly in the hands of the high-born, they queried the allocation of resources, power and privilege, on the basis of arbitrary differences like birth. Hereditary monarchy and all forms of hereditary access to privilege and power came under critical scrutiny. At the level of society, Enlightenment thinkers looked for universal laws controlling human behaviour, as Newton had looked for the laws governing the movement of the planets.

Republican thinking was stimulated by Enlightenment ideas, and by both the American revolution in the 1770s and the French revolution from 1789. These fed into the long tradition of European republican thought, based on the the classical education universally enjoyed by the better-off, with its knowledge of the political ideas of Greece and Rome. From this came the concept of the classical republic, the *res publica* or public thing, with the virtuous and active citizens at the centre of political life. However, this citizenship was confined to male heads of households, and excluded all dependents, including women and slaves. Enlightenment

values deepened the democratic values of republicanism, stressing that good government must be in the interests of all the people and must be one in which all the people had a say. Writers, like Thomas Paine, advocated putting the principles of freedom and equality into practice on the ground, through political action. The French revolution saw one of the major European states attempt to do just that. Republican writings were widely read in late eighteenth-century Ireland, especially Paine's latest work, *The Rights of Man* (1791-2), which defended the French revolution, and presented a detailed Enlightenment and republican critique of the structure of British government.

Both the Enlightenment and the French revolution created a space and a climate which encouraged the assertion of claims for women's equality with men. In eighteenth-century Europe, for the small number of women – and men – who voiced such ideas, equality meant equality in terms of moral and rational worth, freedom to fulfil individual potential, and recognition as full members of the human race, instead of the second class membership allocated to women. The emphasis was not on equal work, but on recognition of the value of different work and roles. In Enlightenment debate, the position of women in western Europe was analysed in new terms, not of what God had ordained, but of 'nature', what was 'natural' for their sex. Nevertheless, women's nature and role continued to be defined by most male thinkers, in the context of their view of the relationship between the sexes. That role was famously defined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762. The education of a woman, he wrote, must be planned in relation to man:

To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught when young.¹

The view accepted by most Enlightenment thinkers of women's nature, fitted this role. Women were essentially non-rational, guided by emotion and feelings rather than moral judgment, and needing the guidance and control of rational men to find the path to virtue.

The language of reason, and of revolution and citizenship, became familiar to all sections of society, and disadvantaged groups expressed old concerns in new political terms. In France, for some years after 1789 radical women, mostly middle-class, pressed for specific reforms, formed clubs, marshalled their arguments, and began to petition the National Assembly. Demands included marriage reform, divorce, better employment, education, political liberty, and a general equality of rights. One of the best known, Olympe de Gouges, in 1791 published *Les Droits de la Femme*, demanding complete equality in the public sphere. In 1793 the Club des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires was founded, but,

in October of that year, the revolutionary government outlawed all women's clubs, and told women their contribution to the republic lay strictly within the home, where they could rear good republican citizens. The Assembly did pass some reforms in the area of divorce and property rights, but not on education or the public role of women.

While Britain did not experience a revolution, the early years of the French revolution made radical political change seem a real possibility and in this heightened atmosphere Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published in 1792. A writer and intellectual, unequivocally committed to the values of the Enlightenment and republicanism, and who had already published a book on the rights of men in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, she now argued the case for women's equality in the terms of republican citizenship.

Her main target was the basic contradiction underlying Rousseau's views on the education of women already noted. Either women were rational human creatures who should be both educated and expected to act as such, or men should declare openly that they did not believe women were fully human. For Wollstonecraft, as for most Enlightenment thinkers, reason and virtue were closely linked. To be virtuous one had to be free to act as reason dictated. According to Rousseau, a woman 'will always be in subjection to a man, or men's judgment, and she will never be free to set her own opinion above his...'² Wollstonecraft responded: 'In fact, it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason. That was Rousseau's opinion respecting men; I extend it to women...'³

While she argued that all knowledge and occupations should be open to both sexes, she saw women as being primarily occupied as wives and mothers. To be good as either, they must first be self-determining virtuous human beings. The political, social and economic structures of society forced women into dependence on men, and hence into subordination. This then made it an economic necessity for women to seek to attract a man who would support them. It was useless to expect virtue from women while they were so dependent on men. If women were recognised as free, independent citizens, they could then be expected, as other citizens were expected, to work, and to work to acceptable standards. Being wives and mothers would then be seen as real work by citizens, contributing to society, and a revolution in the quality of mothering would follow. 'Make women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers'.⁴

Some Enlightenment writers, female and male, supported improved education for women on the grounds of improved motherhood. Wollstonecraft was one of the few who justified the rights of women on

the same grounds as the rights of men, on shared human reason: 'Speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother'.⁵ She went further still in seeing motherhood in terms of citizenship, rejecting any absolute division between the private and public spheres.

Ireland did see a rebellion, but not one which, like the French revolution, led to a new constitution and a new state. The defeat of the United Irishmen in 1798 was followed by the passing of the Act of Union in 1800. We do not know what sort of state would have followed success. Nor do we, as of now, know how widespread demands for women's citizenship were among the women in the movement. However, we do know that some at least had developed opinions. Mary Ann McCracken (1770-1866), writing from Belfast to her brother and leading United Irishman, Henry Joy McCracken in Kilmainham Prison in Dublin on 16 March 1797, put the case in language and ideas reminiscent of Wollstonecraft (who was widely read in Ireland), and with the added edge of the French *citoyennes*. She wrote of the dignity of women's nature and their current situation, 'degraded by custom and education ...'; if woman was intended as man's companion, she 'must of course be his equal in understanding ...'; women must take responsibility for their own liberation: 'is it not almost time ... that the female part of creation as well as the male should throw off the fetters with which they have been so long mentally bound and ... rise to the situation for which they were designed ...'; they must believe that 'rational ideas of liberty and equality' applied to themselves as well as to men, and must cultivate a 'genuine love of Liberty and just sense of her value', if their support of liberty for others is to be of value. Like the women activists of the French revolution she urges that a new Irish constitution should include women as citizens, and hopes 'it is reserved for the Irish nation to strike out something new and to shew an example of candour generosity and justice superior to any that have gone before them ...'⁶ It was not to be. Sixteen months later almost to the day she walked with her brother, her arm through his, to his execution in Belfast. The rebellion had been crushed, and there was no new Ireland in the building.

A number of points arise relevant to our understanding of how history is written. Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Ann McCracken and the radical Frenchwomen were not outsiders pressing claims on movements of which they were not a part. They were all active participants who from within tried to broaden the intellectual base. Olympe de Gouges and the French women who urged women's rights to full citizenship on the revolutionary leadership, were active revolutionaries themselves. Wollstonecraft's writings, including the *Vindication*, are part of the body of Enlightenment

and republican thought. McCracken, while not a sworn member of the United Irishmen, was active in the broad movement. Nancy Curtin, one of the leading historians of the United Irishmen, describes her as taking 'the radicals' notion of the natural rights of man to self-government to its logical conclusion – the extension of these rights to women', and notes that she 'seems to have been far better read in the classic republican and radical texts than her brother'.⁷ These women took part in the mainstream development of republican thinking and practice, and, in addition, argued for a more inclusive concept of republican citizenship. By any criteria this would seem a significant contribution. Yet, few histories of the Enlightenment, the French revolution or the radical politics of 1790s Ireland see women as part of the action or see the feminist challenge as part of the political thinking of the period.

Most survey histories of societies have been written from a perspective that sees males as the active agents in human history, dominating the 'public' sphere of political, macro-economic, intellectual, and cultural affairs, and as the instigators of the patterns of change and continuity that historians study. Women are implicitly seen as passive spectators or followers in the public sphere and as in control in their special domain of the 'private' or domestic sphere. The two spheres are seen to operate separately and independently.

A major factor in this perspective is that few historians have seen the relationships between men and women as a part of history. Instead, relationships between the sexes appear to have been taken for granted, as 'natural', biologically based, essentially the same across societies and over time, unchanging and unchangeable, and so outside the remit of the historian.

To see these relationships as solely 'natural' and outside history seems extraordinary once attention is drawn to them. In eighteenth-century Ireland, as elsewhere in Europe, access to resources and power was directed to males, rather than females, through a combination of laws, regulations, and customs. These involved inheritance laws, marriage laws including husbands' legal control of their wives' persons and property, and double sexual standards in law and daily life, as well as the exclusion of women from the universities, the professions, and political life. It is difficult to see how all these together could be explained as occurring 'naturally', without any purposeful human intervention. Yet, few historians have seen them as needing to be even adverted to or described, let alone analysed or explained as significant aspects of the history of a society.

If historians do not see relationships between the sexes as part of history, then feminist argument and campaigns have no reference point. If historians do not see the historical realities that provoked them, they appear to come from nowhere. This blindness of the historians appears to

be the main reason why survey histories, when they do mention women's rights campaigns, which is seldom, almost never consider their origins, their significance, their interaction with other movements, or the light they throw on other developments.

The 'discovery' of these relationships, as the proper subject for historical research and interpretation, came in response to a simple question: what did women do in history? This question came to be asked when the current growth in women's history developed under the impetus of the new wave of the women's movement in the 1960s. It arose because opponents argued that women had always lived happily in a purely domestic sphere. Attempts to answer it uncovered, among other things, both earlier assertions of women's right to autonomy and the structures of societies which gave rise to them. It became clear that male-female relationships in history could not be ascribed solely to a simple biological determinism. It was necessary to distinguish between, on the one hand, whatever biological differences exist between the sexes, and on the other, the roles societies prescribe and enforce for males and females. These roles involve the political, social, and economic consequences experienced by an individual in any particular society – at any particular time – depending on birth as a male or female. Feminist theorists took the word 'gender' and gave it a new meaning to denote this social construction of sex.

This highlights the significance of both the questions historians ask and the questions they do not ask. Women's emancipation campaigns, and the reasons for them were fully visible in the historical evidence. It was historians' perceptions of who and what was significant that made it irrelevant to ask: what did women do? This reminds us that we all bring our political and other beliefs to the writing and reading of history. While this is inevitable, it also indicates the importance of listening to new questions, and paying less attention to who is asking them, and more to how we try to answer them. New questions may be politically motivated in various ways, but that does not invalidate a question that opens up hitherto unexplored areas of human experience. We may also ponder what conscious or unconscious motivations contribute to the various blindspots of historians, as well as what questions remain as yet unasked.

Gender analysis is a powerful tool in historical research and interpretation, and it is ironic, to say the least, that before its value has been recognised and exploited on any broad scale, popular usage has translated it into a synonym for sex, and so drained it of its value. However, whatever name we use for it, it is important that the concept itself and the reality it names do not become invisible again. Once the relationships between women and men are brought under historical scrutiny, sex takes its place with other categories of analysis, such as class, colour, race, religion, nationality, wealth or access to resources. The interaction of all

these determines the location of individuals in time and place, and influences the opportunities and choices open to them. Seeing this interaction eliminates the danger of a reductionism that sees all women as always oppressed by all men. For example, the interaction of class and sex will find some women exercising power over men and other women. Women as well as men can be oppressors. The reality is that we have human beings, female and male, grappling with their situation, with varying degrees of altruism and self-interest, awareness and muddled thinking, within the constraints of sex, class, and the other categories.

Women's history in Ireland, while not as fully developed as elsewhere, is rooted and growing. Relevant to the discussion here, is its discovery of women's emancipation activism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nineteenth-century campaigns, some of them conducted in close cooperation with British activists, and others separate Irish endeavours, achieved a number of substantial reforms: improved standards in the education of girls and women, including admission to universities and degrees; married women's control of their own property; wider employment opportunities; and the local government vote and eligibility for election to most local government bodies. The early twentieth-century campaign for parliamentary suffrage, as well as continued pressure on other fronts won full citizenship, including full political participation, for women in the 1922 Constitution of the Irish Free State. After 1922 activism continued, albeit with a lower public profile, as feminists tried, with varying degrees of success, to counter the general hostility of the conservative Free State governments of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s to women's participation in the public sphere.

These findings have yet to infiltrate the 'mainstream' survey histories of Ireland. To be fair, there is not, as yet, a sustained and comprehensive overview of the history of the Irish women's movement. There are a few good monographs on the suffrage movement and quite a wide range of collections and scattered articles on various aspects. It may be that an inclusive overview or overviews are needed before the breakthrough will come. Be that as it may, for a group, society, or nation, history plays the role that personal memory does for the individual. What is not recorded by the historian has not existed for the reader. So effective can the memory loss be, that when the new wave of the women's movement, Women's Liberation, burst very publicly onto the scene in 1970, few of the participants were aware that Irish activism went back at least to the 1860s. Even today, knowledge of the history of Irish feminist organisation is confined to a small group of the interested, and has made little inroad into the awareness of the public at large or popular political debate. This is only too evident in the very limited perception of feminism generally portrayed in the media, where it is seen as a 'women's issue' and essentially a matter

of women trying to compete on equal terms with men within the existing structures of society.

So, the cycle of reinventing the wheel continues. Time and energy, which could be spent in critical self-analysis and reflection on what could be learned from the earlier experience, are instead used in rediscovering information and insights. Equally, of course, successive generations of men have lost the memory that male-dominated societies imposed such restrictions on the areas of human activity it allowed women to enter, and have not had to ponder the implications. How many other distortions of our shared past have yet to be recognised?

However, once we see the relationships between the sexes as part of history, this brings feminist thinking unequivocally into the arena of political thought where it makes its own contribution to debate. In practice, of course feminism has always engaged in political debate and argument with other analyses. Again, because the political, social, and economic relationships between the sexes have been overlooked, so too the contribution of feminism to debate has – until very recently – been largely ignored in discussion of political thought. At the international level, a large body of critical feminist theory has developed over the past 20 years or so, and is beginning to find its way into some histories of political thought.⁸ In Ireland, so far there has been only a limited amount of publication on political thought, and feminism is not included.

Feminism does not produce a blueprint for the ideal society. Its contribution to political thought is to insist that the political, social, and economic relationships between the sexes be scrutinised. It argues that sex-roles which limit women's control over their own lives, and which subordinate women to men, and women's needs to men's needs, are oppressive to women, dehumanising to both sexes, and damaging to society as a whole. In interaction with other analyses of the dynamics and structures of societies, various feminist political theories have developed, and so far none has become recognised as the definitive orthodoxy.

Nineteenth-century liberalism, itself a product of the Enlightenment emphasis on reason, sees human beings as autonomous, rational individuals, competing for success, wealth and status. The state's role is to create a level playing field by removing obstacles based on factors such as birth, religion, or ethnicity. Other than this, it should interfere as little as possible. However, in a liberal democracy, like Ireland today, feminists, whether or not they agree with the liberal world-view, find they have to call for continuing state intervention to remove obstacles based on sex. The social construction of sex, including the unequal division of domestic labour, the smaller earning power of women, and the distribution of power within families which determines whose interests get priority, inhibits equal competition between the sexes within the worlds of paid work and

politics. Feminists argue that a liberal democracy, which aims to treat all citizens equally, will have to exercise active discrimination. To achieve equal treatment, account must be taken of the differences in the life situation of different groups, and the balance of advantage and disadvantage has to be redressed. This may be done in various ways, for instance by providing child-care services to free women to compete on equal terms, by insisting on a quota of women on boards, or by anti-discrimination legislation.

These arguments are valid and important, but have limitations if the aim is to radically change society. In the first place, measures that aim to adjust the balance *between* the sexes often overlook the differences *within* each sex. Freeing women from various domestic responsibilities may allow more affluent women to compete with more affluent men, but may make little difference to poorer women and poorer men whose participation may be inhibited by other factors, such as lower educational achievement, lack of a car, etc. Secondly, it can easily slide into an assumption that the objective of feminism is solely equal rights and equal opportunities between the sexes. Equal participation of women with men in political, social, and economic life will only create a more inclusive and equitable society across the board if women *per se* are more committed to such values and to devising policies to promote them. Neither the historical record nor today's world show women consistently supporting different political policies to men. Like men, women involved in politics are, and have been, members of parties and movements whose policies differ fundamentally. In any case, there is a contradiction at the core of a view that sees women's rights as solely concerned with women attaining the position and privileges men enjoy. If we reject sex-role models which see women as subordinate to men, and which limit women's autonomy and control over their own lives, the corollary must be rejection of a male model of dominance and authority. The logic of the feminist starting point is the need to develop new and more fully human models for both sexes.

Marxist analysis also drew on the Enlightenment, in its case on the search for the laws governing human behaviour and societies. It believes that capitalism, based on private ownership and competition for profits, produces an unjust society with high levels of deprivation and unhappiness. Marxism and socialism argue that society as a whole should control the entire economic and political systems, which should be developed in a non-competitive way in the interests of the welfare of all. Feminisms which accept Marxist and socialist views criticise liberal feminism as bourgeois and interested only in middle-class women. In Marxist and socialist analysis, *all* women will only be fully liberated when the class issue is resolved and capitalism replaced by socialism. In turn, feminists challenge Marxism and socialism that gender analysis must be

incorporated with their class analysis if women are to benefit from a class revolution.

Radical feminism emerged in the 1960s, and took yet another approach. It saw both biological sex *and* socially constructed sex-roles as crucial issues. Sexuality and sexual activity, as well as childbearing and rearing, were areas for political scrutiny and analysis. It rejected any aim of making women 'equal' to men and celebrated women's difference.

There are many feminisms, many feminist theories with many variations and interactions. Few people's thinking fits neatly into any one theory and most combine elements from a number.

All this points to the potential of dialogue between republicanism and feminism to contribute to radical change in society. Feminist awareness of the need to recognise social difference when trying to create conditions of equality and freedom, can engage with republicanism's insistence that good government must be concerned with the welfare of all citizens and must facilitate the participation of all citizens. Feminism also brings its insight that current models of masculinity and femininity may be obstacles to creating the republic; in particular the macho model with its reluctance to admit error and its obsession with saving face. If socialist principles are included in the dialogue, a critical approach to the existing organisation of the world, socially, economically and politically could follow. The present organisation and structures subordinate people to profits. This may favour male participation over female, but it does not aim to facilitate the human development, welfare and happiness of either sex. Instead of trying to fit women into this model we could ask what forms of economic organisation would best suit the real needs of women, men, and children. The same question could be addressed to political participation. The dialogue could also seek ways to counter the inhuman aspects of the current global, free-market economy where many of the issues that concern feminism and republicanism arise in new forms. Critics of globalisation stress the need to counter the belief that a competitive and unregulated free market, divorced from social responsibility, will best serve the interests of people everywhere because it is the most effective way of increasing wealth. It may increase wealth, but that wealth will benefit the few and not the many, unless some form of global regulation is devised to protect individuals from bearing the costs of unchecked competition, through job insecurity, the breakdown of communities, increasing wealth for some accompanied by the increasing alienation of others, or destruction of the environment.⁹

Feminism, republicanism, and democracy are concerned with combining individual freedom and social responsibility. Feminism is not a 'women's issue.' It is a human issue with implications for society as a whole, and it addresses fundamental questions concerning the definition of a human being and a citizen. Perhaps because the logic of its analysis

leads to critical scrutiny of masculinity as well as femininity, male thinkers have been slow to accept this. The emphasis of the women's rights argument in the 1790s was on a number of concerns: inclusiveness; the need to recognise and respect diversity among individuals and roles; the responsibilities as well as the rights of citizenship; and the need for education for good citizenship. All these have an applicability that is not confined to women and can engage constructively with the republican values of liberty, equality, and fraternity/sorority. The writing of history, just as it played a role in losing the memory of feminist challenges to patriarchal societies, can now play a role in helping to retrieve some of that lost memory. If we can start by recovering the interaction of republicanism and women's emancipation in the 1790s and incorporating it into the written histories of the period, we can prepare the ground for ongoing engagement in the present day. If history is what the evidence forces us to believe, the first task must be to make that evidence so visible that it cannot be ignored. This is part of the project of writing a more inclusive human history. The challenge here is to historians, and perhaps particularly to historians of women.

Notes

¹ J.J. Rousseau, *Émile* (London: Dent 1974), p. 321

² *Ibid.*, p. 333

³ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Dent 1982), p. 25

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 213

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159

⁶ Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken 1770-1866* (Belfast: Blackstaff 1988), pp 126-8

⁷ Nancy Curtin, 'Women and Eighteenth-Century Irish Republicanism', in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound 1991), pp 138-40

⁸ See, for example, John Morrow, *History of Political Thought: A Thematic Introduction* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan 1998)

⁹ See, for example, John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Books 1999)

Can Republican Ideas Inform Political Practice?

INTRODUCTION

For this section of the journal, *The Republic* invited a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to write about some aspect of contemporary Ireland relevant to their work and areas of concern. We were particularly interested in how the NGOs would respond to the challenge of considering their concerns and practices within a framework of republican ideas. Notwithstanding the long history of these ideas, for many in Ireland today republicanism means little more than armed nationalism and violence. Reasserting the democratic core of republicanism and reinvigorating its radical political potential will form part of the educational role of this journal.

Shortcomings in democratic participation and inclusion are noted in these articles. The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), and the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) point to exclusions based on sex, age, and ethnicity respectively. The ITM argues that those with power always define who is entitled to participate.

That Irish society is marked by great inequalities is also accepted by the NGOs. Both the NWCI and the ITM acknowledge legislative and practical advances in this area, yet they argue that the achievement of formal rights is only a first step. Political will, proper resourcing, education, and systematic implementation will be needed if we are to move towards real equality.

The language of rights, joined to a wide-ranging equality agenda has, become the predominant discourse among the NGOs, some locating their arguments within it, while for others it is the subject of their articles.

Part of this agenda must include the recognition that cultural diversity exists in Ireland, argues the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI). Fully developed integration policies for minority groups, such as Travellers and refugees, are essential for the achievement of this goal.

There is a scepticism about the commitment to rights in the Republic, with the ICCL citing the delays in incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into Irish law and in establishing a Human Rights Commission. Questions about the form of incorporation, the powers and remit of the Commission, and proper resourcing, will remain after they have been implemented.

It is argued by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (ICJP), that social and economic rights should be legally enforceable and no longer only aspirational. Rights to health and housing, say, should be considered of equal importance to civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression or voting rights.

All of the NGOs make it clear in their contributions that they aspire towards a more equal, more inclusive, more democratic Ireland. They envisage a way forward through education and the implementation of a rights and equality agenda. This approach is well established and has its merits, but can be extended in the light of the views of the other contributors in the journal, who suggest the need for greater change and transformation of existing structures. Within present economic, social, and political structures, real democratic control, self-determination, inclusion, and equality may be impossible to achieve.

Caging the Tiger: Strengthening Socio-Economic rights

JEROME CONNOLLY

On the day of the last European Union elections, a third of Irish electors failed to avail of their right to vote. But, how many of them would have chosen to go without shelter or food on the same night? Yet, the right to vote is justiciable, while there is no constitutional right to shelter or housing. It is increasingly apparent that the existing divide between rights which are justiciable (civil and political) and those which are not (social and economic), needs to be rethought and redefined. This is needed to put more effective curbs on rampant market forces which favour the strong over the weak, to better protect key aspects of human dignity such as access to decent housing, and to reduce poverty more effectively.

Engaging in rhetoric is usually risky – it tends to highlight the gap between aspiration and reality. But occasionally the risk is in the opposite direction. Sentiments, principles, goals, originally uttered perhaps to placate and deflect, may despite everything inspire and keep alive, through hard times, the hope that they may somehow be realised and acted on.

Rights language is of this sort. The uncompromising claim that every one has rights, that rights trump other claims, has often been rejected or derided as 'idealistic', unrealistic, and unattainable except to a limited degree. Yet, time and time again, rights have shown the resilience of a bog fire, smouldering unseen beneath the surface, and capable of bursting into flame unexpectedly.

We are now at an interesting stage, to put it no more highly, in the evolution of rights. In the past, a certain cleavage between different categories of rights was widely accepted in the West as proper and necessary. Only one category, that of civil and political rights, was determined to be enforceable in law. Such rights as health or housing were denied legal enforceability, not only in national constitutions, but also in the international human rights instruments.

In the Irish constitution, as is well known, while a number of 'Directive Principles of Social Policy' were stated in Article 45, they were specifically stated to be non-cognisable by the courts, and have had little

practical effect. The constitution of India, drawing on the example of its Irish predecessor, also included similar non-cognisable provisions. However, the Indian Supreme Court showed in a number of judgments that these, even if non-cognisable, could be used in a positive sense to advance social and economic rights.

The divide between the two categories of rights is very apparent at European level. While the European Convention on Human Rights allows the individual to take a case to the Court of Human Rights, no such possibility exists under the European Social Charter (1961) or its updated successor, the Revised European Social Charter of 1996. At UN level, neither category of rights is justiciable.

In Ireland, the 1996 *Report of the Review Group on the Constitution* dismissed in less than two pages the proposition that anti-poverty rights be included in the Irish constitution. It re-stated two of the main arguments on which the denial of justiciability to social and economic rights is usually based: (i) that it would be a distortion of democracy to transfer decisions on major issues of 'policy and practicality' from the government and Oireachtas, elected to represent the people and do their will, to an unelected judiciary; (ii) that it would not accord with democratic principles to confer absolute personal rights in the constitution in relation to social or economic objectives, however desirable in themselves, and leave the Oireachtas 'with no option but to discharge the cost, whatever it might be, as determined by the judiciary'.

Both arguments reflect the prevalent assumption (shared by liberals and conservatives alike) that civil and political rights are essentially negative rights, obliging the state to refrain from doing something, or guaranteeing the citizen freedom to do something. This type of right is contrasted with social and economic rights, which are classed as essentially positive, requiring the provision of resources for their implementation. Therefore, it is argued, elected governments rather than the courts should properly decide the rationing and allocation of scarce resources between competing uses, since governments are responsible to the electorate, and the courts are not.

These arguments are less and less tenable. The assumptions underlying them are increasingly challenged. One is that civil and political rights are basically cost-free; this is patently not so. Another is that the courts would run amok in adjudicating socio-economic rights. This has not happened in the 60 years since the right to free primary education was given constitutional status in Ireland. Indeed it is remarkable that the Review Group ignored completely the Irish experience in this regard, which completely belies their fears about constitutional enumeration.

From another direction, much work has been done especially within the UN, in developing the content and internal structure of social and

economic rights. The UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which monitors the reports of states parties to the covenant of the same name, have defined a three-fold aspect to such rights. States have a duty to respect, that is, not to violate or infringe the rights in question by their actions; to protect them, that is to prevent their violation by third parties; and to promote and fulfil them, that is, to ensure their progressive implementation as circumstances change and resources permit.

The first two requirements, to respect and to protect, do not depend primarily on the provision of resources. A justiciable right to health or housing would be important in the context of guaranteeing respect and protection for the health of individuals. As for the resource question, this is of course related to existing levels of economic and technological development – but so to a significant extent is the right to life and to bodily integrity. It is not necessary to assume that, if made justiciable, a given right must inevitably be left for the courts to treat as totally open-ended. The UN committee has emphasised that what is at issue here is a *minimum* standard, which the courts would if necessary enforce. In a path-breaking judgement the Swiss Federal Court in 1995 found that there was an unwritten constitutional right to a basic minimum of subsistence, based on or derived from fundamental human rights. There were, it said, elements which, although not expressly enumerated in the (Swiss) constitution, nevertheless acted as pre-conditions for the exercise of other rights, to liberty or justice, which were enumerated in the constitution or which otherwise appeared as indispensable elements of a state based on democratic principles and the rule of law. The guarantee of elementary needs such as nourishment, clothing and shelter was 'absolutely necessary for human existence and development', it stated.

The line of argument used in the Swiss judgement is relevant in an Irish context. The Federal Court showed itself acutely aware that judges have to be aware of the functional boundaries of their competence. It stated specifically that, in view of the restraints of state resources, judges do not have the competence to set priorities for the allocation of resources. Consequently, the courts could only determine minimum levels of state performance. But, after making very clear the limits to the courts' competence in resource determination, the Federal Court, nevertheless found unequivocally that 'what constitutes the inalienable pre-condition of dignified human existence is clearly recognisable and susceptible to investigation in legal proceedings'. Only when the legislative framework (in this case of Switzerland) failed to meet the minimum claim required under the rights stated in the constitution was it to be set aside, the court stated.

Ireland is a party to the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which includes the rights to health, shelter, adequate standard of

living, and access to adequate nutrition. The UN monitoring committee for this Covenant has laid down that 'there is a minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights [in the Covenant] which is incumbent on every State Party'.

Everyone understands that although the right to life is justiciable in the Irish constitution, this does not make the state liable to guarantee life everlasting. In the same way, a right to health or housing, if constitutionally enumerated, would be construed in the light of prevailing standards, technology, and resources. It would not and could not be interpreted to guarantee everyone the right to live in a king's palace. It could and should be interpreted, however, as guaranteeing that we do not have to sleep in ditches; that by whatever means are appropriate, the state would ensure that we enjoyed at least the minimum conditions of shelter required to satisfy the 'inalienable pre-condition of dignified human existence', as the Swiss judgement puts it.

In crude terms of Gross National Product per head, our wealth in Ireland increased by 66 per cent between 1993 and 1999. By the end of the current year we are expected to exceed German per capita income, putting us second from the top, after Luxembourg, in the league of eleven countries in the Euro zone. Current forecasts are that, although slackening somewhat, the Irish economy will continue to grow at an exceptionally high rate over the next several years. It is less and less convincing to argue that we cannot afford to make core social and economic rights justiciable.

By doing so, by inserting them in the constitution, we would proclaim that we intended to have, not a regime of first and second class rights, but a true republic of rights. We would be saying that we valued people first, and that our national priorities were to safeguard in a holistic way the well-being of all citizens.

Ireland – Not the Plato Ideal for Women

GRÁINNE HEALY

Though the Irish republic has been established for over half a century, the republican ideals of democracy, liberty, equality, and fraternity apply to men – full citizenship for women within this republic remains merely an aspiration.

'How many generations may be necessary to give vigour to the virtue and talents of the freed posterity of abject slaves?' asked Mary Wollstonecraft (1792).

Mary Ritter Beard in 1931 said: 'centuries before Mary Wollstonecraft called for a vindication of the rights of women, Plato was sufficiently familiar with women ... to provide that they should have equal guardianship in his ideal republic.'

While speaking of 'abject slaves' in the eighteenth century, early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft might see some progress for women in Ireland at this, the start of the twenty-first century. However, she would be deeply disappointed, as are many men and modern feminists, that in today's Irish republic the misogyny which pervaded in her century ensures Irish women still do not equally benefit from, nor enjoy, the same rights and privileges as Irish men.

Indeed James Connolly and other republicans of his time would shake their heads at the fact that the socialist and feminist revolution that they envisaged in the early twentieth century has yet to materialise. As the core ideals of the republican ideology – self-determination, liberty, equality, and fraternity – apply to women, the fact is that in 2000, women still do not enjoy the right to self-determination, full citizenship, or democracy in Ireland.

Today women make up 50.8 per cent of the Irish population. There is no doubt that a democratic deficit exists when we examine public life and the position of women in the institutions of the state. Women make up less than 12 per cent of the membership of the Oireachtas. The serious dearth of women in public policy decision-making posts (only one per cent of women in the two highest grades of the civil service), and their poor representation in the judiciary, add up to a disgraceful gender balance in this state. The failure of successive governments to tackle this gap is unfair and actually further supports the exclusion of women. Positive

action measures to increase the presence of women in all of these areas are necessary if the democratic deficit is to be addressed. For women in Ireland in the year 2000, real democracy does not exist.

In terms of equality, there is no doubt that there has been an increase in equal opportunities for women, in the area of employment in particular. However, many women's rights established in this state result from European directives or legal challenges at a European level (equal pay and contraception, to mention just two). Women do have the formal right to enter non-traditional, male-dominated areas of work (though women still make up less than five per cent of apprentices in Ireland, and less than three per cent of top managers in business). Women are now just over 40 per cent of the paid workforce – their participation rates have increased in the last ten years while their move into non-traditional areas is notable. Women now make up a huge number of solicitors for example, yet the vertical segregation of the labour market continues to show women as most likely to be in the low paid, part-time, and low status end of the majority of sectors.

Women are, ostensibly, entitled to economic independence. The recent moves towards individualisation (Budget of December 1999 and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness) of the welfare and taxation systems will benefit women. Individualisation is a move towards ending the concept of woman as 'adult dependent'. Still today, married couples on welfare receive only 70 per cent of the male 'full' rate for the woman. There is no doubt that these discriminatory aspects of both the tax and welfare systems are based on the ethos and view of woman as contained in the *Constitution of Ireland, Bunreacht na hÉireann* – Article 41.2.1: 'by her life within the home, woman ...' De Valera may yet turn in his grave, if women's full and rightful place in and outside of the home, as citizens with full rights, is established.

The fact is that since the 1980s women are more likely to be 'at risk' of poverty than men (Combat Poverty Agency, 1998). Lone parent women headed households are those deemed most 'at risk' of being in poverty. The reasons for such exposure to poverty for women are complex. The absence of recognition that women are, and should be treated as, full individuals and citizens of this Republic, lies at the root of many of these injustices. Woman's poverty arises from the fact that many of her entitlements are 'derived' from her status, not in her own right, but in relation to a man. Women have little entitlement in their own individual right, especially if married.

Women's unpaid, undervalued, and invisible work at home and in the community, continues to mean that for most women entry into the paid labour market or access to training and employment is a problem. There are real existing barriers for women. The key barriers remain lack of

childcare and eldercare supports. In addition, for rural women poor public transport facilities create insurmountable barriers. Financial supports are needed for parents, recognising children as citizens of the state and the responsibility of the whole nation. Childcare and eldercare supports – both supply and demand sides – are a necessary and expensive aspect of the development of the Republic's infrastructure. If women really are to be full and equal citizens the state must stop treating women like a second class or an underclass that carries out the invisible yet vital caring duties in society.

To foster the development of fraternity – real sisterhood and brotherhood in equality – there remains a list of items which must be dealt with, for men to show that they regard women as sisters in the Republic. The fact is that violence against women is still increasing in Ireland, both rape and domestic violence, while one in four Irish women has experienced violence at the hands of a known male intimate (Women's Aid, 1996). In their private roles women carry the greatest care burden – little equal sharing of household and domestic tasks takes place in the private sphere. This public/private split is most worrying, especially as the Celtic Tiger and rising house prices draw more women into the public workplace. The real burden is that most women carry out their public/paid employment tasks while also retaining almost full responsibility for the caring and home life of the family. This is not sustainable, and women are increasingly calling a halt to the double burden they carry. Women are talking about quality of life issues – it's a discussion from which men may also benefit, especially if it is carried out in a real power-sharing approach!

Few political parties in Ireland support positive action measures to encourage women to overcome the barriers they face when attempting to access political power. Notable exceptions are Sinn Féin and the Green Party, both of whom managed to get a respectable gender balance in their last outings at general/European elections. If parties really support women's participation and power sharing, then they must recognise the real barriers that exist for women. They must support the move towards a balance of power, and get more women into their ranks at all levels. The colleens may still be dancing at the crossroads for some antiquated republicans, but *Mná na hÉireann* are far more likely to be occupied by the double demands of managing home/care duties and working a 40 hour week!

If fraternity is an ideal worth pursuing, then we must recognise that the ability to live together in society as true equals, requires a shift in the power balance. Feminism, as a philosophy, addresses this shift from a rights perspective. Of course, the shift will require relinquishment of power and position by men. There are some men willing to engage in this

dialogue. Most men do so in intellectual terms only. Many men, including the proponents of a republic, fail to make the connection between equality in legal terms and the necessary private shift in responsibility and power. Only the latter will make a real difference, and lead to genuine shifts towards gender equality in an integrated private/public manner.

What would democracy with gender equality and freedom look like for women?

Women would be free from fear of violence from men. Women's contribution to society would be measured and valued. Existing barriers to women's full participation in all areas of social, political and cultural life would be eliminated. Gender mainstreaming of women and women's concerns would be in place. All public policy would be gender-proofed to ensure that structural inequalities are removed, and that women and men derive equal benefit from public policy decisions and public funds.

Such equality would mean supporting decisions inherent in women's and men's life choices. Equality is not about creating a homogenous people. Equality is about recognising differences, and ensuring that the differences do not give rise to discrimination. 'All different – All equal' was a slogan used in an anti-racism campaign some years ago. The true test of freedom in a democracy is the extent to which we can support and encourage difference. Recognising the rights of minorities, whether political, religious, sexual, able-bodied, or ethnic origin is vital. While women are not a minority grouping, this move to support a wider equality agenda is the context in which the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) is currently working.

Interesting developments in Ireland in recent years include the recognition of NWC as a social partner, along with other members of the Social and Community Pillar. NWC represents 150 plus women's organisations, amounting to some 300,000 women. As a social partner, NWC took part in national agreement negotiations for a second time, on the negotiation of the successor to the Partnership 2000 national agreement. The new Programme for Prosperity and Fairness contains significant gains for women – gains for those women in paid employment; gains for those women with caring responsibilities (though not a childcare payment for parents, yet); gains for women entering education and those in welfare dependency.

Allied to participation as a social partner in national negotiations is the participation of NWC in the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). In each of these fora gender equality is now centre stage. Advice to government on economic and social matters includes significant consideration of the gender dimension of proposals and recommendations. This consideration of possible impacts and outcomes for women is a significant step forward

in the development of public policy in a republic. Gender equality – including consideration of gender equality outcomes along with equality of opportunity – is a vital cornerstone of the whole social inclusion and equality agenda.

The NWCi welcomes the new equality institutions, the Equality Authority and the Director of Equality Investigations. The Equality Act of 1998 and the forthcoming Equal Status legislation firmly set out the grounds of anti-discrimination work and the role of these new institutions. It is hoped that these institutions, building on the groundbreaking work of the Employment Equality Agency, will support the establishment of an equality culture, at least in the public sphere. However, it is notable that the Employment Equality Act of 1977, which introduced the equal pay legislation, has yet to deliver. Forthcoming Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) wage differential figures show some 20 per cent plus difference in women's and men's earnings.

In 1869 J.S. Mill (*The Subjection of Women*) spoke of the subtle and pervasive social conditioning of women and men, which explains how women 'learn' to accede to their societal roles. He concludes: 'So long as the rights of the strong to power over the weak rule in the heart of society, the attempt to make the equal right of the weak the principle of its outward actions will always be an uphill struggle.'

For NWCi and feminists on the island of Ireland, the uphill struggle continues for the realisation of a republican ideal many centuries old - and getting older.

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Commissioning New Human Rights Standards

SIOBHÁN NÍ CHÚLACHÁIN

Commentators and activists in Northern Ireland campaigned long and hard for human rights protections to be included in any long-term solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland. This stance was to some extent vindicated by the Good Friday Agreement which contained parallel undertakings by both the British and Irish governments to promote and protect human rights and standards to an international level. The first of these undertakings is a commitment to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law, the second involves the establishment of Human Rights Commissions.

The European Convention on Human Rights

Ireland and the UK have both ratified (signed) the European Convention on Human Rights, but neither had incorporated it at the time of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Effectively, this meant that litigants could not raise issues relating to their rights under the Convention before the courts in these jurisdictions. If they had a good case under the Convention, they first had to exhaust the domestic remedies available, and then take their case to Strasbourg to the European Court of Human Rights. The journey to justice can be slow and expensive, and the governments can be even slower to bring domestic legislation into line with the eventual judgement of the court. In fact, fewer than ten Irish litigants have won cases in the European Court, but they have won important rights there, for example, the right to legal aid. Incorporation of the Convention means that domestic courts have to consider and apply the European Convention in cases that come before them. Appeals to Strasbourg would only be necessary where the domestic application of the Convention is incompatible with the established jurisprudence of the European Court.

In the Good Friday Agreement, both the British and the Irish governments undertook to incorporate the Convention. In Northern Ireland and in England, the Convention will be incorporated into domestic law as and from 2 October 2000, by virtue of the Human Rights Act, 1999. The delay in implementation is attributed to the need for judicial and

professional training programmes. There was speculation that provisions of the Human Rights Act relating to freedom of assembly would be fast-tracked in order to deal with the marching season. However, there were no such plans for other provisions of the Act, dealing with family rights and privacy, which could have been perceived as counterbalancing those provisions. In the circumstances, it was decided not to fast-track any of the provisions, but to await the October implementation.

The Irish government has taken no steps to incorporate the Convention, and Ireland is now the only member of the Council of Europe not to have done so – hopefully, this is a continual embarrassment to the government. It is certainly to their shame. Only litigants from the courts in the Irish Republic will continue to be put to the time and expense of taking their cases to Europe in order to vindicate their rights – rights which the government has already recognised by ratifying the Convention. So why the delay? Incorporation has now the status of a political imperative, and newspaper reports around the time Ireland assumed the presidency of the Council of Europe indicated acceptance of this.

It appears that the delay emanates from an uncertainty relating to the best method of incorporation. This is difficult to understand. Under the Convention, if there is a clash with domestic law, the higher standard should be applied. In many instances, the standards laid down under the constitution are higher than those enshrined in the Convention, which is after all, a compromise between member states of the Council of Europe. If the Convention is incorporated, it will not trump the constitution where those standards are higher, and where the constitutional standards are absent or lower, the Convention standards will apply anyway. The government is quick enough to hold referenda in relation to other international instruments (the Good Friday Agreement itself being one example) so why not enshrine the Convention itself into the constitution, with a proviso that Irish law prevail where it applies a higher level of protection?

Human Rights Commissions

The second undertaking by the governments related to the establishment, North and South, of Human Rights Commissions, as well as a North-South co-ordinating body. These commissions are essential to create a new culture of human rights throughout the island of Ireland. Human Rights commissions can and should raise awareness of rights, guide people through new legislation, inform them as to the ramifications of legislation on their personal rights, assist litigants take cases to courts and other international bodies that vindicate those rights, take the advisory role of *amicus curiae* where the public could be affected by a determination on a rights issue, and investigate alleged abuses of human rights.

Of course, to be effective, Human Rights commissions require resources

and powers. They also require committed and dynamic members. The membership of a commission should be broadly representative, and should not be too lawyer-oriented. This commission's valuable work will mean reaching out to those who need rights education here, not producing learned reports which moulder in the bowels of government departments. A recent report from the Australian Human Rights Commission shows their Chief Commissioner sitting cross-legged on the ground under a tree, talking to native Australians. Now, that is an effective commission.

The Northern Irish Human Rights Commission has already celebrated its first anniversary, having started work in March last year. University professor and former chairperson of the Committee for the Administration of Justice, Brice Dickson, was appointed to the chair of the Human Rights Commission. One of his first comments after his appointment was that 'the Commission will want to be a peoples' commission, keen to interest all who have views on how human rights can be properly protected in this part of the world. Political parties, community organisations and civil liberties groups will be particularly worth consulting'.

The Northern Commission published a draft strategic plan last September, and has unveiled an impressive website. It has also launched the debate on the Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland (which is to be in addition and complementary to the Human Rights Act). However, it should be noted that the commission's powers are not all that could be wished for. It has not been given any significant power to compel the attendance of witnesses or the production of documentation for its inquiries.

Meanwhile, the Irish government produced its legislation for a Human Rights Commission early last July and it received a broad welcome from non-governmental organisations. However, since then, there has been very little activity on the Oireachtas front. It is as though our broad welcome for the legislation has caused them to stop and look for the trap. This is particularly worrying given that there is to be a North-South co-ordinating body on human rights issues. Indeed, one would even begin to wonder about the government's commitment, both to Human Rights and to the Good Friday Agreement. The delay is inexplicable – in December 1998, on the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Taoiseach Mr. Ahern announced that the Irish commission would 'set, not follow, standards for the best international practice in this field'. He seems to have lost his enthusiasm.

The Human Rights Commission Bill, as published gives a broad definition to the human rights which fall within the Commission's remit, including the rights and freedoms contained in the constitution and those guaranteed by any agreement or instrument to which the state is a party. However, for the purposes of litigation, the function of the Commission is

limited to those rights protected by the constitution or any rights contained in international instruments which the state has incorporated into domestic law. The Irish courts uphold constitutional rights already, so the only new benefits under this definition are those rights contained in international instruments which have been incorporated here. And how many such instruments are there? None. So much for setting standards.

In effect, the Irish government has failed to seize the opportunities presented by the Good Friday Agreement to put its house in order. It has been quick to call on other parties to the Agreement to deliver on promises made, but has failed to deliver on what could have been perceived as the least controversial of the undertakings made. Ironically, it is the British government, whose rights record in the North has for so long been a matter for concern, which is showing up this transgression. It is time to remind the Irish government that under the Good Friday Agreement, human rights belong to all the people of this island, and not just those in the North.

- Since this article was written, the government has moved to establish the Human Rights Commission by the end of June, 2000. It has also promised to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights in October. The watchdog and campaigning role of the ICCL and others has played an important role in this development.

Between Rhetoric and Reality: Travellers and the Unfinished Republic

COLM WALSH

During a recent conference on the new Equal Status Bill, the head of the new Equality Authority, Niall Crowley, was asked a particularly poignant question. The questioner, Mags O'Leary, a Traveller woman living on a halting site in Sallynoggin, was interested to know if the new law would change the situation on her site where eleven people share a single toilet, or would she have a safe place for her children to play. Would these fine words make any difference to how she lived her life? An awkward silence followed. Apparently it was not possible to answer in the affirmative, or guarantee a timescale in which such deprivations would be redressed.

This paper sets about an open contemplation of the guiding principles of republicanism, namely liberty, equality, and fraternity, as enunciated during the French revolution. The particular focus of the piece is the relationship between these principles and the Travelling community, as the Irish Republic enters a new century. This paper discusses the philosophy, rhetoric, and practice related to these concepts.

Following a hard-fought campaign, a definition of 'Traveller' that is in keeping with Northern Ireland legislation has been enshrined in Irish law. According to the new Equal Status Bill the 'Traveller community' means 'the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland'.

The belief that Travellers are an ethnic minority has become one of the most contentious issues in modern Ireland. On one hand, the idea of an ethnic minority is criticised as being a middle-class, liberal smokescreen, hiding a sub-culture of poverty. Writers, like the historian Dymphna McLoughlin, challenge the term ethnicity as used in relation to Irish Travellers. She argues that basing a campaign for human rights on the special claim to ethnicity is to betray a conservative agenda. Better by far to recognise that society in the Republic has been oppressively monolithic, and that many minority groups have been denied full expression of their identities. However, it has only been since groups like

the Irish Traveller Movement and Pavee Point began organising under the idea of ethnicity that progress of any kind has been achieved. Yet this has not precluded these organisations from taking part in broad national platforms like the Share the Wealth campaign.

Whether or not Travellers organise through identity politics, it remains a fact that opinions exist within the settled community which attach innate 'negative' characteristics to Travellers. The assumption of innate characteristics and discrimination based on these assumptions are, in effect, racial discrimination. This is true whether or not the group being discriminated against has organised on the basis of being an ethnic group. Dr. McLoughlin's analysis, however, should prompt us to question our commitment to extending basic human rights to all the citizens of our thriving republic.

Long before Ireland had become a republic, James Connolly stated his belief that:

Ireland without her people is nothing to me, and the man who is bubbling over with love and enthusiasm for 'Ireland' and yet can pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and suffering, the shame and degradation wrought upon the people of Ireland, aye, wrought by Irishmen upon Irish men and women, without burning to end it, is in my opinion a fraud and a liar in his heart.

Connolly's denunciation of the yawning gap between rhetoric and reality remains as important and incisive today as it was when these words were first uttered. It will prove worthwhile to examine each of the foundation stones separately, beginning with fraternity.

Fraternity, 'n. group of people with shared interests, aims etc'.

The use of the term fraternity is still in common usage in popular culture. Our TV screens are regularly treated to American students partying in their 'Frat' houses. Indeed, based on the above definition, the term 'frat' house is entirely accurate. It has been the history of republican fraternity that the term has been as inclusive as the user's conception of that republic was inclusive. Whether it was the exclusion of slaves from Plato's republic, or women from the French revolutionary republic, or Blacks from the independent American nation, the rhetoric of a republic has never been a guarantee of an all-inclusive society.

Liberty, 'n. freedom'.

What does the word freedom imply? Surely it must include the freedom to live one's life in keeping with one's culture. If this is true, then what of the impact of the two recent pieces of legislation that have directly affected Traveller culture, i.e. the Casual Trading Act and the Control of Horses Act. When politicians call themselves liberal these days, it refers mainly to their attitude to the economy. At the same time as the economy

is being liberalised, the Traveller economy is being regulated out of existence.

Equality, 'n. state of being equal'.

The Equal Status Bill will be law this summer. Although the equality of all citizens is one of the fundamental principles of a republic, the Equal Status Bill has been forced upon us due to international treaty commitments. It is obvious that Travellers will still suffer from an inequality of opportunity. Years of disadvantage will not disappear with the passing of this law.

There is now an onus on the Republic to finally turn rhetoric into action. The country needs to be pro-active in making the principles of republicanism a lived reality, experienced by all of its citizens. It is no longer acceptable that we talk inclusion and practice exclusion. The Irish Traveller Movement promotes a common understanding of the distinct ethnic identity of the Traveller community, a community with its own culture, of which nomadism is an important part. The right of Travellers to self-determination as a community, and the alleviation of the horrendous living conditions which so many Travellers experience, remain among the most pressing civil rights issues any where in Europe. A comprehensive and sustained programme of action, based on the much vaunted principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, would indeed constitute a good start.

Ireland – Young Population, Old Political System

EAMONN WATERS

Irish politics is facing a potential crisis that has become increasingly obvious in recent years. Fewer people are voting and quite a number of those abstaining are young. Strangely for a country with the youngest population in Europe, Ireland's political profile also looks relatively old. Three from a total of 166 Dáil Deputies are under 30 years of age, while nobody under this age sits in the 60-member Seanad. The average age of a TD is 50, the average age of a Cabinet Minister is 49, and the average age of a Junior Minister is 52!

A generation ago, most of the current party leaders were getting involved in elected politics. John Bruton, Mary Harney and Bertie Ahern were all in their early 20s when entering the Oireachtas. With so few young people making it into national politics, we can justifiably ask, where will the leaders of tomorrow come from? In terms of the present tense, we can also ask, how representative is a democracy where up to half of the population (the young half) is virtually excluded?

Last year, the country went to the polls in the local government and European parliament elections. There were the usual winners, losers, and surprise packages. What was more significant, perhaps, was the turn-out. 1999 may have marked the centenary celebration of county councils in Ireland, however, it also witnessed a 50 per cent turn-out, the lowest ever in those 100 years. A report published by the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) showed the turn-out of young voters to be even lower still. For every person under 25 years of age who voted, there were two who did not. These statistics are not an isolated phenomenon. Record numbers of people are not voting, and young people make up a sizeable proportion of them. The 1997 presidential election saw the lowest turn-out ever, and the general election turn-out of the same year was the lowest since 1923. Recently, the nadir for democratic participation came in the Dublin South Central by-election which had the lowest turn-out in a ballot ever recorded. Over seven in ten voters stayed away on polling day.

In quite a few countries the numbers of people who vote are falling, so Ireland's situation is not unique. What does set Ireland apart in an unflat-

tering way is the participation rate among young first-time voters, which is the lowest in Europe. This is even more significant given the relative youth of Ireland's population, 41 per cent of Irish people being under 25 years of age. In fact the biggest single cohort in the Irish population are in their late-teens.

The statistical data is there, but the enigma in all of this is why? Some contradictions begin to emerge. The NYCI's research has found that young people are in fact interested in politics and feel it is important to get involved in making their community a better place. However, the conventional party political structure is increasingly seen as not offering the means to do this. In relation to voting, the issue of political skulduggery and corruption is a factor, but surprisingly not the main one. A huge number of young people do not vote because they find it increasingly difficult to do so. One in three are not registered where they live. On polling day last year thousands of young voters were also preoccupied with exams, work and travel.

It would seem that Irish life-styles, particularly among the young, have changed. People are travelling further to work, changing addresses more often, participating in night courses, and generally have more commitments in their spare time. My own recent experiences are not atypical; in a single year I changed addresses three times. One election involved a trip from Dublin to a school hall in Kilkenny to vote, which is fine if you are genuinely interested. I suspect most people in the same situation would not bother.

Our system of voting was largely inherited from the British, and has experienced little alteration in the last 80 years. It was devised in a different age, for a different society, and needs to be changed. Ideas like postal voting, proxy voting, weekend elections, an independent electoral commission, automatic registration, and year-round, non-party, political information campaigns have yet to reach Ireland.

While the mechanical process of voting is important, there are also deeper issues of democracy and representation. Any political system in which a large section of the population is either unwilling or unable to participate is not fully representative. There is a wider problem of a downward cycle emerging, whereby candidates and parties focus their attention on groups who are likely to vote, to the neglect of those groups with lower turn-outs. Evidence of this trend has emerged in the United States in relation to young people, the poor, and ethnic minorities. There is also the possibility that if non-participation based on alienation and apathy is not addressed at an early age, some young people may get into a lifelong habit of not voting.

Young people have different political interests than older sections of the population, and it is important that these interests are represented.

However, this is not currently happening in national politics at any rate. Some of the fault and responsibility lies with politicians and political parties. Stories abound of once keen, but now disillusioned, young activists who have experienced being sidelined or shafted at party meetings by their older colleagues. Politics needs to become a more welcoming place for young people – if it does not it is in trouble. There are also issues around the credibility of politics that will have to be addressed by parties and politicians.

Probably the biggest single threat and challenge to Ireland's democracy in the new millennium will be ensuring that it is relevant to, and involves young people. In this way, a possible outcome will be a more inclusive and representative structure. The alternative will be governments elected by a small minority of people with a questionable mandate to call themselves democratic, and to govern. The consequences in this scenario are quite disturbing.

The Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland

PHILIP WATT

The following article is an edited version of the talk Philip Watt gave at the meeting on 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland' held in Liberty Hall, Dublin, on 25 November 1999. The meeting was organised by the Ireland Institute.

The Council of Europe has defined integration as a 'two-way process [whereby] immigrants change society at the same time as they integrate into it'. The World Development summit in 1995 prescribes the goal of integration as 'a society for all' in which people have the right and the ability to participate in decisions affecting their lives.

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) developed these statements into a more comprehensive definition, with three key components. Integration is defined by ECRE as:

- *Dynamic and two-way*, placing demands on the receiving society and the individuals and/or communities involved
- *Long-term*, beginning from arrival in the country and concluded when a refugee becomes a member of that society from a legal, social, economic, cultural, and identity point of view, and the integration process extends past the first generation of refugees
- *Multidimensional*, relating both to the conditions for, and actual participation in, all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil, and political life of the country, as well as the refugee's own sense of belonging and membership in the host society.

Whilst being a useful starting point, this definition of integration also has its limitations. For instance, the definition does not expressly recognise that racism is a key barrier to integration. It also fails to recognise the issue of when a refugee stops being a refugee.

The needs of refugees change over time, and it is often more useful and accurate to address them in the context of policies aimed at the inclusion of minority ethnic groups, rather than confined to policies limited to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

This point becomes of key importance when one considers the factors which influence a country's approach to the integration of refugees. In a

recent review of integration policies across the EU, ECRE concluded that attitudes to integration of refugees and asylum seekers are often determined by the policies of the state towards cultural diversity. In short, if a member state promotes policies (either intentionally or unintentionally) of marginalisation or segregation towards minority ethnic groups, then policies towards asylum seekers and refugees will likely be similarly fashioned.

If, on the other hand, the country's approach to cultural diversity and minority ethnic groups is positive and inclusive, then it is likely that policies towards the integration of refugees and asylum seekers will be based on the same principles.

So what is the official attitude to cultural diversity in Ireland? In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s government policy towards cultural diversity and minority ethnic groups was clearly informed by a policy of assimilation, which is now recognised as a form of exclusion and marginalisation. Policies were designed, either intentionally or unintentionally, to ensure that minority ethnic groups and their needs, particularly Travellers, would become as invisible as possible, with their way of life submerged into that of the dominant population. This was reflected in policies that forced Travellers to settle in houses, and the criminalisation of nomadism.

However, since the mid-1990s we have seen a number of key policy developments which point to a greater recognition that cultural diversity exists in Ireland, and measures are beginning to be put in place to address issues such as racism, and to promote equality. Some examples of these policies include:

- The Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community
- The equality legislation and development of the Equality Authorities
- The government support for European Year Against Racism and the subsequent establishment of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
- The emergence of measures to promote interculturalism and cultural diversity in the education system.

The evolving approach to the integration of minority ethnic groups, including refugees, into Irish society

In Ireland in recent years, a policy towards the integration of minority ethnic groups has begun to evolve, albeit that this policy appears at times to be *ad hoc*, inconsistent, and disjointed. The clearest articulation of integration policy is in respect of Travellers and Programme Refugees.

1. Travellers

The example of the Task Force on the Travelling People and the recommendations contained within its final report¹, provides both an

approach and a range of measures which could help to inform an ongoing integration policy towards refugees. The Task Force itself was established by the government along partnership lines with representation from a range of statutory and non-statutory bodies, including community groups operating at national level with a remit for Traveller issues. The Task Force Report provided an overview of the key socio-economic issues facing the Traveller community, and a range of measures which need to be put in place to promote Traveller integration in policy areas such as education, enterprise, employment and training, accommodation, and health. The recommendations of the Task Force were written into Partnership 2000, and a range of committees has been developed to implement and monitor the implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

2. The integration of refugees

In respect of refugees, to date, the most comprehensive approach to integration has been developed for Programme Refugees. Special integration measures have been developed by the Refugee Agency, which provide a range of interventions, particularly in settlement supports and language and employment training (the Interact initiative is one example). Other projects, such as Access Ireland, which was developed by the Irish Refugee Council, have a focus on working with Convention Refugees and service providers.

3. Building an anti-racism and intercultural dimension into integration policy

Asylum seekers are now part of a local community, often living in areas with high unemployment and high levels of social exclusion. Some existing communities have felt threatened by the apparent change in the ethnic profile of their area, and this has resulted in incidents of racially motivated harassment directed at people who are perceived to be refugees or asylum seekers. Some community groups have recognised this problem, and are developing small-scale strategies, such as festivals, workshops, and presentations to schools, to try to break down these fears. However, these initiatives are small scale and inadequately funded.

Legislation has a key role to play in protecting refugees from racism. The equality legislation is an important step forward as it will outlaw discrimination in the workplace and in the provision of goods and services. However, legislation in this area is not without its flaws. The Incitement to Hatred Act (1989) has been recognised as being completely inadequate to address racially motivated crime or incitement to such crime, and there have been no successful prosecutions to date. This legislation needs to be reviewed.

The role of the media in addressing racism is also an important one. Some reports and programmes have helped to highlight diversity in Ireland positively, others have contributed to a climate of fear by printing or broadcasting stories on 'floods of refugees', or by labelling refugees as 'scroungers', or alleging that all or most refugees are involved in criminal activity.

As well as the need to address racism, there is a need to develop strategies that aim to build a more intercultural and inclusive society: for example, ensuring that the needs of refugees and asylum seekers are recognised and included in initiatives such as the National Anti Poverty Strategy, and in the Departmental Customer Action Plans developed as part of the Strategic Management Initiative. The need for intercultural education is also beginning to be recognised as a key issue within the school curriculum.

Dispersal

Policies of dispersal are a common response in some other European countries. However, there are concerns about this approach which have been raised by the Council of Europe:

Except possibly for the initial settlement of large population influxes, enforced dispersal of ethnic groups is undesirable because it leads to the break up of families and communities and also carries the unfortunate implication that immigrants are an undesirable or a problem element in the population. Enforced concentration of immigrants is even more unacceptable, amounting to a form of racial segregation.

It has also been demonstrated that dispersal does not work in practice, unless it is carefully planned and resourced, and has the support of refugees themselves. For instance, the Vietnamese Programme Refugees were dispersed to different parts of Ireland, but eventually tended to live near each other, particularly in parts of west Dublin. In other words, there is also an efficiency argument against enforced dispersal, in terms of waste of resources, as well as an ethical argument.

However, it is acknowledged that there are practical difficulties associated with non-dispersal. The absence of accommodation in Dublin has resulted in some asylum seekers sleeping rough or being forced to live in overcrowded conditions. There may, therefore, be a case for proactive policies to encourage new refugees to live in other areas and towns outside of Dublin. The easiest way to achieve this goal would be to open designated reception centres such as those used for the Kosovan refugees, but evidence from other EU member states highlight major problems associated with dispersal. If dispersal policies are used, they must be carefully planned and accompanied by the appropriate level of services and access to employment, etc. They should not be used as a 'burden

sharing' exercise which views asylum seekers as a problem that needs to be shared out.

Direct provision

Direct provision in the Irish context is the approach whereby supplementary welfare payments and rent allowances are replaced by full board and a small living allowance of £15 per week for an adult asylum seeker. Support for renting accommodation, such as flats or bedsits, is replaced by refugee reception centres.

The experience of other countries reveals some of the pitfalls of direct provision, which include:

- Increasing the potential for segregation and further marginalisation of asylum seekers rather than developing policies that promote integration, particularly when the right to work is not granted.
- Limiting the choice of asylum seekers by determining where they are to be accommodated.

Conclusion

There are a number of different challenges to developing an overall approach to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers:

1. The adoption and development of integration policies based on international human rights standards and with reference to the standards adapted to programme refugees
2. The development of a strong anti-racism/intercultural dimension to integration policy
3. The specific inclusion of asylum seekers in integration policy, even if this is only on a temporary basis
4. The establishment of a task force to look at the integration needs of refugees and asylum seekers, with similar terms of reference to the Task Force on the Travelling People.

In conclusion, the development of integration policy should not be based on a view of refugees as a problem, but as part of a wider challenge to the development of a more inclusive and intercultural society in Ireland.

- In December 1999, after this talk had been delivered, the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform published the report of the interdepartmental working group on the integration of refugees in Ireland, *Integration – a two-way process*. The NCCRI was consulted on this report.

Note

¹ *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community*. Government Publications (1995)

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