

Debate

Culture, Politics and Civil Society: the Role of the Critical Journal

ROY JOHNSTON

I WAS STIMULATED by a critical reading of Rayner Lysaght's paper in issue three of *The Republic* to think about how arguments such as this in a critical journal can interact constructively with civil society. The train of thought led on to the exploration of the role of the critical journal and an attempt at analysis of *The Republic's* contribution to date.

Let me try to construct something in a mode that I have been trying to develop over many years, as a spin-off from the culture of scientific problem-solving in real-world situations. This mode consists of a phase of analysis of the background to the problem, followed by a statement of the problem itself, suitably structured. One then attempts to assemble the factors necessary for the solution of the problem and develops a vision for their deployment, perhaps apparently utopian, though touching reality at enough points to enable an immediate next step to be identified, such that readers of the paper will be stimulated to go and make it happen.

It is, in this context, perhaps useful to go over the papers in the first three issues of *The Republic* to see how they relate to this structure. This might be seen, at the meta-level, as an analysis entitled 'Problems of a Critical Periodical'.

The central problem, at this level, is how to develop an active bridge between those who contribute practically to the development of policies at the political level and those whose job it is currently to study, analyse and evaluate national experience and relate it to global experience, in other words, the intellectual elite, who influence the educational system from which the people who become our political leaders emerge. The problem is that most of the people who are in the political lead picked up their background education decades ago and have mostly been unable to keep up with what has happened since.

The role of the critical periodical is therefore to act as the interface between contemporary decision-makers and the results of contemporary research, distilled into contemporary critical thought. It should therefore *not* be primarily a repository for academic research papers, contributing to

the promotion process within the various specialist academic communities. A key factor is its frequency. Another is its format. The frequency should be high enough so that issues do not get forgotten or mislaid, and the format should be such that it stays vertically on the bookshelf and can be referenced. *The Republic* qualifies under the latter but not the former criterion.

Another factor is editorial policy. Strict guidelines to authors are required for treatment of issues so as to maximise the impact of their conclusions on the practical thinking of decision-makers. This implies an active role for an editorial committee, composed of members each of whom has a specialist role in invoking material in a defined sector of cultural life. *The Republic* falls short of these requirements, though it has visibly made the effort to span a broad cultural spectrum.

It is also necessary to ensure that the critical journal is read by thinking policy-making people in that part of the political spectrum dedicated to democratic reform and social change. This suggests a need for some sort of organic link, probably at a personal level, with the relevant elements in the political spectrum. There are hints of such a link in the composition of the existing group, though the scope is somewhat narrow. The role of such link-activists would be to see that each issue got sold to appropriate people in the politically active organisations and lobby-groups. The narrowness of the existing political scope implies some residual elements of the old 'republican exclusiveness'.

Consider some prior and contemporary models. *The Bell*, edited by Peadar O'Donnell, was one; it flourished in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and was influential in its time. A more contemporary one is *Planet*, in Wales.¹ This is bi-monthly, in book-like format, and covers a broad spectrum politically and culturally, nationally and internationally; it has a strong review section, and publishes short stories and poems.

There is also *Feasta* in Ireland, which concentrates on the economics of sustainability, and addresses the energy question, which will be upon us shortly in crisis mode.² It tends to publish event-based 'Proceedings'. Also, the Desmond Greaves Summer School has on occasion contributed material to a *Reconsiderations* series published by Daltún Ó Ceallaigh. *Saothar* is published by the Irish Labour History Society and has an editorial board loaded with Irish Studies specialists from abroad.³ The *Journal of Music in Ireland*, edited by Toner Quinn, is fulfilling a critical role across the spectrum of all music, from traditional to contemporary, via jazz, classical, etc.; this comes out every second month, but is glossy and in throw-away format.⁴

The analysis of the 'useful critical performance' of these other

periodicals is another day's work, but it could, perhaps, be on the agenda of *The Republic*, as part of the broad-spectrum critical role. Let me begin with *The Republic* itself, casting an eye over the three issues to date to see how the material relates to the suggested action-oriented model outlined above. Let us go through the papers in reverse chronological order to see which ones are in reasonable overall conformity with the model, and which of the others are primarily 'background' oriented, which are 'problem' oriented, and which if any are primarily generators of 'actions' towards a projected vision.

Primarily Background-Oriented

Let me comment first on the Rayner Lysaght paper in issue 3, given that this was my stimulus for the production of this paper. In the foregoing structured approach, Lysaght's contribution has a place primarily as background. His very first paragraph offers several rich theses worth exploring: the need for some theoretical analysis of the republican concept, the negative effect of the 'armed struggle' tradition, the 'philistine influence of the Catholic Church', and the 'reformist' influence of the Communist Party chasing 'socialism in a single country'. Each of these themes could generate a good critical paper.

Rather than attempting to develop any of them creatively, Lysaght, however, chooses to pick on some of the work of earlier contributors, exposing what he identifies as their weaknesses, and then goes on to give a creditable historical background survey of the republican tradition, hinting at the complexity of its relationship with various kinds of nationalism and at the forces for social change that can sometimes constructively lurk within it. He is thus adopting an approach which is something similar to my own, and in this analysis I am trying to develop it further.

He skates over the contemporary European dimension and briefly touches on the Northern Ireland situation. Altogether we have the makings of a reasonable background survey of left-wing politics, which touches interestingly on a problem of which I have been aware for decades, namely the analogies between the Fenian militarist tradition and that of Stalinism, and the contradictions between both and the democratic environment that is a requisite for genuine social change. But, alas, in Lysaght we do not get focused attention on a tractable structured problem, or any hint what to go and do next.

Mary Shine Thompson from Dublin City University, on 'childhood' in issue 3, casts a critical eye on the early quasi-philanthropic initiative of Maud Gonne and Inghinidhe na hÉireann, and on the conflation of 'child'

with 'citizen' in the Proclamation. She goes on to consider issues relating to the family and the 1937 Constitution, giving a rich set of references. This is primarily an academic-style background paper, though it does suggest emergent problems, rooted in family law and custom and in the educational system, though she fails to structure these in such a way as to focus attention, let alone give guidelines towards a solution.

In issue 2, the editorial emphasis was on the 'Common Good' as theme, so it is not surprising that most of the contributions were primarily in the 'background' category. We have Iseult Honahan (University College Dublin) on the citizenship concept in republican theory. After an extended historical introduction covering Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli, Harrington, Rousseau, and Madison, she overviews republican ideas today, primarily as they have been re-developed in the '1990s global realignment'. She reminds us that 'liberal concern for interference fails to take account of serious threats to freedom which do not always come from the State', and that 'the right to private property has been politically constructed and does not constitute an absolute right to unlimited accumulation'. There emerges a diffuse sense of problem-definition: 'if politics is about addressing common concerns, the question 'common to whom' becomes crucial'; interdependence, and ethnic and linguistic questions are touched upon. Some elements of an action plan emerge, in the form of active citizenship, promotion of civic virtue, and participation, but this remains diffuse. One can detect a cautious nod in the direction of the democratic Marxist tradition and the 'class' concept.

In issue 2, Tomás Ó Fiaich (former President of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth) analyses the pre-history of Irish republicanism in the seventeenth century in an attempt to give early authenticity to the concept of the Catholic Republic, which emerged, in concept, in the period after the 'Flight of the Earls' when Spanish intervention was on the agenda, and the problem of who would be king of the emergent Catholic nation was rendered problematic by inter-earl rivalry. This concept of a republic remained a paper plan, and in the papers in the Madrid archive the words 'Kingdom' and 'Republic' are juxtaposed, so that to trace the origins of the Republic to the power politics of the Catholic monarchies in their struggle against England and the Reformation States, I find somewhat unconvincing. More credible is the influence of the English Republic, at one level via the contacts between Owen Roe O'Neill and Cromwell's generals (Monk, Coote), and at another level via the rank and file of Cromwell's army, many of whom would have been Levellers, under the influence of Lilburn, rejecting Cromwell's proto-Stalinism. These were paid in title to land, which they of course were unable to develop, lacking

capital, so they sold up to 'adventurers' (i.e. capitalists) and became the foundations of Dublin's radical artisanate, who later contributed to the republicanism of the United Irishmen. Ó Fiaich does not develop this theme, which remains somewhat apocryphal, but he does blame 'bitter memories of Cromwell and their first republican experience' for the subsequent Irish 'ill-fated devotion to the Stuarts'.

To my mind, it is a mistake to link the English Republic with Cromwell, who in effect suppressed it after it had tried to emerge as a democratic force with Lilburn and the Levellers, as exhibited in the Putney Debates. Cromwell established, in effect, a dictatorship, which became a model for subsequent post-revolutionary dictators like Napoleon and Stalin. How to achieve a genuine revolutionary objective without this type of pathological process ending up dominating the scene remains on the political agenda of the Left.

There are hints as to how this might have been done in the history of the Quakers, many of whom were Cromwellian soldiers, who came round to rejecting the role of the sword and developing internal political procedures based on democratic consensus and inclusive citizenship. This latter concept had a brief flowering in the early eighteenth century with William Penn's colonial constitution of Pennsylvania, which gave rights to the Native Americans. I have attempted to interest academic historians of the seventeenth century in the need to analyse proto-republican processes and the role of the Quakers as pioneers of democratic organisational procedure, so far without success, despite the possibility of generating some public interest via the fact that the current year, 2004, is the 350th anniversary of the foundation of the first Quaker meeting in Ireland (at Lisburn in 1654).

My suggestion above of the existence of an intellectual link between the English republic and the United Irishmen gets some support in a passing mention by Thomas Bartlett (University College Dublin), who in his evaluation Wolfe Tone, also published in issue 2, refers to 'a republican coterie in the mid-eighteenth century which was vital in communicating commonwealthman ideas to a new generation'. This paper is far from being a hagiography: it touches on Wolfe Tone's South Seas colonial adventurer concept, his patronising attitude to Catholics, his cultural philistinism, and delight in French militarism. He is however supportive of Hubert Butler's net positive evaluation, and his pragmatic development of the earlier colonial ideas of Swift and Molyneux towards a consistent republican position, in the spirit of Tom Paine.

It is worth remarking that Hubert Butler's essay was based on his paper in the Dublin Mansion House lecture series devoted to the Wolfe Tone

Bicentenary. These were organised by the Wolfe Tone Directory set up by Cathal Goulding in 1963, from which the Wolfe Tone Society subsequently emerged, contributing to the initiation in November 1966, with the Belfast War Memorial Hall meeting, of the steps that led to the organised movement for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland. I have treated this in some detail in my book *Century of Endeavour*.⁵

James Livesey, who lectures in French history in Trinity College Dublin, gives an account in issue 2 of this history of republicanism in the French context. He takes Marx and his attitude to the 1871 Commune as his starting-point; Marx initially held that the bourgeois Third Republic was all that was achievable and premature working-class action was to be avoided. He then became lost in admiration of the heroism of the Commune, seeing in it a model of the future socialist republic, though his initial concern was in the end proved right when it was drowned in blood. Livesey goes on to list the successes of French institutions in the persistent republican framework, claiming it as the main intellectual alternative, since the 1990 events, to Anglo-American ‘liberalism’ (quotes added). He contrasts the resilience of the French republican culture in its post-imperial transitional situation with the identity problems that have plagued the English. He approves of the ongoing radical tradition of French republicans, as manifested in the failure to find a jury to convict José Bové, who thrashed a MacDonalld’s, and of its inclusiveness, as manifested in its 1998 World Cup team.

The paper is, on the whole, somewhat of a panegyric, which invites critical comment at many points, and in this sense is good background raw material for discourse. There is no focus, however, on specific problems relevant to the Irish context, nor any specific action-orientation.

Priscilla Metscher has been teaching Irish Studies students in Germany and has written extensively on labour history. In issue 2, she gives a concise overview of the development of republican separatist concepts over the nineteenth century. Bypassing O’Connell, dismissed as a conservative monarchist—‘one king, two legislatures’—she sets up the classic left-wing ‘apostolic succession’ from the United Irishmen, via Thomas Davis, John Mitchell, and Fintan Lalor, to the Fenians, and on to Connolly. Davis’s republic was inclusive of the Protestant tradition, but he was anti-industrial and favoured the ‘peasant proprietorship’.

Davis attended the Cork meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1843, which was a festival of the emergent Irish pre-Famine industrial capitalist class, who were enthusing about the latest productive technologies. As I wrote in my *Crane Bag* paper: ‘he gave it six column inches in the August 26 issue, hidden among pages and

pages of after-dinner speeches by Daniel O'Connell and his supporters: the 'verbal republic'. He named the principal local notabilities and ignored the scientists, except one Robert Hunt, of the Cornwall Polytechnic Institution, who described an embryonic photographic process, which, given development, might eventually have lent itself to newspaper reproduction. Davis must have been somewhat out of his depth, but he was smart enough to pick up what might have been of use to his main weapon'.⁶

Because he did not appreciate the essentially social nature of the production process, increasingly so as technology advanced, he fell for the 'peasant proprietorship' myth, which, however, was rejected by Fintan Lalor, who wanted the land as a whole to be owned by the people as a whole, thus opening up the feasibility of co-operative production for getting scale economies, as was then in evidence in the Owenite community at Ralahine, County Clare, as described by Connolly in his *Reconquest of Ireland*.

The Fenians were basically working people under the leadership of lower-middle-class intellectuals. There were continental influences via James Stephens, who after 1848 went to Paris, where he met Auguste Blanqui. He later met with Gustave Cluseret, who subsequently commanded in the Commune; he offered him the command of the Fenian forces in Ireland in the lead up to 1867. The Fenians, under Blanquist influence, alienated potential English working-class support with their Clerkenwell bomb, which episode was much criticised by Marx and Engels, who subsequently, however, campaigned for the release of the Fenian prisoners. Connolly credited the Fenians with having a broad political base, and in his Ralahine chapter attempted to pick up the Lalor legacy.

This survey of the nineteenth century had the potential for 'stating a problem' and 'outlining an approach to a solution', which Metscher does not take up; it being not on this occasion in the editorial guidelines. It is the problem of the 'peasant proprietorship' and the outcome of the Land League campaigns, which was to generate a mass vested interest in land ownership by a group who in modern times have inherited a severely flawed and locally overspecialised agricultural system and a vested interest in the corrupt politics of land rezoning. These arguments need to be developed elsewhere, but ask yourself, what industrial social reformer would break up a productive factory into small individual workshops? Michael Davitt was right to take up the Lalor vision, but at that time the British State was involved, and, of course, they adapted their basically feudal concept of land ownership in the restructuring. We have inherited

this situation, and it is at the root of most political corruption. The Metscher survey also gives insights into the terrorism problem that is currently with us, the role of the Fenians in England being classic in this mode. There are lessons here for the current Palestine-Israel problem, as well as for Northern Ireland.

Dorothy Thompson writes refreshingly in issue 2 on the English Republic (she teaches history in Birmingham University). She develops a substantive background to an important political problem: the lack of a focused republican political interest in England, which she differentiates from Scotland and Wales, whose national movements are basically republican in their philosophies. She distinguishes the republican tradition, which she links strongly with Tom Paine, from the occasional agitations which occurred over the centuries against specific monarchs, though these sometimes converge. She identifies the Chartists as being consciously Paineite supporters, and she develops their international links, on the home ground with Wales, and on the continent with Mazzini, though surprisingly she misses out on the Irish connections, a curious oversight in a paper for an Irish publication. This perhaps reflects a chronic deficiency in English historical scholarship, which perhaps *The Republic* and *Planet* might combine to address, along with the promotion of the idea of an English republican movement? The latter could perhaps be linked to a humanitarian movement against child abuse in what is visibly a dysfunctional family.

Patrick Maume currently teaches in Queens University Belfast and has written extensively on the Irish Parliamentary Party in its heyday and its political environment. His contribution to issue 2 is on the evolution of Irish republicanism in the period between Parnell and the Free State. This is very much a background academic-type paper, with its relationship to the current spectrum of problems somewhat remote, though sometimes they can be inferred by analogy. He comes up with interesting insights, like the basis of the GAA banning of certain games, namely those associated with the Irish upper-crust and the English lumpenproletariat, this from the standpoint of the sturdy independent peasant. He goes at length into the various separatist, nationalist, republican, constitutionalist, and insurrectionist threads in the complex mix and their relationships with establishment Whiggery. The Parnellite split, the Union of Hearts, it is all there; Davitt's attempt to find common ground with the Labour movement in Britain, Griffith's Sinn Féin and its early electoral success fuelled by Dublin-based radical issues, the tensions with the cultural nationalism of the Abbey Theatre, the emergence of republicanism as the dominant idea in post-1917 Sinn Féin, the recrudescence of 'whiggery' of the

Free State: all these get mentions, without, however, the type of analysis that could lead to a valid current problem-definition. The underlying problem implied in the treatment, perhaps, is how the aftermath of the Civil War, and indeed the earlier Parnell split, can be expurgated from contemporary politics, but this is several other days' work!

Primarily Problem-defining

Gerard Delanty, from the University of Liverpool, introduces a scholarly European sociological dimension (Habermas and others) in issue 3, rejecting as 'no longer credible' the separation of the world into discrete national cultures. He calls for a 'public culture which accepts the expression of divisiveness, differences and conflicts'. He promotes the critical function, 'sceptical values associated with intellectuals ... the autonomy of science and art from ecclesiastical and royal authority'. He ends with a note of warning: 'the public culture of the republican polity is not to be identified with the State'. He nods in the direction of the classical and Enlightenment background of republican thought, and suggests somewhat simplistically that the way forward is via recognition of 'culture as communication'. But, to my mind, his main focus, though somewhat blurred, is on the problem of how to generate a meaningful cultural analysis, in the morass of 'postmodern', communitarian, and other obfuscations.

Patrick Zuk, from the Cork School of Music, has been writing extensively in the *Journal of Music in Ireland* in a discursive and erudite style. I was tempted in this analysis to see him as primarily a 'background' writer, but in his paper in issue 3, which is dedicated to the composer Raymond Deane, while going into a good deal of background material, his main focus, for me at least, is on the problem of recognition in the national culture of the work of contemporary Irish composers. There is perhaps here an analogy with the lack of a science dimension, as adumbrated by Brian Trench (see below). He laments the contemporary lack of a musical dimension in theories of civic republicanism, and the lack of accessible published versions of the output of contemporary Irish composers, despite the pioneering efforts of Fleischmann and Boydell. 'The last general history of music in Ireland was written in 1905.' One thinks of the roles of Dvorak, Grieg, Sibelius, and others in the emergence of European nations in post-imperial situations. The author promises a sequel, presumably, we hope, action-oriented.

Brian Hanley is a TCD historian; he writes in issue 2 on republican thought since 1922. This addresses the problem of how to politicise a movement in transition from a military background, and he does so by

outlining the various attempts made to do this. He credits Liam Mellows with his analysis of the defeat of the anti-treatyites in the 1922 election in terms of their lack of social policy, thus becoming the founding father of all subsequent social-republicanism. He treats somewhat superficially the Fianna Fáil process, its relationship with the IRA, the land distribution process, and the complexities of the economic war, though the impact of the latter must have been a factor that led to the politicisation process exemplified by the Republican Congress in 1934. His evaluation of the politics of the split which killed the latter tells us nothing new, but suggests the need to go deeper. He goes on to attempt an analysis of the attempted politicisation of the 1960s, which repeats the various journalistic canards that have got into the literature ('national liberation front', 'stages theory', etc.), though he does credit the then movement with helping to initiate the civil rights movement in the North. He chronicles the post-split 'Official Republican' decline into euro-communist dogma and the shedding of its politicians to Labour, and begins to chronicle the current transition of the Provisionals in the direction of all-Ireland constitutional politics, without managing to notice how they are revisiting the politics of the 1960s prior to the split, in a situation which has been made infinitely more difficult in sectarian terms, thanks to all those decades of unnecessary mayhem.

I have also treated this in some detail in my book *Century of Endeavour*. I have classed the Hanley paper as 'problem-oriented', but one has to dig to find a succinct definition of what the problem is. May I perhaps offer one: it is in the nature of the political and constitutional relationship between the political movement and the army. The latter is 'democratic' after a fashion, being modelled on the system pioneered by the English republicans in the 1640s, with an elected Army Council, and embedded in the IRA Constitution, I think, in Peadar O'Donnell's time, and under his influence.

The trouble is that when organising an Army Convention in underground mode, it is somewhat difficult to keep track of the paperwork and engage meaningfully in the necessary political and ideological preparatory work. I observed this problem at first hand during the 1960s politicisation episode, when the objective of the then leadership (Goulding and others) was to get the Army to go political by activating the Sinn Féin organisation from within. Thus, Army Conventions tend to be top-down events. The Ard Fheis of the political movement, however, is able in principle to adopt open democratic practice.

The further trouble with this two-headed system is that, due to the influence of the 'holy grail' mythology, the 'Republic' was, and I suspect

still is, seen as having been ‘handed over’ to the Army Council by the surviving quorum of the 1918 First Dáil (who had not accepted the Treaty) at an event in Tom Maguire’s house at Cross, Co Mayo, in or about 1939. A photographic record of the group was hanging on Tom Maguire’s wall when I encountered him during the 1960s. Thus, we have in effect a military dictatorship, and the Army Council, in the mythology, is seen as having precedence over the Ard Comhairle. I remember in 1970 the Provisional Army Council felt it had to get Tom Maguire’s blessing; this received media notice at the time, and some journalist asked me for comment. I was inclined at the time to discount its significance, but let us in retrospect not discount the power of myth and tradition. This, in effect, defines the problem: how can contemporary Sinn Féin assert its priority in the acceptance of a constitutional road to a new Republic and bury the old 1918 aspirant one decently, with honour, incidentally retiring the Army Council from its role as the guardian of this ‘holy grail’, as well as from being a potential source of a Cromwell, Napoleon or Stalin?

I originally had classed Peter Linebaugh’s somewhat rambling narrative in issue 2 as historical background relating to the 1798 aftermath, but on re-reading I detected a strong implicit problem-orientation on the issue of private ownership of land. The author is a Professor of History in the University of Toledo, Ohio, and is one of the increasing number of US-based academic exponents of Marxist historical materialism. His starting-point is the execution of Col. E. M. Despard, the United Irishman, in February 1803, on which he hangs texts relating to Native Americans by Constantin Volney, a contemporary French republican scholar, and John Dunne, who published on the same theme in the Royal Irish Academy. He cross-references to Marx and Engels and to contemporary works by Kevin Whelan and others, and we also meet Babeuf and Mary Shelley. There is a great collection of anecdotal material, the general drift of which is to indicate that the democratic republican philosophy of the United Irishmen was inclusive of the Native Americans, with emigrants intermarrying with them. This was in contrast to the US political environment, dominated as it then was by Jeffersonian slave-owners. But the central message, to my mind, is the utopian-socialist economic model, with land owned communally by the ‘village republic’.

We have here a further foreshadowing of the Owenite commune at Ralahine Co Clare, as described in his memoirs by Craig, the Scottish manager of the commune, and taken up by Connolly in the *Reconquest*; it also foreshadows the ideas of Standish O’Grady when he was writing for Larkin’s paper in 1913–14. My father, Joe Johnston, when in the Seanad between 1938 and 1954, on several occasions attempted to introduce a

legislative framework to encourage this to happen to estates currently subject to division, thus preserving the scale economies of mixed-farming synergies. He encountered R. M. Burke's failed attempt to do this near Tuam in the 1940s. The key underlying problem is how to amend the laws governing land in the direction of social ownership, with leasing to co-operative enterprises. I have more to say on this in my *Century of Endeavour*.

In issue 2, Daltún Ó Ceallaigh has a critical analysis of Finbar Cullen's introductory paper in issue 1, 'Beyond Nationalism: Time to Reclaim the Republican Ideal'. In it, he attempts a set of definitions of the republic and the nation, and the ambiguities associated with their -isms. This is basically a terminological problem, and by promoting this discourse *The Republic* is helping to clarify the problem-definition. There is unfinished business here.

The editor, Finbar Cullen, sets the scene in issue 1 with the paper to which in a sense the above is an initial response, but it can also be said that it has helped to generate the totality of these ongoing discussions about problems of political forms for emergent national movements and for expressions of cultural identities.

There follows a paper in issue 1 by Theo Dorgan, poet and at that time editor of Poetry Ireland, on 'Poetry and the Possible Republic', which begins to address the problem of how poetry and poets can impinge on the national consciousness. There are, it seems, some two hundred and fifty poets with works in print, yet the overall cultural environment is decidedly philistine. There is an implied contrast with the situation leading up to 1916 and Yeats' subsequent comments.

Liam O'Dowd (from the Sociology Department at Queen's University Belfast) attempts at some length in issue 1 to address the boundary problem in the setting up of nation-states. In this context, he comes up against the problem of the meaning of the word 'republican'. He inveighs against the insularity of Irish thinking on these matters and attempts to open up the European dimension on the question of national boundaries. He contrasts the national objective of making nation and state congruent with the republican focus on citizenship and territory. 'Transnational governance is here to stay ... the Good Friday Agreement ... promises to replace the zero-sum territorial claims with the politics of transborder functional governance and associated forms of participatory and deliberative democracy.'

Colm Rapple, a journalist writing on economic topics in the business pages of the media, has some critical things to say in issue 1 about the trend towards privatisation of natural resources, as well as about the

quantitative measures like GNP and GDP that are in use. He highlights the problem of land ownership, as it emerged from the Land League struggles, for which the British solution to the problem gave rise to a stagnant agriculture; a new, basically reactionary, landowning class; and a declining working population on the land. He has identified the same problem as I have done, when commenting above on the Metscher and Hanley papers. He brings up the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil in contrast, and references Galbraith's *Culture of Contentment* as descriptive of contemporary Irish socio-economics. He argues strongly against the privatisation of Coillte, on the basis of a critical evaluation of the Telecom privatisation debacle.

Primarily Action-oriented

Here, the material published to date is concentrated in the first issue and consists of short background papers from leading people in NGOs with activist objectives. Some papers in subsequent issues, as listed below, suggest action after background analysis and problem definition, in rough conformity with the model structure. It is true that one would expect any emergent action-oriented material to find its way into the weekly, monthly, and occasional papers and newsletters read by the activists. This assumes a philosophy of top-down activism.

There is scope, however, in a critical journal for the critical analysis of bottom-up activism, working backwards to the analysis of the theoretical basis which underlies it. Are they on the right track? Is it flawed? If so, how?

Current issues generating activism include the conflict between motorway development and our historical heritage, one-off rural housing, the so-called 'decentralising' of the Civil Service, the impact of Common Agricultural Policy reform on Irish farmers, public transport in Dublin, access to housing, renewable energy, Sellafield, asylum-seekers, etc.—the list is endless. There is a need for papers addressing current issues of public concern, and tracing their roots in various flawed aspects of the legislative environments which have evolved within the framework of both states, or have been inherited from, or imposed by, the British. Such analysis would be helpful in the process of developing the required approach to an inclusive all-Ireland democratic republic, providing a framework within which an inclusive, culturally rich nation can evolve.

In issue 1, towards the end, there is an editorial introduction to a section in which leading people in various non-governmental organisations are invited to outline what they are actively doing towards the achievement of their objectives. This is taken as a conscious step

towards decoupling the concept of ‘republicanism’ from that of ‘armed nationalism’, and reinvigorating its radical political potential. Jerome Connolly outlines, in what is basically a background paper, the position of the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace on socio-economic rights. Gráinne Healy, Chair of the National Women’s Council of Ireland, outlines the background position on women’s rights. Siobhán Ní Chúlacháin, Vice-Chair of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, has things to say about the European Convention on Human Rights and on various Human Rights Commissions. Colm Walsh makes a case for the Traveller Movement, and Eamonn Waters for the National Youth Council. Philip Watt, Director of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, outlines the refugee situation.

The foregoing are all short background outlines, and are not related to in-depth background analysis or problem definition, though these no doubt in all cases occur elsewhere.

Tending to conform to the ‘Background-Problem-Action’ Model

Brian Trench, from Dublin City University, in issue 3, makes a creditable attempt to draw attention to the role of science as part of the culture, referencing some contributions from J. W. Foster, Nick Whyte, and the present writer, which attempt to analyse the role of science in the colonial to post-colonial transition. He correctly credits de Valera with his role in providing a haven for Schrödinger and others, but misses out on the analysis of the fragility of the model he adopted, which might have explained the failure of Kiberd to recognise the significance of the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies in his analysis of Flann O’Brien’s work and in the cultural scene generally. The width of the culture gap is exemplified in the absence of science from the Field Day anthologies. His referencing of contemporary material, however, indicates the beginnings of an accessible critical treatment of the current science-culture issues. Thus, he presents some outline background to the problem, which he goes on to define in terms of the existence of the cultural barrier between science and the humanities, and suggests how it may be addressed in terms of the provision of access to courses in science, technology, and society at third level, in such a way as to be available to humanities and business students, showing how this has been done elsewhere, including the serious treatment of science fiction.

Alan Titley, from Dublin City University, *as Gaeilge* in issue 3, develops the link between the culture of the republic and the problems of the world, with the aid of the late Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, Ernst Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and others less familiar to

me. He treats the emergence of nations in post-imperial situations, underlining its complexity, and contrasts the civic approach to nation-definition to the ethnic, with the latter generating mini-imperial superiority attitudes, most if not all emergent nation-states having ethnic minorities and incipient border disputes. He rightly criticises the absence of understanding of the national question from what is usually perceived as the Marxist canon, due to its having evolved under centralist-imperial influence. He calls for the incorporation of human rights laws into national legislation.

This paper incidentally raises the question of the role of the language and the need for those concerned with contributing to the critical debate to be familiar with it at the necessary technical working level. In the Wolfe Tone Society in the 1960s, we began to address this problem and ran into difficulties once we realised its depth. I had the same feeling when recently I encountered Finbarr Ó Brocháin at a seminar run by *an Roth*, the Engineers' Irish-language forum. There is unfinished business here, worthy of a paper in its own right.

Philip Pettit, from Princeton University, makes the link in issue 3 with classical Enlightenment republicanism via Wolfe Tone, leaning on the Roche-Cronin 1960s Wolfe Tone Society pamphleteering publication, *Freedom the Wolfe Tone Way*, as well as on his own scholarly work. After defining an agenda for an emergent cultural system within the democratic republican political framework, he suggests, under the heading 'motivational effects', various cultural pathologies that can emerge, e.g. excessive religious domination. He concludes by coming up with practical policy proposals for encouraging a healthy cultural environment in civil society.

In issue 3, Ivana Bacik, from Trinity College Dublin, on free speech and civil rights, gives a useful paper on the legal and constitutional background, going on to adumbrate the many issues arising from state security legislation, and stating the problem in terms of definitions of the 'common good'. She concludes that we need a system in which free speech does not protect Nazis, Klansmen, and pornographers, while doing nothing for their victims.

Paul Delaney, also from Trinity College Dublin, gives us some insight in issue 3 into the complexities of the Traveller culture, attempting to rescue them from the status of romantic relics of the past and to suggest a positive emergent modern role. Although all the elements of the model are there in the text, it is closely woven; it would benefit by being edited in such a way as to bring out the structure. I should perhaps add that I have had thoughts along these lines myself, when occupying space on holiday

camp-sites. Would Travellers not provide a steady year-round revenue, a base-load for the camp-site service industry?

Fergus O’Ferrall, who is a medical doctor associated with the Adelaide Hospital, in issue 2 goes into the question of ‘Civic-Republican Citizenship and Voluntary Action’, in a mode which approximates to what I am suggesting should be the norm. He gives a scholarly historical background, covering the Greeks, Italians, English and French—in the English context giving due credit to John Milton. In his advocacy of voluntary organisation as the basis of a way forward for politics in a vibrant civil society, he leans on Hannah Arendt. The underlying problem is, of course, the pressures of the economic system on the individual under modern conditions. He gives a useful appendix with the classic texts of the civic republican tradition.

The foregoing conforms approximately to the basic structure, though the problem-definition phase is ill-focused. Overall, it is, however, at a somewhat abstracted level; one might have expected a concrete example, in the form of an approach to how the current problems in healthcare might be addressed [Editor’s note: Fergus O’Ferrall’s article was an edited version of a much longer paper, which may account for this discrepancy].

In issue 1, Kevin McCorry makes an integrated case for all-Ireland democratic renewal, in the context of the Good Friday Agreement. He goes into the historical background, in Ireland, Britain, and the EU, and homes in on the problem of how to get the Agreement to work. He comes up with a set of immediate demands, which he considers the Dublin government should be able to achieve. He concludes with a call for an alternative government, based on a political alliance across a broad democratic spectrum.

The McCorry model deserves development in detail and in depth, both in scholarly and activist mode, in its various suggested aspects. It is a pity more effort was not put into following the trails suggested in this concise overview in subsequent issues of *The Republic*.

Conclusions

Before going in to the substantive concluding section, I feel I need to make a minor but significant critical point about current publishing technology. To write the above, I have had to work with the three successive issues of *The Republic* open on the desk beside me. Due to the nature of the binding, it will not stay open at the pages on which I am interested in commenting. So, I would add to the specification of the ideal critical journal: as well as being ‘vertical in the bookshelf’ and ‘frequent

enough not to be forgotten between issues', it needs to be bound in such a way as to easily lie flat on the table pending the absorption of its message by activists into other writings having wider circulation. I am putting this forward as a serious contribution to the definition of a standard 'critical journal format'.

How to comment on the foregoing, additionally to what I have done interstitially? I think the interesting thing is the developmental sequence: the initial emphasis on problem-definition and the slightly hesitant though real aspiration to relate to action; then, there followed a concentration on scholarly historical background, perhaps even some degree of 'academic respectability'. Finally, in issue 3, there began to emerge the makings of an integrated approach, with analysis, problem-definition, and suggestions for action in various niches, though the overall content retained mostly a somewhat eclectic and scholarly flavour. There is clearly a learning process going on, though the frequency of appearance militates against this being effective.

I suggest that there is a need for a more pro-active editorial policy, with flexible adaptation of the suggested integrated model: scholarly analysis, clear problem-structuring, outline solution (even if visionary), and action towards the first steps to achieve the vision. This could be in the form of guidelines to authors, and the selection of authors needs perhaps to be pro-actively related to support the need for detailed analysis of the problems that underlie current activism. There is also a role for self-selected authors who have done the analysis, who have seen the problem with insights not yet publicly widespread, and who need to generate activism where none yet exists. I am thinking here of the coming energy crisis, as the oil supply dries up, and its ramifications into diverse areas like food production, transport, urban planning, etc. Awareness of this needs to be spread wider than among those whose priority concern is the environment.

There is perhaps a role for *The Republic* as an accepted and sought-after critical reviewer of all niche-oriented journals, analysing and activating their implied, and perhaps not perceived, political dimensions, for example the politics of the Arts Council in the contexts described by the Journal of Music in Ireland, or the politics of the various science-related agencies in the contexts described by *Spin*⁷ or *Technology Ireland*⁸, a domain which Brian Trench has begun to outline in *The Republic*, and which I have been actively attempting to influence for decades. These requirements, I suggest, indicate a need for an active editorial support group, each member of which should have some standing in some niche sector of the cultural spectrum and be in a position

to relate it to the political environment.

Notes

1 *Planet* is published in Aberystwyth by Berw Cyf bi-monthly at £3.25 and edited by James Bernie who is contactable by e-mail at planet-enquiries@planetmagazine.org.uk.

2 *Feasta* is addressing problems of economics of sustainability, providing theoretical ammunition for the Green movement. It is edited by Richard Douthwaite and John Jopling, and published from 159 Lower Rathmines Road, Dublin 6. It is contactable at feasta@anu.ie and distributed by Green Books Ltd. in Devon, e-mail: john@greenbooks.co.uk.

3 *Saothar* is published annually by the Irish Labour History Society at Beggars Bush; it is edited by Fintan Lane and Emmett O'Connor; it is contactable at ilhs@ilhsonline.org.

4 The *Journal of Music in Ireland* is published bi-monthly at €3.75 and is edited by Toner Quinn, who is contactable at editor@thejmi.com.

5 Roy H. W. Johnston, *Century of Endeavour; A Father and Son Overview of the 20th Century*, (Washington: Academica/Maunsel 2004). At the time of writing, arrangements for ordering and distribution on this side of the Atlantic are under development, but the author is contactable at rjtechne@iol.ie.

6 *Crane Bag*, Forum Issue, vol. 7, no. 2, (1983).

7 *Spin* comes out quarterly at €4.50 and is edited by Tom Kennedy and Sean Duke; it is published by them from a decentralised location in Foxford Woollen Mills; e-mail tom@sciencespin.com.

8 *Technology Ireland* is edited by Sean Duke and published monthly by Enterprise Ireland (Merrion Hall); it is essential reading for industrial management concerned with the innovation process. The e-mail contact is: technology.ireland@enterprise-ireland.com.