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SENSE

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1969~89

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Ireland's political and cultural review

Number 6 January 1989

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SENSE

Fighting poverty

1988 WAS THE YEAR the media woke up to poverty. Lavish amounts of time and space were devoted to something over one-third of the population of the Republic wake up to day in, day out, year after year. But despite the extensive coverage, very little attention was devoted to analysing the causes of the widespread poverty in Irish society. Poverty, it seems, is a condition to be accepted stoically by the poor while waiting patiently for their betters to alleviate it.

This approach condemns the poor to a life of deprivation on the margins of society. It is in line with the official response, which the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has pointed out, 'has failed to tackle the causes of poverty.' The ICTU went on to emphasise that 'poverty is not caused by either natural calamities or inherited deficiencies,' but, 'is rooted in social and economic structures that allow the rich to prosper, often at the expense of the poor.'

Nowhere is this clearer than in the United States. In September last, the US Census Bureau released figures which showed that 13.5 per cent of all Americans — 32.5 million people — live below the government-established poverty line.

While the top 40 per cent of the population is doing better, more people are living in poverty than in any year since the 1970s. And the poor are getting poorer. In 1987, the fifth year of the much-heralded US 'economic recovery', one out of every three black Americans, and one out of every two black children were living in poverty.

The US working class is being squeezed into poverty. Manufacturing jobs have been lost, and the much-touted numbers of new jobs reflect positions at the bottom of the service sector where wages are low, about half of them at poverty level.

Britain mirrors the American experience. Thatcherism has spawned the 'loadsamoney' mentality which is shared by the yob, the yuppie, and the 'lager lout' alike. The affluence and security enjoyed by two-thirds of the population mock the misery and deprivation suffered by the remaining one-third. The journalist John Pilger argues that the poor in Britain 'have been declared expendable and invisible in the New Age. Statistically, the nine million workers who live on or below the Council of Europe's "poverty threshold" no longer exist;

for they are "employed". The one in four of children who live on or below the poverty line are not seen, nor are the thousands confined to rat-ridden bed-and-breakfast hotels, nor are those abandoned on Broadwater Farm and Toxteth where the Public Order Act, one of the measures of the New Age, is used as an instrument of internment.'

Emigration has rendered some of Ireland's poor 'invisible', but the vast majority remain trapped in the vicious circle of poverty with no prospect of a way out. The principles of both Reaganism and Thatcherism have found devout disciples within the Haughey government, and such principles take little or no account of poverty other than to marginalise the poor.

The level of poverty in Ireland is a scandal. It is a cop-out to quibble with the figures as Albert Reynolds, Minister for Finance, did in a recent interview: ('I find it hard to see where all that is...') The government must be persuaded to change its economic policies, not simply to alleviate poverty, but to eliminate it. Given the ideological complexion of the government, and the nature of the right-wing consensus in the Dáil, it will take some powerful persuasion to achieve the desired result.

There is an obvious need for unity among those parties and groups who see the elimination of poverty as a national priority. In this context, Proinsias de Rossa's call for a 'Rainbow Coalition' working together 'to create a climate for more caring social and economic policies' warrants a positive response. De Rossa drew attention to the common ground existing between parties of the left, the trade union movement, poverty agencies and some church groups, on both the main causes of poverty and the measures necessary to combat it. He went on to raise the possibility of an anti-poverty coalition which would have a number of limited but important objectives, such as the implementation of the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare, a major job creation programme, minimum pay legislation, protection for part-time workers, and guaranteed access to health and education.

The voice of the poor was heard to great effect in 1789, and helped give birth to democracy. It would be a fitting celebration of the French Revolution if that voice was raised in Ireland to insist that the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were accorded more than lip-service.

Bórd na Móna

In my article on Bórd na Móna in the December issue of *Making Sense*, I argued that socialists should support the Board's rationalisation plans, provided the fruits of this rationalisation are used to create additional jobs in the areas affected. Since this article was written, an additional feature of the Board's plan has come to light — namely, a proposal to subcontract peat harvesting to private operators. This would involve the replacement of the Board's own heavy harvesting equipment with much smaller tractor-pulled machinery imported from Finland.

According to newspaper reports, the principal motivation behind this proposal is to save on the labour costs which arise because harvesting is sensitive to weather conditions, with the result that harvesting workers are frequently idle. It is envisaged that much of the subcontracting would be done by former Board employees who will have taken the redundancy package. These would be presented with the attractive prospect of getting good redundancy payments along with continued employment after redundancy.

This move would mean that much of the work which is currently being done by permanent Bórd na Móna workers would, in future, be done by temporary, casual or part-time workers — workers with few rights, and with many of them inevitably operating in the black economy. While this is a trend which is general throughout western capitalist economies at the moment, it is one which needs to be strenuously resisted — especially when

letters

MAKING SENSE
30 GARDINER PLACE
DUBLIN 1

it is being perpetrated by a state-owned company.

It should not be beyond the competence of the Bórd na Móna management and unions to work out a flexibility scheme whereby workers not required temporarily or seasonally for direct harvesting operations could be given other useful work within the company, thereby maintaining the tradition of permanent, secure employment which has been a hallmark of the Board's contribution to the Midlands economy.

The proposal to replace Bórd na Móna's own in-house equipment with imported technology also has disturbing implications for the Board's technological capability and associated employment. It appears that the Board has long since become stagnant as a centre of research and innovation. Questions need to be asked as to why this is so, and why we should now be importing equipment developed in another small, peripheral European country. I suppose we could just as easily ask how come Tara Mines is now owned by a state-owned Finnish company which also happens to be a world leader in the development and manufacture of mining equipment. Clearly, small size and peripheral location are not fundamental obstacles to an independent technological

capacity and a high standard of living.

PROINNSIAS BREATHNACH
92 Páirc an Ráille
Má Nuad Co, Chill Dara.

Development Forum

Next year from January to June (on the second and fourth Thursday of every month) Comhlámh will be launching a series of talks called "Development Forum". The talks will be held in the basement of 29 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin 2, at 8pm

The programme is as follows:

12.1.89: Women's education and development in Ireland. Speakers:

Angela Mulligan, Kathleen O'Neill and Carol McDermott. **26.1.89: Women at work and in the home in Iraq.** **9.2.88:**

Ireland and the developing countries: a woman's perspective. Speaker: Joan Burton. **23.2.89: Irish education and development awareness training.**

Speaker: Fionnuala Brennan. **9.3.89: Primary dental care.** Speaker: Martin

Hobdell. **23.3.89: The Solomon**

Mahlangu Freedom College: education for liberation. Speaker: Marius

Schoon. **13.4.89: Children in South Africa.** Speaker: Louise Asmal.

27.4.89: The waste trade and

developing countries. Speaker: from

Greenpeace. **11.5.89: Nicaragua: the**

threat of a good example. Speaker:

from Irish Nicaragua Support Group.

25.5.89: Irish input into the Agricultural

development of Tanzania. Speaker:

John Reidy. **8.6.89: The commodities**

trade. Speaker: Alan Shiel. **25.6.89:**

Development or neo-colonialism?

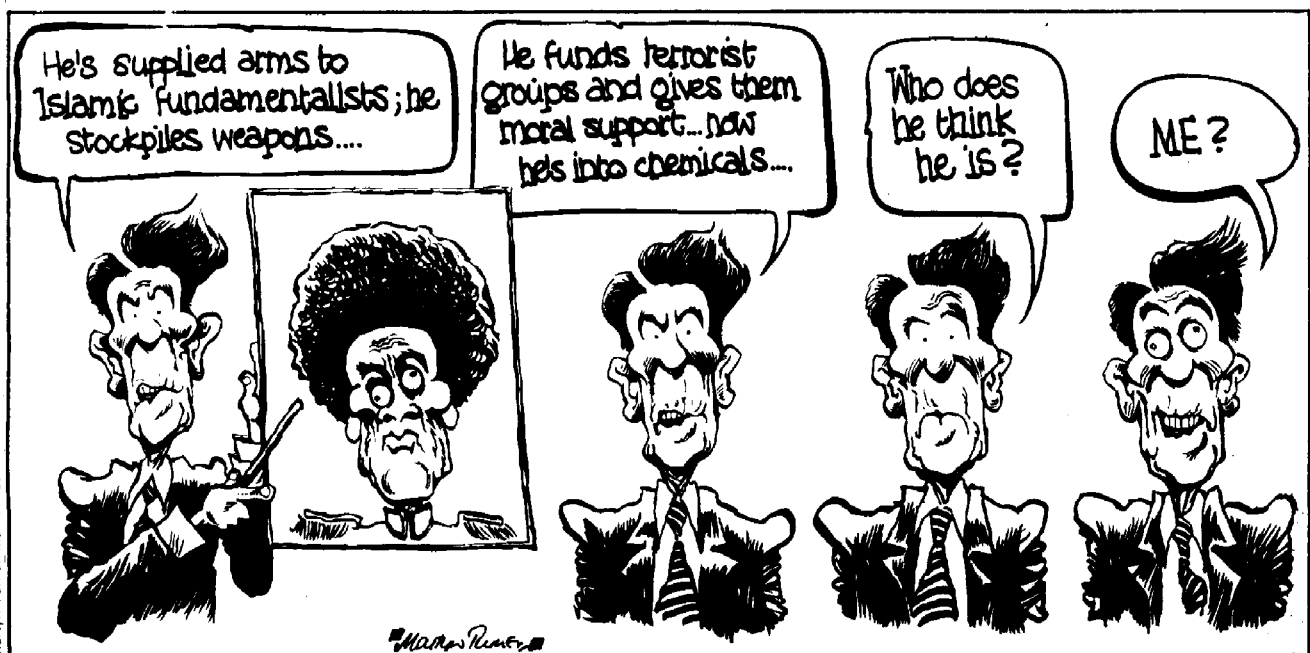
Speaker: Raymond Crotty.

MARIUS SCHOON

Coordinator, Comhlámh,

29 Lower Baggot Street

Dublin 2.



MAKING PEACE IN IRELAND

It is almost twenty years since the British government sent troops to Northern Ireland in the midst of serious civil disturbances. Two years later, the Provisional IRA came into being and launched a vicious campaign of violence against the Protestant population. Loyalist elements responded in kind, and politics gave way to terrorism. Efforts to find a political solution have thus far failed, and the killings continue.

In this issue, *Making Sense* begins a series, 'Making Peace in Ireland' which will hopefully make a contribution to a democratic resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The first contributor, SEAMUS MURPHY of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, calls for a change in Southern attitudes to the conflict.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPUBLIC

IT USED TO BE SAID in the radical days of the '60s that if you're not part of the solution then you must be part of the problem. Given the length and the bitterness of the conflict in Northern Ireland, perhaps the southern community needs to ask itself whether it has eased or compounded the problem. I use the term 'southern community' advisedly, for it is clear that successive Dublin governments are limited to a certain range of policy options by trends in public opinion.

The typical southerner (with the exception of a small minority) genuinely feels that he or she is all for peace and justice in Northern Ireland, but is a little at sea when it comes to trying to say what a situation where peace and justice prevailed would actually look like. I suggest that this is because there is a certain Jekyll-and-Hyde quality to the typical southerner when it comes to looking at Northern Ireland.

Dr. Jekyll is all for reconciliation between the two communities, respect and mutual accommodation for what he calls 'the two traditions', and encouraging the political rise of moderate groups on both sides. Mr. Hyde feels he should stand up for the nationalist community in NI, since they have suffered and still suffer systematic injustice and oppression at the hands of the British and the unionist community, and he believes that there cannot be peace in Ireland until the injustices of the nationalist community (one of which is partition itself) have been removed. Mr. Hyde also refuses to support the IRA campaign, and genuinely believes that he opposes it.

The typical southerner is not schizoid; just ambivalent, once things get beyond a certain point. As long as 'supporting reconciliation between the two communities' and 'supporting the nationalist community' come to the same thing, all is well; but if they diverge, then Jekyll and Hyde neutralise each other, and the southerner becomes prey to the politics of the last atrocity. Following the Enniskillen bombing, Dr. Jekyll's voice is heard loudest; following Gibraltar, My. Hyde is seen again. In such times, the poor confused southerner never knows what face he will be

wearing tomorrow until he looks in the mirror.

GUILT AND ITS MANIPULATORS

Much southern confusion arises from subconscious guilt about the north. This guilt is often played upon quite successfully by republican groups with very little interest in peace, other than the 'peace' which would follow the withdrawal of a war-weary Britain and the conquest of the unionist population. If the southerner shows any reluctance to commit himself to the 'struggle for justice of the people of Northern Ireland' (i.e. the Provo campaign), he is reproached for his indifference and hard-heartedness. If he offers analysis or opinion of his own, he may be told that he doesn't really know what it's like because he doesn't live there, or that even if his facts are right and the analysis irrefutable, still he doesn't have the experience of life in NI at a gut or emotional level, so he's still wrong.

The typical southerner is quite helpless in the face of this manipulation. He abhors the appalling violence of the IRA and generally supports the Dublin government's attempts to suppress it; but he cannot bring himself to consciously stand with the unionist population against IRA violence or express support for the security forces in NI. Because of his confused ambivalence and his subconscious guilt, the southerner is unable to attain the clarity which would enable him to distinguish between the different voices of northern Catholics, i.e. to distinguish between the SDLP, Sinn Féin, Alliance and the Workers' Party.

THERAPY

Most forms of psychological therapy involve a slow facing of reality. The biggest single responsibility of the southern community is to face the reality of Ireland today. There are a number of elements in this process.

First, it must be realised that the guilt or responsibility for the present impasse is not exclusive to the south; all sides have some responsibility and are somewhat at fault. People in the Republic must be ready



1972: Oxford Street bus depot, Belfast

to recognise manipulation by extreme republicans, and to identify it for what it is: the call to holy war against Brits and Prods.

Second, the Republic must not lend a sympathetic ear to everybody claiming to be a spokesperson for the oppressed minority in NI. It is perfectly obvious that the democratic parties representing northern Catholics (SDLP, Alliance, WP) are engaged in a serious struggle with a fascist, authoritarian, violent and anti-democratic party (SF/IRA). To fail to distinguish between these two sides is not merely a betrayal of the democratic parties and of democracy itself, it is also a betrayal of the minority community, since, as John Hume stated recently,

In the last twenty years republicans have killed more than twice as many Catholics as the security forces, and in the last ten years have killed more than the loyalists.

Third, the south must be prepared to publicly challenge that section of the minority community which votes for Sinn Féin. If, through the mechanism of the Anglo-Irish agreement, the southern community can legitimately expect and demand that the British government should challenge the unionist community on certain points, then it is only fair that we, the southern community, should be prepared to challenge that minority of the northern minority which votes Sinn Féin and tacitly supports the IRA's war. It must be made clear that every vote for Sinn Féin, far from bringing the day of Irish unity closer, actually makes it more distant; it needs to be spelled out that supporting the IRA creates, not just a gulf between the two communities in NI, but a

second gulf between the northern minority and the south where Sinn Féin has no electoral future.

Fourth, precisely because the south has not directly suffered either at the hands of loyalist paramilitary violence or by security force excesses, it has less excuse for failing to reach out to the unionist community. If the southern community is to fulfill its moral responsibility of building peace, it must resist the temptation to give in to its own emotions and take sides, and instead work at the difficult task of being an honest broker for peace.

THE IRA AND THE REPUBLIC

The southern community needs also to take a new look at its attitude to the IRA and its campaign. There is an understandable but mistaken tendency to speak of paramilitary violence as 'mindless' as though each and every paramilitary member were an unbalanced psychotic who positively enjoyed killing for its own sake. No doubt there are such individuals but they are the exceptions. Far more significant is the fact that the IRA campaign is logically planned with a view to achieving certain political goals, viz. the establishment of a united Ireland on the basis of British withdrawal and unionist surrender or expulsion. It is quite possible that much of the leadership of SF/IRA regard the killing as 'regrettable' - but necessary.

That the southern community (and most of the northern minority) repudiate the violence of the IRA is clear. But the extent of the repudiation is not so clear. The southern community needs to ask itself the question: 'If the IRA achieved a united Ireland in the near future, would we accept it?' I suspect that quite a number of people would say: 'We hate the way they did it, but a united Ireland is what we always wanted, so we will take it, reluctantly.' Such people do not see that it is precisely upon such a reaction that the IRA counts: that a large proportion of the southern community would still see a united Ireland as a 'good thing', even if it were built on the slaughter and expulsion of thousands of the Protestant community. The IRA has a good-humoured contempt for such people, viewing them as basically decent Irish people, who are just too squeamish to do the necessary dirty work to achieve the desired goal.

The IRA campaign is being waged for us and our future generations — in our name, and for our avowed goals, and in the conviction that we would accept a united Ireland, no matter how blood-drenched. They would be quite surprised if their campaign was approved of; ritual condemnations of violence are to be expected, and have little effect. What might in the long run make a difference would be a repudiation of its goal, as well as its method; if the southern community is not to be complicit in the IRA campaign, it must build a wide consensus around the position that a united Ireland attained the IRA way could never be acceptable. There is a vast difference between a united Ireland achieved by peaceful means and mutual consent, resulting from the interaction of democratic forces and meeting the aspirations of both communities, and avoiding the domination of one group by another; and a united Ireland based on sectarian war conquest and fascist terror. The message must be made clear: a united Ireland is 'a good thing' if, and only if, it is a means to peace, respect for human rights and community pluralism, democracy and economic development.

THE LEFT'S AWAKE?

THE LATEST opinion polls give the Left a combined vote of about 12%. Twenty years ago, the Labour Party alone got one and a half times that in the 1969 General Election.

Traditionally, the Irish Left has explained away its poor electoral performance by claiming factors such as the Catholic Church's role in maintaining conservative values; the inheritance from the Civil War of the two major parties and the absence of class politics. If politics in Ireland were to be re-aligned along Left/Right lines and 'Unity of the Left' could be achieved, then socialism would progress. Or so we were told!

But these excuses no longer hold. The right-wing consensus has re-aligned politics for the past two years. There is now more co-operation on the Left than at any time in recent history. The Catholic Church (indeed, all the churches), far from being obstacles have now become allies of the Left, especially on issues such as poverty, inequality and international affairs such as Central America. As for class politics — class differences have never been clearer. The very rich are paying up to £500,000 for houses in South Dublin while one third of the population exists in poverty. The Left should be thriving.

Failure to analyse

It is not enough, as Brendan Ryan does, to blame the media consensus. I do not deny the importance and influence of the media — nor their right-wing perspective. But if media alone was

'Not only has the Left not convinced the public that it can ever gain power, but it has never explained what it would do with it.'

EAMON GILMORE argues that socialists need to wake up to the realities of Ireland today.

such a powerful arbiter of voting intentions, the PDs and the Labour Party should be surging ahead. Their spokespersons are never off RTE or out of the newspapers.

The weakness of the Left in Ireland is due not to how the media treat us, or how we treat each other, but to our failure to analyse the real nature of Irish society, and to critically assess our political strategies. Gorbachev has forced some new thinking on all socialists. We have all been quick to applaud his reforms in the Soviet Union, but much slower to apply his methodology to our own situation.

The Irish electorate is far more sophisticated than we often credit. The Irish people understand only too well the complex relationships between political power, capital and media. They believe the Irish Left will never triumph over these forces. That is why they don't vote for the Left, why there is so much 'working the system', and why Charlie Haughey is streets ahead in the opinion polls — despite cut-backs, unemployment and emigration. The people accept that

there will be no socialist transformation and that the more punishment we take now, the sooner this little capitalist economy will be back on its feet again, and the emigrant sons and daughters can return to some modest prosperity.

Protest and protect

The people view Left-wing politics and politicians in much the same way as they see their trade unions. Their job is not to govern — but to oppose, to protest and to protect the poor. Ironically, the people are as likely to blame the Left and the trade unions for failing to protect them against cuts, as they are to blame the government which has inflicted them in the first place.

The Left itself has contributed to this sorry state of affairs. We have never convinced the people that we could win power at either national or local level. We have reinforced the public perception that we are permanently on the margins by, for example, assenting to the opinion that the Left can only win *one* seat in any given constituency. We are told that if Pat Rabbitte, Eric Byrne or Eamon Gilmore are to win seats for the Workers' Party in Dublin, it must be at the expense of Mervyn Taylor, Frank Cluskey and Barry Desmond.

Why shouldn't the Labour Party and Workers' Party win half the seats in Dublin South West, the largest working class constituency in the country? And why shouldn't the Left take two of the five seats in Dun Laoghaire which produced the largest progressive vote in the Divorce and Abortion Referenda?



Not only has the Left not convinced the public that it can ever gain power — but it has never explained what it would do with it. We have offered no vision of the socialist Ireland. The people can be forgiven therefore if they feel that the Labour Party stands for the poor man's version of Harold Wilson's state — a bit like Fianna Fáil in their spending days — and that the Workers' Party would land us all in some gloomy stereotype of a People's Republic.

Negative image

This negative image of the Left goes on to suggest that we would worsen rather than improve living standards. We rightly champion the cause of Local Authority tenants, but we sometimes forget that 80% of householders either own or are buying their houses. They do not consider themselves to be 'men (or women) of no property'. What do our comments about the public health service convey to the increasing numbers of workers who are joining the VHI?

Does our approach to education lean too heavily on concepts such as 'state schools' and remedial teaching when most parents value the educational contribution made by the Churches and would prefer democratic control by parents and teachers to the bureaucratic hold of a government department?

If the Left is to progress, it must firstly convince the people that it is serious about winning power, and it must offer a vision of the Socialist Ireland which will attract and mobilise the public.

Need for change

To do this we must change. The

'The weakness of the Left is due not to how the media treat us, or how we treat each other, but to our failure to analyse the real nature of Irish society, and to critically assess our political strategies'



Workers' Party has recognised the need for change. The Party itself is the product of change. It has run the gauntlet of accusations — that it has sold out on the national question — that it has gone soft on the multinationals etc., when it has courageously faced down nationalism and paramilitarism, and when it has recognised certain realities in the economy.

In his last two Presidential addresses, Tomás Mac Giolla emphasised how successful revolutionaries, including Lenin, have embraced change. Following his election as Party President, Proinsias de Rossa has continued the theme in his speeches and in his overtures to the Labour Party.

This process must be continued. The composition of the working-class has changed. Social and economic policies borrowed from the 1950s will have little relevance as we approach the next century.

Our approach to political activity must also be adapted to suit the new times. The Left in Leixlip has shown the way here. Their success was not due to a 'swing to the Left' — but to a swing towards a new style of politics by the Left.

I would not disagree with most of Brendan Ryan's article — but I think his overall assessment is a bit too optimistic. We will not progress by telling each other that we are 'going from strength to strength' or that we need to get our marketing right. The fact is that in circumstances which are supposed to be favourable for the Left, we appear to be making no progress at all. The most immediate task for all serious socialists is to discover why.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

Rosheen Callender

During the 1970s, western capitalism was shaken by a number of developments. Perhaps the most significant of these was the oil 'crisis' — or rather, the dramatic redistribution of income, internationally, which was caused by the sudden oil price increases. Another was the rapid rise of modern industry in South-East Asia, notably Japan — which brought home the fact that western industry needed modernising and restructuring if it was to compete successfully again on world markets.

But it was not until the '80s that western capitalism 'got its act together' and started following an effective strategy for re-establishing itself at the expense of labour (both in the industrialised and developing countries). At this stage, the drive to modernise industry, reduce labour costs, restore profit margins and compete internationally is well underway — and with it a clear, well-planned withdrawal from the social commitments of earlier years. Keynesianism and welfare statism are seen as having 'gone too far', with too much time and money being wasted on 'inessentials' like social welfare, industrial democracy, equality for men and women, legal protections for vulnerable groups, and recognition of trade union activity.

The 'single market', due for completion in 1992, is Western Europe's big effort to fight back on all fronts against its various competitors. In my view, however, the drive to secure new markets and restore Europe's pre-eminence in the world economy, through increased efficiency and the 'economies of scale', necessarily involves attempts to sweep away many social gains that have been made. These include many important gains by the trade union movement.

The wider questions of whether the economic forces impelling us on to 1992 will serve to help or to hinder social progress, has (in my view) yet to be fully addressed. The only issues addressed here are how these forces are affecting the basis of trade unionism in Ireland, and how the

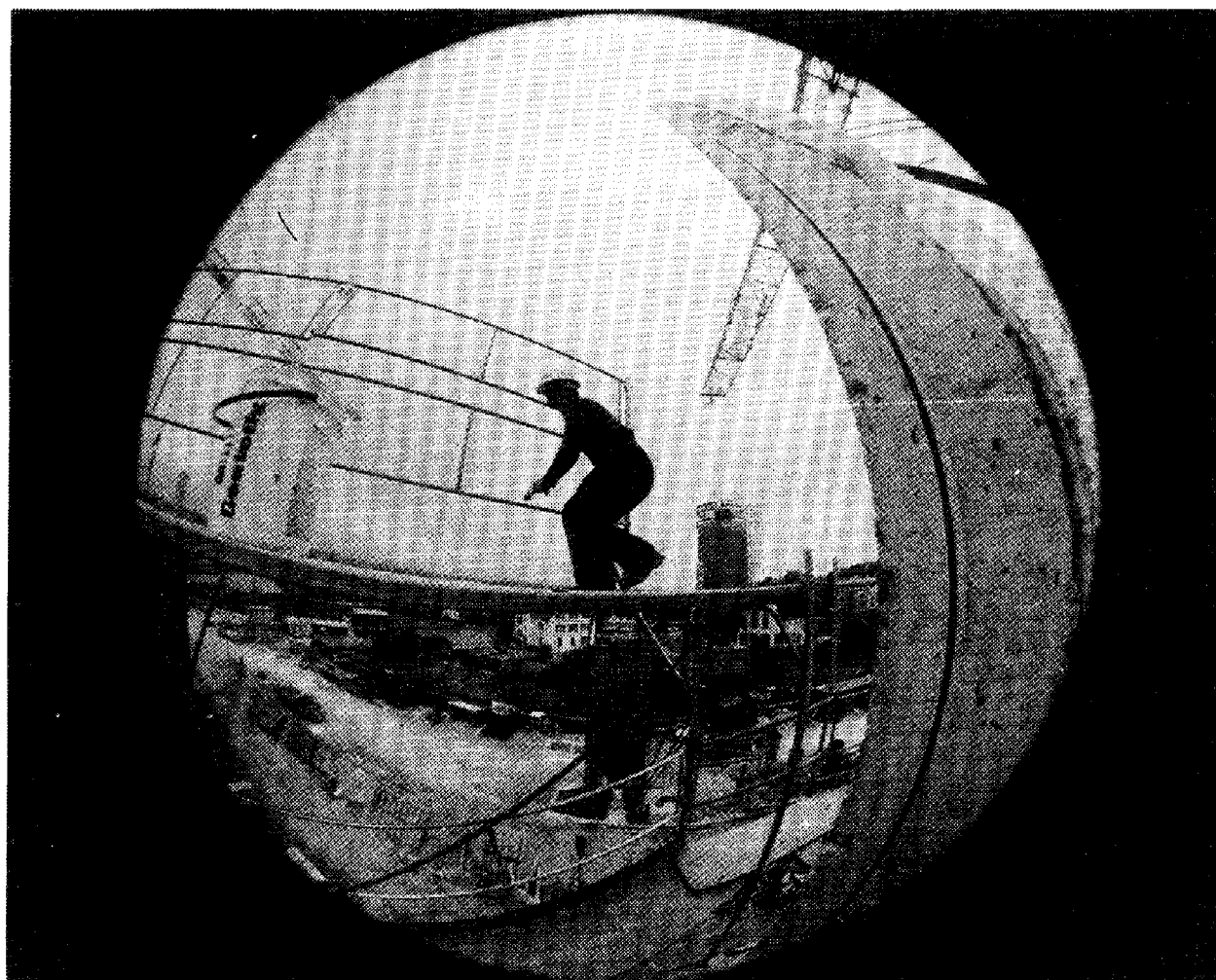
movement is reacting to the changes which, have been taking place.

What's happening in Ireland is what's happening all over Europe. Technological change and the drive to increase competitiveness and profitability are having a major impact on the labour market. They are resulting in direct assaults on traditional forms of employment and, consequently, on traditional forms of trade union organisation.

Attempts by employers to minimise labour costs have resulted in a major growth in the number of workers now engaged on a part-time, temporary, casual, seasonal, freelance, stand-by, call-out, contract and 'portfolio' basis. These 'atypical' workers (for want of a better description) all have one thing in common: a lack of full legal protection at work — protection resulting from coverage by labour legislation, full PRSI cover and — usually — trade union membership.

In industries such as building, construction and distribution, for example, contract working is commonplace because (among other things) PRSI cover for the self-employed is so much cheaper than for employees and the range of employment legislation does not apply. In other industries such as contract cleaning and retailing, the employment of part-time women workers, usually for 17 or fewer hours a week, is commonplace because such workers are not covered for full PRSI or employment rights such as holidays, minimum notice, maternity protection, redundancy payment or protection against unfair dismissal. This is generally also the case for casual, seasonal and temporary workers.

In Northern Ireland, part-time workers already comprise about 22% of total employment, and the inclusion of various other categories (e.g. homeworkers, free-lance workers and sections of the non-agricultural self-employed)



brings the number of 'atypical' workers close to one-third of the total. In the South, it has been estimated that by the year 2000 about 35% of the workforce will consist of 'atypical' workers — already the proportion is almost 30%. The 'atypical' is fast becoming 'almost typical'.

Another significant change occurring in the Irish workforce is the increased participation of women. While this has to some extent been slowed down by unemployment and the economic recession, in some areas those very factors have served to accelerate the growth of women's employment. In Northern Ireland 47% of all employees are now women; in the South, 30%.

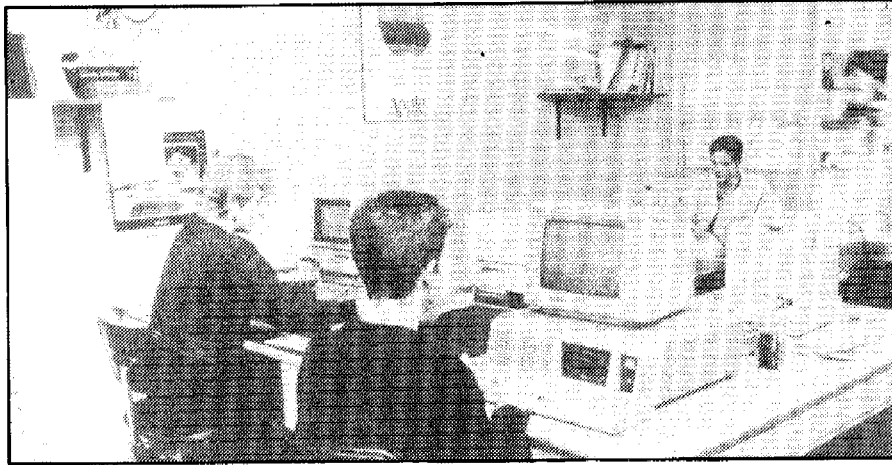
In industry, male employment has fallen more sharply than female employment because the traditional 'male' areas (like construction, engineering and agriculture) have been worst hit by the recession; and the manual occupations (again, mainly male) have been affected more severely than administrative, technical and clerical ones, where women predominate.

It is not valid, any more, to think of 'the typical worker' as being a full-time, permanent, middle-aged male, manual manufacturing worker: indeed this species is becoming rather rare. The typical worker nowadays is as likely to be part-time, temporary, young, white-collar and female — not the usual stereotype at all.

Morover, today's workers are increasingly likely to be in small employment or even self-employment; to change employment several times in a lifetime; to have spells outside the formal workforce; and to change back and forth as between employee status and that of self-employed.

The latter trend has now become particularly evident in the South, with non-agricultural self-employment increasing steadily (in fact, at four times the rate of growth of total non-agricultural employment in the first half of the eighties). In the South, over 20% of the workforce is now self-employed (about twice the Northern level); and about half of them work outside the agricultural sector (as in the North). In the non-agricultural group, somewhere between 65—75% consists of what might be termed 'own-account' workers. These are people who are classed as self-employed, but have no employees themselves, and generally speaking have little by way of fixed assets or other resources. In other words, they have little capital and are dependent mainly upon their own labour, rather than that of others. Also, their average income is surprisingly low — even allowing for the problem of tax-evasion and non-declaration of true income, which distorts the official statistics.

It is worth remembering that the self-employed status of a significant proportion of these 'own-account workers' derives from redundancy or prolonged unemployment, or government-sponsored training schemes; that many are former or potential employees; and that their economic position and interests are often very close to those of the average employee. Indeed, some 'own-account workers' may have more in common with the average employee than the latter has with certain other groups who technically come within the employee category. A further important point about this group is that precisely because they are technically self-employed, they lack the protection of most labour legislation, and therefore suffer from considerable



insecurity in job markets. It will often be cheaper for an employer to purchase the services of 'own account workers' because the lower rates of tax and social insurance put them at a competitive advantage by comparison with employees; but by the same token, this can place them in an even more vulnerable position than many of their counterparts performing similar work but classed as employees.

Another significant change is the growth of small employment which has taken place in Ireland, partly because of training schemes and other government initiatives designed to help people set up small businesses and offset the worst effects of the recession on large employments. Many of the businesses established on foot of such schemes have failed to survive for long, and they have by no means offset the huge job losses from the traditional areas of employment so devastated by the recession.

There has been a steady decrease in the last decade, both North and South, in the average size of employments as measured by the numbers of workers employed. In Northern Ireland, for example, the significance of companies employing over 100 has been declining steadily (though it remains dominant in terms of numbers employed). The most recent figures (1984) indicate that 98% of all firms employed less than 100 people (although the other 2% employed 42% of all workers). Only 84 firms employ more than 500. The pattern is very similar in the South.

According to conventional economics and 'competition theory', one of the expected effects of the single European market is to bring about a restructuring of industry and an increase in the size of firms (those that survive). However, the experience in Ireland, since moves towards free trade began, has run counter to that found elsewhere in Europe — we do not conform to the norm in this respect (and in many others!). The average size of Irish firms has been falling steadily and nobody seems to be predicting that it will rise in the '90s. The Cecchini Report (which of course did not cover Ireland anyway) forecast a 40% reduction in the size of the survivors — a somewhat chilling prospect for Ireland in the continued absence of serious attempts to develop large-scale industry either in the public or private sector.

Finally, in this context, we must note the growth in service industries. In the South, services now employ over half the workforce. In the North, with the steady decline in manufacturing industry over the past decade and more, the proportion of the workforce employed in services has grown steadily and is now almost 70%. In the South, manufacturing now employs less than 20% of the work-

force — in the North, the proportion is still over 20% — but only just, and perhaps not for long.

These, then are the major labour market changes which have taken place in recent years: the growth in 'atypical' employment (especially contract and part-time working); the decline in traditional 'male' employment; the increase in women's labour force participation; the increasingly impermanent nature of work; the increasing movement as between employee and self-employed status; the growth of self-employment; and the steady increase in the proportion of the workforce employed in services rather than manufacturing or construction. How has the trade union movement responded?

Whether consciously or otherwise, it seems that most of our trade unions are still based on the premise that the average worker is a middle-aged man who worries about his wages, his taxes, his outgoings, his pension; preserving his status and holding on to his job. Most unions are run by men with similar concerns themselves.

There has been plenty of lip-service to the idea of catering better for women workers or young people or part-timers or other 'minority' groups; and there are of course a few notable exceptions to the male-dominated unions which are geared mainly to full-time male workers. However, there is, by and large, very little analysis or understanding of the outlook, interests, lifestyles and priorities of the so-called 'minority' groups; and therefore, no coherent strategy for attracting and incorporating them into the trade union movement in a meaningful way.

Take, for example, the question of attracting more women into the ranks of the trade union movement at all levels. There has been considerable discussion about this over the years. However, most male trade unionists still think that this is merely a question of adjusting a few structures and practices here and there so as to suit women a bit better; or 'improving the image' of unions that is presented to women. There is a recognition that there are women workers 'out there' who are not organised, or who are trade union members on paper only; but there is usually a failure to ask searching questions about why this is the case.

Similarly, there is some recognition of the fact that the average size of employments today has declined dramatically. Yet this decline in the large industrial conurbations and the parallel growth in small-scale industry and employment have not yet been mirrored in the decentralisation of our major unions. Most are still firmly based in the

'It is not valid anymore to think of the "typical worker" as being a full-time, permanent, middle-aged male, manual manufacturing worker... The typical worker today is likely to be part-time, temporary, young, white-collar and female.'

city centres while their members are out in industrial estates, or suburban shopping centres or hospitals or schools. The simple but obvious fact that city-centre offices aren't always convenient (or cheap) to drop into if you're living and working out in the suburbs doesn't strike anyone as particularly relevant.

Of course it *wasn't* so relevant when most unionised employments were large and union representatives were either well-trained, experienced shop stewards who could handle most problems, or full-time officials who were able to visit the employment regularly and deal collectively with the problems of a large group of workers. But it is very relevant today where there are more (and smaller) employments, with a higher turnover of labour; because on the one hand shop stewards tend to be less experienced (and perhaps have newer, more awkward, sometimes more technical and legal issues to deal with) and on the other hand, the full-time official will have less time to devote to each individual employment if he or she has more of them to deal with. It is not *always* the case that 50 ten-person employments will be more time-consuming to deal with than one five-hundred-person employment, and it certainly will not be fifty times as much work; but there will generally be some significant difference in catering for their needs. Yet it seems to me that nobody nowadays is admitting that trade unionism, as a full-time occupation, is actually becoming *more labour intensive* — or, to be more accurate, that trade unionism will have to become more labour-intensive if it is even to maintain, let alone improve, the quality of the service, analysis and leadership it provides to workers.

There is, of course, some response to this. There has been trade union rationalisation in recent years and more is in the offing. This has been designed mainly to pool services and bring about greater efficiency, which is clearly a welcome and necessary development. However, some unions, it would seem, are engaged in rationalisation and amalgamation processes mainly as a means of countering the decline in their membership, and as an alternative to facing up to the real problems of recruiting the new type of worker who has not traditionally been part of the trade union movement. It is easier to acquire existing trade unionists than to create new ones.

There are also still many ambiguities on the part of trade unionists towards the 'atypical' worker. At leadership level, for example, everyone is now saying that we must organise part-time workers and we must protect this vulnerable group and we must incorporate them properly into the trade union movement. Yet on the ground, many shop stewards and many union officials still regard the part-time worker as someone who undermines the position of full-time workers, who is really not that desirable, and who therefore, if ignored, might hopefully just go away. This is, of course, an ostrich-like position, but there is no question that it still exists.

There is a similar antipathy — in many cases much stronger — towards the growing number of contract

workers who were in many cases once part of the trade union movement and are now, for the most part, simply seen as 'sell-outs to the ranks of the self-employed'. The fact that members of this group can be as exploited and as vulnerable as many employees (and in fact, because of the absence of full social insurance, labour legislation cover and trade union organisation, often even more so) is rarely recognised.

The foregoing indicates a critical view of the way in which most unions, so far, have adapted to the changing composition of the workforce and various changes in the size and location of employments. However, there is, in my view, a more deep-seated problem and this is the question of whether the movement can look at all these changes in an integrated way and consider the effect they have had on the thinking and priorities of the working class today. The unfortunate truth is that many workers — men as well as women — simply do not see the relevance of trade unionism today because trade unionism today isn't always relevant to them. Some of what trade unionism stands for is of course distorted by the media and by its opponents. But leaving this aside, trade unionism does sometimes seem to conflict with workers' own long-term economic interests; and some of the traditional demands and priorities actually hold little appeal for certain groups of workers today.

For example, many young people have a positive distaste for the idea of job security, one of the most fundamental, traditional trade union demands. To them, this means staying in the same job for ever and ever; and anyway, they see that the nature of modern industry makes the idea of this increasingly untenable. Many working parents, especially mothers, would opt for shorter working hours in preference to a bigger wage packet, if they had the choice; and this too runs counter to the thinking of many trade unionists — although at leadership level negotiations on a general one-hour reduction in the working week are proceeding. It is also a fact that many people simply prefer to spend their time on work — be it paid work for an employer, or unpaid work at home or elsewhere — than on what they see as long-winded and time-consuming trade union meetings and activities which appear to yield very few tangible benefits or results. The level of participation by most trade unionists in the internal affairs of their own unions is extremely low and questions must be asked as to why this is so. Finally, of course, to the unemployed, who make up 20% and more of the workforce, trade unions can seem not only irrelevant, but positively hostile to — and sometimes even responsible for — their plight.

Is it possible to pin-point some of the reasons for this alienation from the trade union movement? In the case of the unemployed, the reasons are quite separate from those relating to employed workers. (In a sense, the alienation is less 'justified' because there has been a fairly consistent and determined effort by the trade union leadership to make job creation and maintenance of the living standards of the



unemployed major priorities in any national agreements in the last decade and more. Indeed, employed workers as a whole have traded wage moderation for promises of job-creation and the fact that no government has delivered on these promises has not been something for which the trade union movement has been wholly, or even mainly, responsible.) But leaving aside this issue, can we pin-point any reasons for the alienation between trade unions and employed workers?

In this context, it may be relevant to discuss what appears to be a significant change in the interests and priorities of many workers today. I see this change as being connected with an increased awareness of an involvement in the production process in its broadest sense. By this I mean that workers — perhaps because of better education, higher skill levels, and greater awareness of the economic and international context in which their organisation operates — are nowadays often more sensitive and attuned to the needs of the market and the performance of their product in what is such a highly competitive world.

This probably owes something to television, radio and other mass media which are dominated by competition theory and free market ideology — certainly more than it does to any great development of worker participation or industrial democracy. However, it may also be connected with the reduced size of many employments and the greater insecurity of small firms in the market place today. And in Ireland, it must certainly be connected with the fact that the majority of the workforce is now engaged in service industry — which by its nature brings workers more closely in contact with the end-product of their labour and makes them very much more aware of its quality and its direct impact on the consumer. This is very much in contrast to the situation in a large employment, where a worker may be engaged only in one particular part of the production process and may never have very much involvement with the end product, or its impact on the consumer.

The result would seem to be that many workers today are often very closely in touch with, and therefore concerned about, the quality of their product, or service, and its likely survival in the market. The tragedy for trade unionism is that this kind of interest and involvement, which many

would regard as natural and desirable, can often come into conflict with 'trade unionism' as it is often perceived and practised. The workers who favour greater efficiency or a better service to the customer, or the introduction of new technology, are very often the ones most at odds with trade union policy, and are increasingly the ones declining to join unions at all. We may all know and accept that in each case there can be excellent reasons for opposing new technology, or particular restructuring proposals, or changes in work practices, or whatever. We also know that many companies — especially multi-nationals in the 'hi-tec' industries, but lately, several indigenous firms as well — are pursuing long-term strategies of union avoidance and 'de-unionisation'. Nevertheless, no thinking trade unionist today can avoid some feelings of discomfort about frequently appearing to be in a position of Luddite opposition to economic change, to be trying to hold back the tide of technology or somehow to be favouring old-fashioned principles over modernism and reform. One cannot help feeling that trade unionism has been wrong-footed in the march towards economic progress, and that however much we may disagree with the way in which such progress is defined, we have often been backed into a corner of defensive reaction and resistance to changes which are in themselves perfectly desirable.

Is this simply because trade unions are in a period of weakness, and are not always able to dictate the terms of progress, not able to defend the jobs of their members and at the same time co-operate with, or even initiate, the type of changes which are needed to make industry more efficient, competitive and viable in a long-term sense?

This may indeed be part of the explanation, but it does beg the further question of why we have arrived at this position of weakness. It is simply a matter of capitalism's renewed strength and confidence, both nationally and internationally, which enables it to carry out the economic changes it requires regardless of trade union and workers' rights? Or does it also have something to do with a lack of foresight, initiative and planning on the trade union side? And even if the answer is both: what exactly can we do about it?

'Unions are more necessary than ever before, to protect an increasing number of increasingly vulnerable workers in an increasingly ruthless world of competition and market forces.'

In fact, there is plenty we can — and must — do about it. But the key to effective action is study and analysis of what capitalism is up to and what changes it is seeking to bring about in the labour market. We must also recognise what changes it has already brought about in the labour market in terms of the thinking and priorities of many workers. It is no longer sufficient to expect workers to join unions out of traditional loyalty, or even political conviction: they must be wholly convinced that it is in their economic interests to do so.

For people in small employments, and particularly in the service industries, this raises some new questions with which trade unionists and many socialists have not yet grappled. For example, it is often the case that a small business in the early stages of its life will simply be unable to generate sufficient income — let alone sufficient surplus — to provide a decent income for those involved. Does this place its employees, who may number only one or two, outside the ambit of the trade union movement, or does it place the trade union movement in the position of accepting what would normally be seen as unacceptably low wages? Or does the young person who wishes to work exceptionally long hours for a limited period in order to establish a position in the workforce, place himself or herself outside the arms of the trade union movement by so doing? And what of the position of the working parent who wishes only to devote twelve or fifteen hours a week to paid employment, and the rest to a young family or an elderly dependent? It can be argued that trade unions should be seeking the flexibility that employers are often reluctant to concede; yet, more often, it is unions who are seen as opposed to flexibility.

Many socialists nowadays seem disillusioned over the obvious failures of the trade union movement to recruit new categories of workers; to present a better image of themselves to women, to young people, to the public at large; and to reform their structures so as to become generally more relevant, more democratic and more effective. But socialists themselves haven't put very much energy into analysing the weaknesses of the trade union movement. Perhaps out of a misguided sense of loyalty which forbids public criticism? Perhaps out of a failure to properly analyse the economic and labour market changes which have given rise to some of the current disarray? And perhaps out of an unwillingness to change some of our own traditional views on who exactly constitutes the working class, and how exactly the interests of the working class should be defended?

My own view is that unions today are more necessary than ever before, to protect an increasing number of increasingly vulnerable workers in an increasingly ruthless world of competition and 'market forces'. The ideology of individualism which has permeated most parts of the economy, fairly extensively at this stage, is leaving people more and more defenceless, both economically and politically; and the image and structures of most trade unions are not exactly inviting to such people.

If trade unions are to rejuvenate themselves as the

defenders of the economic interests of the working class — and if socialists are to support them in this struggle, both from within and from without — then one of the first issues on which we must be clear is who exactly constitutes 'the working class'. At a recent international conference on this and related issues, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences defined the working class as comprising "people of mental and manual labour". This is an extremely wide definition, and even if we in the West exclude from it, as we must, people who are not wholly or mainly dependent upon their own mental or manual labour only, the definition still leaves us very far away from the traditional idea of the typical worker being a male, manual, manufacturing worker in the production industries — or a woman only if she is slaving in some sweatshop.

There is a need to incorporate most of the workers in the newer, 'atypical' forms of employment — including most part-time, temporary and casual workers and a significant section of the non-agricultural self-employed. There is a need to harmonise trade union policy with the diverse economic interests of all these groups, and to take the offensive on changes which are economically desirable — rather than be left permanently on the defensive, as if workers had no interest in economic progress.

This is tied in very closely, in my view, with the need to encourage rather than discourage, close contact between workers and the end-product of their labour. At present, this contact is already happening, because of the growth in self-employment, small employment and service employment; and it is working to the disadvantage of unions, rather than to our advantage. We must make ourselves relevant, rather than irrelevant, by taking account of this trend rather than denying it; and by harnessing the energies and emotions it releases to progressive rather than reactionary ends.

This means, for example, that trade union demands in every area of the economy must address the issues of primary concern in relation to the work of the particular group: it means that teachers must address the question of what is being taught and how; service workers must question the quality of the service they provide; industrial workers must question what they produce and how and why; and so on. In other words, producers — whether of goods or services, raw materials or finished products, in the public or private sector — must build alliances with consumers; and trade unions should find new and more imaginative ways of defending workers' interests.

Wage militancy may have its place in the trade union armoury — but it's a smaller and smaller place, I believe, because wages are no longer, always, the central issue in every employment or at every stage of either the organisation's or the individual worker's life. The world of work has become too complex for simple-minded slogans to be appropriate in every situation. And socialists must do better than to trot out time-worn clichés about unions — and knee-jerk reactions — any time they seem to be criticised.

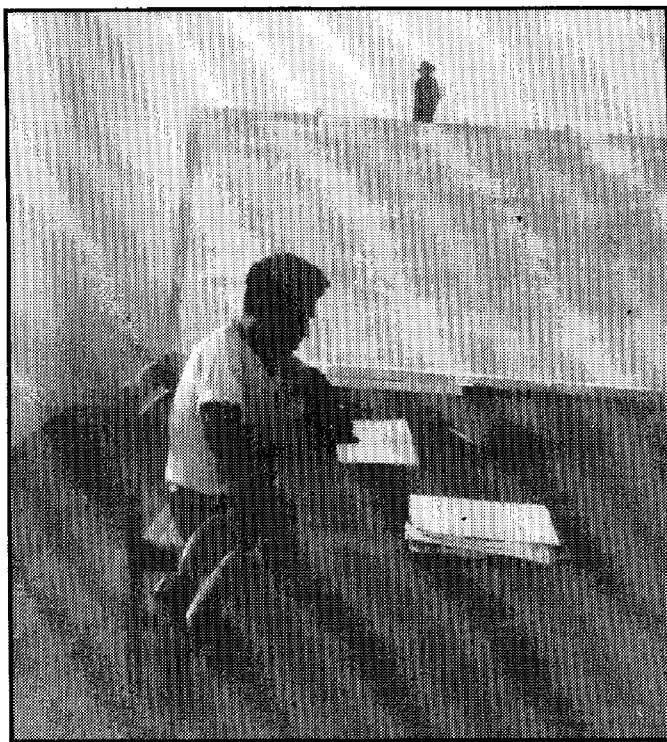
The second-last decade of the 20th century has been a period of crisis for the trade union movement; and to some

'It is to be hoped as we approach the last decade of this century, that trade unionism will grow out of this crisis and into a new, more analytical and far-sighted proponent of workers' economic and social interests in every sector of the economy.'

extent, for socialism as well. Socialism in Eastern Europe is now showing encouraging signs of reconstruction and rejuvenation and, if successful, this should have some positive repercussions in the West if relevant lessons can be learnt and applied. But trade unionism in the West needs a major shake-up and rejuvenation from within if it is not to be reduced to an anachronism, or a remnant from the first industrial revolution. I believe it is capable of such rejuvenation, but only on the basis of accurate economic analysis of the work force as it is, as it is becoming, and as it views itself and its interests; and only if it can provide leadership which both defends and initiates. Mere defensiveness, at this stage, is an inadequate weapon for

working-class progress; almost every major industrial struggle in recent years has illustrated this.

It is to be hoped as we approach the last decade of this century, that trade unionism will grow out of this crisis and into a new, more analytical and far-sighted proponent of workers' economic and social interests in every sector of the economy. But it is by no means a foregone conclusion. A lot of new work and thinking still needs to be done. It has been said that 'Freedom is the recognition of the necessity to change'; and in certain respects, our trade union movement in Ireland, despite its many strengths, is still singularly unfree.



NICARAGUA SCHOOL APPEAL

The Workers' Party is planning to build and fund a school in a rural area some 50 miles from Managua in Nicaragua. Schools are badly needed, but such an act would also be a gesture of belief and confidence in Nicaragua's future, in its people's inevitable victory. This school would cost something over £3,000. It would be a blow against the ignorance in which dependency and oppression thrive. You can speed the day of freedom for a brave people in a very simple way —

put your hand in your pocket.

Your donation should be sent to 'Nicaragua School Appeal', International Affairs Committee, The Workers' Party, 30 Gardiner Place, Dublin 1.

All donations will be acknowledged by letter.

THE AMERICAN WAY



Alexander Cockburn (above) was in Dublin last month to launch the paperback edition of his book, *Corruptions of Empire*. **PADDY GILLAN** spoke to him about the current situation in the United States.

Why did Michael Dukakis fare so badly in the presidential election — was it simply that George Bush ran a dirtier campaign?

No, I don't think so. Let's look at how the American political year works. The most important thing was the Jackson campaign. And Jackson demonstrated something that the mainstream corporate media would not believe: there was, and is, a real radical populist strain in American political life, which has received no expression by the Left for a very long time. On the Right, it did crop up with the George Wallace campaign in the early Seventies. In 1984, Jackson was the first black in history to win a primary. What he did in '88 was to demonstrate that white people would vote for him in substantial numbers. The mainstream press and the mainstream politicians were bitterly opposed to Jackson.

Dukakis was seen by the press as an easier option. He was perceived, in many ways wrongly, as a Massachusetts liberal and he was given an easy ride by the media. The Atlanta convention was basically a celebration, because Jackson agreed to march behind the Democratic banner.

That was when Dukakis was first seen as the presidential candidate. Then a number of things became apparent: his political programme was waffle, he's probably more conservative than George Bush in a number of ways, and he couldn't really make up his mind what he was.

Under these conditions, Bush — who's no treat — made hay with him. I don't think Americans were deluded or fooled by Bush, they knew exactly what he was; they just thought Dukakis was a clown, which he is.

What caused the low (50%) turnout?

Many Americans think, quite correctly, that it doesn't make much difference which lot they vote for. There is also the matter of registration, which is a serious matter. The process of getting

registered can be quite complicated, particularly if you're a poor black family. Jackson, quite rightly, made registration a major issue.

The most reprehensible thing Dukakis did was not to launch a major registration drive. Why didn't he? Politicians in the US don't like a sudden influx of new voters because who knows how these people are going to vote? They like a very few people to vote — the few people they've talked to.

How is Jesse Jackson likely to fare in 1992?

There is now a fight for the leadership of the Democratic Party. On the one hand, you've got the money people who gave money to Michael Dukakis, and probably a lot of them gave money to George Bush — these are real estate people, industrialists and so on, represented by Senator Robb and the Democratic Leadership Council.

On the other hand, you've got Jackson who says: 'I got seven million votes in the primaries; I am the authentic leader of this party.'

A number of things could happen — Jackson could leave the party and lead a third force, but I think that's unlikely. For reasons which aren't necessarily good ones, Jackson could slowly become more respectable.

The man who ran in '88 was a lot more mainstream than the man who ran in '84. Remember in April of '88, Jackson said in New York that he would not sit down and talk with Yasser Arafat. This was a significant defeat for him, the mainstream had accomplished what they wanted which was to ensure that no major American politician would dare say 'I will talk to Yasser Arafat', or even to concede that the PLO is the legitimate voice of the Palestinian people which of course it is.

So when Jackson came off that position, the backbone of his campaign was broken. Jackson could now go on and become more and more respectable, and simply become another

lightning rod for populist resentment at the status quo.

Will there be any major new departures under Bush?

Well, lets look at what Reaganism was really about. Essentially, it was about lowering the cost of labour, which they did very successfully. It was about the internationalisation of the economy, plant-flight to Third World countries -

....And to the Southern US?

Yes, and beyond. On the Mexican border you've got a tremendous amount of Free Trade Zones with 10 cent-an-hour wages. So that will continue.

In terms of diplomacy, American strategists are beginning to realise that they've got some new times coming. You've got the single European market in 1992, and you've got major deals going down between the Common Market countries and the Soviet Union. American business says 'Hey, we want that.' You've just had a huge deal between Ford and the Soviet Union. So, I think Bush will continue the Reagan policy there.

It's conceivable that he might be slightly better on the Middle East, particularly after the PNC in Algiers. The big question mark really is Central and Latin America. It's quite possible that in the next few months the situation in El Salvador will really unravel, and this could be a major temptation for a Bush administration to intervene.

In El Salvador as opposed to Nicaragua?
Yes, I think they've given up the Contra option. They're not thinking of invasion, they're basically waiting to see if the country will fall apart economically, which is quite possible by the way.

To wrap up on Bush, it's like a slight echo of the Eisenhower years — a rather mainstream Republican administration, very business-orientated, and not as crazy as the Reagan people.

How did Reaganism affect American society? In particular, how did the working class fare in the eight years of Reagan?

The postwar economy of the working class peaked in the late sixties, it's been downhill all the way since. What Reagan offered was a sort of fantasy life. It's funny to think of him and Thatcher. Thatcher said to the British, I promise you pain, and the British being British loved that. And Reagan said to the Americans, I promise you joy, and the Americans being Americans, loved that.

Some crucial moments on this level — what you might call the Nuremberg Rally level — were firstly the Los Angeles Olympics, which were certainly as frenzied an occasion of national self-celebration as the Berlin Olympics were. The second was the Statue of Liberty, another incredible demonstration of nationalism; the third was the conquest of Grenada; and the fourth was the bombing of Libya.



Dukakis 'couldn't make up his mind what he was'.

What Reagan offered on that level was a mad, rich life of the imagination. In terms of substantive things, there was a relentless attack on peoples' standard of living. This election campaign was all about 'we've never had more jobs, why have we never had more jobs?' It's a joke; everyone's doing three jobs trying to get by, and everyone in America knows that. The minimum wage hasn't gone up since 1980.

So, the economic recovery which Reagan boasts of has been achieved at a high cost in terms of wages and the standard of living?

OK, so it's the longest boom in peacetime. In the last hundred years, there have only been two booms as long as this, meaning a continued growth at a not very high level. One was 1938-45 which was the Second World War. Another was 1962-70, which was the Vietnam War. And now 1982-88 because it's a totally militarised economy. The driving motor of the economy is military production. That favours people on the West Coast, and on the East Coast, in the big defence plants. It does not favour people in the farm belt or in the South, so you've got this tremendous patchwork-quilt economy.

There are other aspects. George Bush made incredible propaganda about inflation and high interest rates under

Carter. In fact, real interest rates, taking out the inflation, are higher now than they've ever been. The economy is like a very fat elephant, every time they pump it up, it takes more and more effort to get less off the ground.

How long can it go on in this way?

Japan is the great weak link in the capitalist economic system. The 'economic miracle' of Japan is not particularly miraculous when you look at it. They export because they have to. If you were to have a crack somewhere along the line, you could easily have it in Japan. The whole thing could get nasty very fast.

How does the Left in the US compare to the European Left?

In terms of parties or social democratic formations, you won't find very much. There are groupuscules, there are things like the Democratic Socialist Alliance and other things as well, but they're fragments. But if you ask what are the substantive sectors of resistance within a political system dominated by two major parties of business, the news isn't so bad. First, you've got the black electorate as rallied by Jackson which is a real progressive weight in the culture.

Then look at the resistance to Reagan's policy in Central America which is composed of radical, liberal forces grouped around the Churches. People always point to the Evangelicals and Baptists on the Right, but it's actually the liberal left Churches which have made more of an impact. The campaign to stop universities and businesses investing in South Africa was pretty successful. Consider the campaigns against the CIA. Compare this to England and its pathological obsession with secrecy.

On the level of consumer activism, workers' rights, citizens' initiatives, America is still a very radical place.

What's the reason for the decline of the orthodox American Left?

The moment of disaster was when the Progressives — the populists — did their deal with the Democrats in 1892. The last time a major party was opposed to capital was in the late 1890's. This was the farmer populists, but by 1896 they were in with the Democrats. That's when the die of American political life was cast.

Another opportunity presented itself in the Forties, but the progressives were witch-hunted out of American life by McCarthy. And in 1968, Eugene McCarthy had yet another opportunity, but he had no staying power.

So, even by the time of the Palmer Raids, the Left had been marginalised?

The Palmer Raids were really serious, but the damage had already been done. What happened in the late Forties and early Fifties was that the Progressive Party under Henry Wallace was eradicated, as was the Left tradition in



Winner alright!

the Democratic Party.

The joke was summed up this year when a number of American liberals took out a full-page advertisement complaining of the Reagan and Bush attacks on the liberal tradition. Among those who signed it were people who helped fight the Vietnam War under Kennedy, people involved in the witch-hunts in the Fifties, and George Cannon who formulated the doctrine of containment against the Soviet Union in 1947. These people had, in their time, come for the 'S' word — socialism — they are all now screaming that Reagan has come for the 'L' word!

How are recent developments in the USSR viewed in the US?

Basically, they're viewed enthusiastically by people. Some obvious questions arise: if they haven't got a Russian threat, how can they justify their military expenditure, which, in my view, keeps the American economy on the road. We're talking about 300 billion dollars. So I think they'll need a tremendous scare in the next few years.

But what's interesting for me is not the Soviet Union, but Cuba. Here's a place right on America's doorstep which has survived for over a generation. And the Cuban economy is very good. The US press can't swallow that, they won't write about it. They can swallow Gorbachev, because they hope he is going to restore capitalism.

They just maintain a silence on Cuba?

A total silence. No mainstream journalists go to Cuba. In terms of social indices for the Americas, Cuba's doing pretty well. After the US and Canada it's top. Aid from the Soviet Union is much less per capita than US aid to Puerto Rico which is a basket case and Cuba isn't.

So is it possible that the US might contrive a Cuban threat?

When Haig became Secretary of State in 1981, he indicated his desire to attack Cuba. Even the Reagan people, crazy as they were, didn't think it was such a great idea.

But America never forgives. They welched on all their promises made under Nixon and Kissinger for war reparations to Vietnam. They've never forgiven Cuba; they've never forgiven Nicaragua — not 'til every Sandinista has been chopped up into very small pieces. They have a very long memory for people who challenge the world system.

Is the Right assured of continued dominance in the United States — or is there any prospect of the Left emerging as a force nationally?

I don't think much is going to happen until economic conditions alter. As for emergence on the Left, there's always the same old problem — being absorbed by the Democratic Party.

I think the next two years will be a

very interesting period politically. What will Jackson do? He's undoubtedly a leader — will he just become part of the Democratic Party machine, or will he become a viable alternative?

Finally, how do you rate the press in the United States?

The American press is extremely orthodox and conservative in its outlook. It's consistently anti-labour and very pro-business. It became more conservative from '75 on, after the Nixon/Vietnam debacle, trying to get the show back on the road.

The kind of people entering journalism come direct from journalism schools, and their broader education of political life is very poor. They're very often not qualified to understand the world before they start writing about it. The press has tended to be slow on things like glasnost, and terrible on the Middle East. The mainstream press in America is very poor at the moment.

The alternative press is pretty healthy. *The Nation* which I write for, is the main left-liberal magazine, its circulation has doubled in the Reagan years to about 100,000. And while there are no major, really radical magazines, there are lots of good little good magazines.

This is not like the Twenties when a paper published by populists in Kansas called *Appeal to Reason* sold five million copies a week. We've got a long way to go.

CULTURAL FRONT

HIDE AND SEEK

Eoghan Harris

IN 1900 my grandfather Patrick Harris, with an associate, Daniel Corkery, founded the first Branch of the Gaelic League in Cork with the object of reviving the language Corkery referred to as 'Eye-rish'. In later years he could remember nothing remarkable about Corkery, dismissing him as a 'talker' in comparison with his close comrades Terence McSwiney and Tomas Mac Curtain, the fighting men of the First Cork Brigade, whom he believed to be far more important than the spinsterish schoolmaster.

He was very wrong. In 1925 Corkery published *The Hidden Ireland*. At one stroke, he became a potent and pervasive force in the formation of modern bourgeois nationalist intellectuals — and his command over those with Irish was virtually absolute.

Corkery, who played a marginal role in the War of Independence, went on to win the peace. His two large polemical works *The Hidden Ireland* and *Synge and Anglo Irish Literature* became the twin pillars of Irish intellectual nationalism. Corkery came into fashion just as de Valera came into power.

There were material rewards too. Corkery secured the Chair of English at University College Cork against Sean Ó Faolain who was the more qualified contender, as well as a former protege. Sean Ó Faolain had had a rather nastier War of Independence than Corkery, and in the light of these experiences had the temerity to revise some of the earlier opinions he had received from his old mentor.

CORKERY, who was by now a leading member of the national bourgeoisie, was not pleased by Ó Faolain's revisions. Indeed antipathy to revisionism is always the mark of the national bourgeoisie. The truth threatens to set the working class free of nationalist controls. So no great paens of praise greeted Professor Cullen's stylish stiletto in the bag of wind known as *The Hidden Ireland* when it was first published in 1969.* The bag has been imploding steadily ever since and Professor Foster's recent *Modern Ireland 1600—1972* has squashed the bag flat. Irish history revised is our history told true for the first time, since up until now it was written by nationalists who needed myths to distract the workers.

Historical demolition jobs take some decades to register with the general public. There is no excuse for a socialist party taking that long. False history is as bad as false consciousness. Mythologies about history lead inexorably to Dachau or Darkley Hall or the destruction of the Old Bolsheviks.

Few books have led to as much bad politics as the two major works of Corkery. *The Hidden Ireland* is a middle class pseudo history which attempts to hide away the class structure of 18th-century Ireland just as *Synge*

and *Anglo-Irish Literature* is a sectarian polemic that attempts to hide away the dominant contribution made by Irish Protestants to modern Irish literature.

The detail of Louis Cullen's critique need not concern us too much here — the pamphlet is short but demands a good knowledge of Irish — except in its broad findings. Equally interesting is the question not raised by the author: why *The Hidden Ireland* grew in influence between 1925 and 1969, and has waned in importance since.

The Hidden Ireland set out Corkery's theory that Irish identity was made up of land, religion and nationality — a thesis he set out to prove from the Gaelic poetry of the 18th century in what then seemed a novel approach.

If Corkery had simply stated that attachment to land, the Catholic religion and nationalism were the class characteristics of the rural bourgeoisie nobody could have found fault with him. Politics in Ireland today is about removing the remnants of that trinity from power.

But Corkery claimed much more. Firstly he claimed that he had found a 'hidden Ireland' in the Gaelic poetry that would give him a secret history hidden from the professional historians. Secondly he claimed that the general condition of all Catholics was poor and miserable. Thirdly he claimed that the Gaelic poetry was a true record of that poverty and misery.

CULLEN CUTS THROUGH all this and shows us that Corkery, far from revealing a hidden Ireland, is hiding a revealed one — revealed in the very poetry he quotes.

He shows first that Corkery did not break new ground but repeated the polemics of professional historians like Froude who had a vested interest in painting a miserable picture; and of regional writers like Fr. Dineen who took areas of Cork and Kerry as a model for the whole country, thus giving a highly misleading picture.

Cullen then uses the same Gaelic poets to show us a complex and comfortable Catholic rural middle class enjoying a standard of living no worse than their Protestant neighbours. (How *did* Art O Laoghaire get the horses and indeed the fine house in the first place?)

Finally, Cullen shows how the Gaelic poets were creatures of the comfortable class which supported them; that much of their lamentations for the old aristocracy were a lip service; that these hackneyed laments bored some of them so much that they satirised themselves; that they are totally unreliable guides to

* L.M. Cullen *The Hidden Ireland: Reassessment of a Concept*; The Lilliput Press 1988; £4.95



Daniel Corkery in 1955

social conditions — as witness their failure to record the textile work which was widespread throughout Munster in that time.

Cullen deserves commendation for his insight back in 1969 that what is important is the growing sectarianism in Irish poetry towards the end of the century which burst into full flower in the early 19th-century. The prophecies of Pastorini and the savagery of Scullabogue are the real substance of the '98 Rebellion, and not the folklore of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter holding hands. History shows that if we wish to hold hands we can only do so with real people, and must first let go holding hands with mythological ones back in Boolavogue.

WHICH BRINGS US to the question of why such a slight book as *The Hidden Ireland* could achieve such fame.

The Hidden Ireland was one of those books whose influence grew with the growth of the state. But it only really took off when larger numbers of the Irish middle classes entered higher education. Significantly, the influence of Corkery's work reached its height not in the protectionist Thirties but in the aftermath of World War Two.

The new post-war middle class was not quite comfortable with the chilling certainties of the Wolfe Tone Annual. What it wanted was a sophisticated justification of its own tribal emotions — but one that could be read in public without any fear of being mistaken for anything but a schoolteacher with a literary bent and intelligent nationalist politics that preferred reflection to

action.

Of course a few of these schoolteachers passed over to action in the 1950's. They probably never remembered reading Corkery. But the old schoolteacher probably sent as many of the better minds to the Curragh as any Minister for Justice.

But whether the Curragh was open or shut it was read avidly, both by those inside and outside. Especially by those outside, the rising middle class, who needed an elegant but essentially elegaic polemic, about which nothing needed to be done except to nurse a sense of grievance against Britain. And the study of which could get you a university degree instead of a jail sentence.

The Hidden Ireland met every one of these requirements. And so it was not surprising that its influence reached its apotheosis in the early 1960's when the North seemed a shadow rather than a spectre. This is a significant echo of Corkery's own life: he seemed always on hand to urge action, but curiously shadowy when it came to the action itself. It is not difficult to see how this kind of shadow boxing would appeal to a university student from a Fianna Fáil farming family, anxious to believe that it had held broad acres in some remote past — just as the labourer down the road had always lived in some class of a cabin.

THIS IS WHY bourgeois historians who know their job like Louis Cullen are to be encouraged. There is little to console the Fianna Fáil university student who stands around watching the revisionists digging patiently and presenting such hard rocks as this pamphlet, or Roy Foster's new history, or reminding us that when the Earls sailed down Lough Swilly they could see the bonfires of their rejoicing serfs now freed from feudal bondage — and who later produced doggerel poetry with unsentimental lines like:

Treise leat a Chromail! (More power to you Cromwell!)

The eruption of sectarian substance out of the sixties shadow boxing began the long introspection on Irish nationalism by bourgeois historians and the most advanced elements of the working class. It is not a strange combination: Marx went first to the most advanced economists and philosophers of his day. Then he went beyond them.

The last word on Corkery should go to his former pupil Sean Ó Faolain who wrote a fine short story 'The Patriot' which is a respectful but unsentimental laying to rest of the spinsterish savant.

He saw the white hair of their orator friend, the old bachelor, the patriot, driving out of the town and into the country and the dark night... But the wind would not for many miles cool the passion in him to which he had given his life...

The problem is giving *other people's* lives too. A matter which Ó Faolain dealt with in another story set at the rag-end of the Civil War in East Cork.

'What about the Division...?'

'Oh it's always deh Division! What about deh men aw? D'ere's never anything about deh men!'

Politics ought to be always about 'deh men'. Good politics means good history. That means cooling the hot flushes of old spinsters of both sexes.

MOTHER IRELAND

AT A RECENT event, the 52 minute video, *Mother Ireland*, made by the Channel 4-funded Derry Film and Video Workshop, was shown to an invited audience. The screening was private because the video cannot be shown on British television now that the British Government has copied the Republic's Section 31 legislation with new regulations prohibiting representatives of proscribed organisations from speaking on television.

Mother Ireland set out to explore the historical images of Ireland as a woman. Tracing the tradition back more than two centuries, the video shows Mother Ireland as a nurturing, passive, dehistoricised symbol of Ireland. It is an image which filmmaker Pat Murphy, one of several contributors to the programme, described as negative and impossible to identify with. This view was also shared by Maread Farrell, the IRA member killed in Gibraltar.

Such is not the case with Bernadette McAliskey or *An Phoblacht* editor, Rita O'Hare, who seek to reclaim this image as some kind of positive representation of Ireland. Indeed, McAliskey goes so far as to propound a most peculiar argument that this image of 'the Nation' as 'Mother' is one which all colonised or ex-colonised peoples have used and can identify with. The peculiarity of this viewpoint can be quickly demonstrated by reference to the dominant image of imperialism: Britain. It is an image of a woman, but, unlike her Irish counterpart, she is depicted as aggressive, arrogant, imperious, which are perhaps the very characteristics some of the contributors to the programme would wish to see applied to Mother Ireland. This potentially interesting, if confused, exploration of the representation of Ireland as woman is, however, quickly abandoned in favour of the video's main task, the promotion of militarist nationalism.

In this regard the issues of deletion and historical amnesia were raised by contributors to the discussion after the



LORRAINE KENNEDY views a new variation on an old theme.

showing of the video. The most obvious absence in the video was any reference to the loyalist/protestant tradition in Ireland. We could have had, perhaps, some very interesting Irish images of Britannia, both laudatory and critical. But, the makers of the video deflected the questioner by the very weak response that to include a loyalist woman would be tokenism. Of course, this reply was a clear reflection of the orientation of the video both in its historical and contemporary aspects. This was most clearly seen in the selection process of both events and personalities highlighted.

A contributor to the discussion drew attention to the absence of any reference in the video to Jenny Wyse-Power whose career in support of Irish economic and political rights included being one of the founders of the Ladies' Land League, a Vice President

of Sinn Féin and a prominent figure in Cumann na mBan, an organisation she left when it rejected the Treaty. Yet such a key figure is not even referred to while politically less active women are. The reason, of course, is that the video is setting out to establish what it deems the one true faith of Irish nationalism: the militarist/nationalist anti-Treaty lineage which has its most recent version in the Provisional IRA.

Thus both socialism and feminism, the video appears to claim, must take a back seat while 'the lads' sort out the Brits. This is one of the most peculiar aspects of the video which was primarily made by women who presumably would support women's social rights. This thinking is best illustrated in the video by Nell McCafferty's confused contribution. While women should fight for their rights, she said, after 17 years it was time for the national question to take precedence. Come on, boys, the women are behind ya!

Each time these uncomfortable questions were raised after the video showing, its makers deflected the discussion into complaints about the British Government's new television and radio restrictions on paramilitaries and their political fronts. It was a strange sight to behold when propagandists for the Irish nationalist/militarist tradition were moaning about how the Brits changed the rules to deny them their oxygen of publicity. But, the Provos and their fellow-travellers are adept at exploiting the contradictions which exist in any Western liberal/democratic state by co-opting those democrats into opposition to the censorship regulations which are used to defend that state. Thus, the video-makers were seeking to gain support on a liberal cause of opposition to censorship while sidestepping the limited historical view and insidious propaganda of the video. If the video-makers had spent more time examining the internal contradictions of the Irish state, they would have provided a more valuable service to the Irish people.

SPACE ODYSSEY

THE information officer for the Simon Community in Ireland seems at first sight an unlikely author for a history of Soviet space exploration, but Brian Harvey brings a wide expertise to his subject and succeeds in setting it in its full historical and political perspective. He also succeeds in explaining the technicalities of space exploration in terms that lay people will be able to follow. If there is one thing lacking in his otherwise excellent account it is an explanation of some of the basic scientific concepts involved in space flight.

But science has taken a back seat to politics where space travel in the twentieth century is concerned. Without the Bolshevik revolution it is very doubtful if there would have been a moon landing this side of the year 2000, even if it was the Americans who made it.

The new Soviet government was founded on the premise of unlimited material progress for humankind based on the rational organisation of society and exploitation of ever extending frontiers of knowledge. Russian scientists like Constantin Tsiolkovsky were among the first to develop tentative

BOOKS

RACE INTO SPACE: The Soviet Space Programme by Brian Harvey; Ellis Horwood; UK£16.95p.

theses about space travel, ideas that have stood the test of time. But his ideas languished in the class-ridden military autocracy of the Tsars.

In the 1920s scientists were given their head. Within a decade they had developed rocket energy thrust to efficiency levels the West would not match until the 1950s. In the process the Soviet Union's chief spaceship designer of the future, Sergei Korolov, emerged.

Then came disaster. Stalin's purges swept through the young state's political, military and scientific establishments. When the chief patron of rocketry and space travel, Marshal Tukachevsky, was executed Korolov was among those banished to the labour

camp. It took the loyalty of scientific colleagues and the unquestioned military value of his expertise to secure rehabilitation after Hitler's invasion in 1941.

After the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 the Americans were to make much play of the fact that the Red Army captured Peenemunde, the Nazi rocket research centre, in the closing days of World War II. Brian Harvey shows that it was the Americans who scooped the Peenemunde pool, largely thanks to Von Braun, the leading German rocket expert who took plans, personnel and even equipment with him when he surrendered to the Western allies. For years the Soviet Union lobbied for its share of Peenemunde's scientific loot only to be sent cartons of equipment that turned out to be tractor parts.

The American preoccupation with the atomic bomb however, and with developing missiles to deliver it, deprived them of their advantage. The Soviet scientists pressed ahead with their long term research. In October 1957 they launched the first earth orbiting satellite, Sputnik. They had the enthusiastic endorsement of the new Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev. At one stroke Sputnik established the Soviet Union's leading position at the very frontiers of scientific discovery.

It also secured Khrushchev's leadership position and he used the occasion to sack his old ally Marshal Zhukov as head of the armed forces, demobilise a million troops, and establish a missile service on the same footing to the army, navy and air force.

Inadvertently Khrushchev breathed new life into the arms race. The Sputnik was manna from heaven for the US military-industrial complex, which had met in Eisenhower the only US president capable of keeping it in check. He dismissed the Sputnik as 'a heap of junk' anyone could fire into space. But millions of Americans fed on a Cold War propaganda diet for ten years preferred to believe the leader of the Democrats in Congress, Lyndon Johnson, who saw in the Sputnik launch a bid for world domination by the Soviet Union.

NASA was founded the following year. Eisenhower, ever sceptical of his own military advisors, made it a civilian body taking precedence over the squabbling armed forces' own rocket establishments. But there was no disguising the fact that the space race had begun.

The move spurred Khrushchev into accelerating the Soviet space programme and, dissatisfied with the pace of his



Soviet cosmonauts Yuri Romanenko and Alexander Laveikin before the launch of their Soyuz TM-2 spaceship in 1987.

scientists, he placed Field Marshal Nedelin in charge. Nedelin's reign proved a short and disastrous one, ending with the Field Marshal's death and that of many invaluable scientific and technical staff when a faulty space probe blew up at the Soviet space city of Baikonour.

News of the accident was suppressed at the time and it did little damage to Khrushchev's prestige abroad. Shortly afterwards Soviet supremacy was reaffirmed with the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin. Until then the new US president, John F. Kennedy, had been preoccupied by Indo-China and Cuba. The new Soviet success saw him pledge America to put a man on the moon first, with his vice president Lyndon Johnson given the job of making sure NASA delivered on target.

The Soviet Union never formally took up the challenge and Brian Harvey does not overstrain the evidence to prove a race existed. Nevertheless the increasing number of unmanned Soviet probes towards the moon, the last of which crashlanded unsuccessfully on the surface only days before the historic Apollo II landing in December 1972, seems to support Harvey's contention that however unofficial it was, a race was taking place.

The Americans made it first for a number of reasons. For a start, the Soviet team suffered from considerable bad luck. The head of their cosmonaut team, Gagarin, died in a plane crash. So did Korolov, the top Soviet designer, when the Minister for Health insisted on carrying out a relatively straightforward operation that went horribly wrong. As Brian Harvey says, it was the last act of political interference Korolov had to endure. After Nedelin's disastrous record at Baikonour, the Soviets refused to take the risks with safety standards, especially where manned spaceflights were involved. As a result disasters like the Challenger explosion have been avoided.

But more important in terms of the moon project was the basic difference in

approach to space travel. The Americans wanted to be first on the moon, the Soviets wanted a moon shot to be part of an integrated space development programme — incidentally, no scientific reasons were ever advanced by Kennedy for putting Americans, or anyone else, on the moon.

Von Braun was the chief US scientific strategist. He argued for a rocket to go to the moon, orbit the earth's satellite and send down a landing craft. The Soviet scientists wanted an earth orbiting space station from which a craft could be sent to the moon. This was much the better long term strategy, but would also be slower. Brian Harvey produces considerable evidence to suggest that while the Soviet team stuck to the plan, the US challenge distracted them into several attempts at moon probes that were essentially exercises in one-up-manship. This proved costly in time and resources and ultimately futile.

Today the Soviets have made major advances in space station technology, while the NASA effort has largely gone into the highly lucrative business of satellite launches with its Challenger shuttle system. There are strong arguments for greater interchange of expertise, not to mention co-operation in space. The climate for such co-operation has never been better, though Star Wars remains an impediment to such progress. It would also require the US abandoning its hi-tech embargo on the Soviet Union. A possibly more difficult decision, as it would also mean the loss of at least some satellite customers to the other side.

It looks like, for all our advances since the days of Tsiolkovsky, humanity's future in space must ultimately be determined by us sorting out a few basic problems nearer home.

Padraig Yeates

(Padraig Yeates is a staff journalist with the Irish Times)

All in the execution

THE COAST OF MALABAR
by John Maher; The O'Brien Press; IR£4.95

LONG BEFORE I had finished John Maher's first collection of short stories, I was playing the title story game — setting my judgement as to where, in the running order, to place the story that will, hopefully, sell the book, against the judgment of the publishers.

With me, this is a sign that the collection is a success, and this one succeeds very well indeed. But it is all in the execution — there are no spiny plots. In 'Gianni Mi Ha Ferita' the young girl at the heart of the tale lives in Longford, but goes to board at school on St Stephen's Green. Now read on:

... It became her custom, on half days, to stroll down into the city with one of the day girls. One afternoon, for fun, they wandered into a pool hall on the quays. Where the unemployed and the semi-employed of the city passed their free hours, and made contact with one another. The air was thick with their shouts and curses. Lean figures with their cue-sticks, calling out to one

another in the half-dark. She was standing in his path when Robert Darcy stumbled into her, as he rounded a table...

He got her into trouble, did Robert Darcy, and it's the trouble, and its effect on the heroine, that constitute the story, so you'd think that the key introductory passage would be given to us spread a little more like jam, instead of having the density of a collapsed star, as per the foregoing. But it is easy to forgive unevenness like this, because the good parts of this and the other stories are very good. Maher is at his best where economy of style is used, because he needs no telling as to when to use it.

The highest compliment that I can pay the author is to confess that I found myself nodding vigorously in agreement, when he described the way in which lesser lights in the public service rotate around their sun, watching their superiors' every change of expression closely, in order to be first with a supporting view. Maher's observation of his fellow men is sharp and he expresses it with delightful originality.

It is good, too, to see a newcomer to the book business trying out his various writing styles and story techniques. There is variety in this collection, and not a dull story in the lot.

There is the usual content of what, for reasons that needn't be explored, I have come to call the Dublin Liberties style of writing. There seems no way that this can be strained out of modern Irish writing, for, apart from myself, no other reviewer seems bothered by it. Here is an example, from the story 'Leah's Tale':

'She turned to face the man by the door. The sallow complexion of the liver-ill was the most distinctive feature of his face. He crossed to the piano and slowly closed the lid as though to mute any possible distraction...'

Try speaking those sentences, and see what happens when you come to 'liver-ill' and 'mute'. You'll feel as though your teeth are slipping.

If I didn't think that John Maher was a cracking good writer I wouldn't be setting out such minor irritants, and here I must say that the title story 'The Coast of Malabar' is an impressive work, so good and so artistic that it seems to change the feel of the page as it is being read. It is difficult to put a storyteller

and the subject of his story in the one place, and to let the truth unfold, as the gossip offers his version, but Maher brings it off and the result is a triumph.

On reflection, I think that the publisher was right to place the best story first: the other seven are worth the reading, mind, but I'd have paid the money for the one story anyway, and thought it money well spent.

Sam McAughtry

Wanderer's world

STOLEN AIR by Niall Quinn;
Wolfhound Press; IR£3.95

WHAT DOES Na-v'-nad mean? It means a wanderer or a refugee. A wanderer is the type of guy who does not like to stick around, who sails the seven seas. But the sight of land at voyages' end promises a new beginning. The Helmsman had money in his pocket and knew he was going to burn time illicitly. Yo, ho, ho and a bottle of rum. 'Experienced seamen said it must be done this way, the only way to avoid the mandatory penalties every country imposes on seamen who desert their ships.' A stupified sojourn in a barrio in a steamy South American port with a whore who wants to go to California and who hopes she's found her ticket.

But there are better men in the world with money and power, and poor wanderers cannot handle holding someone's fate in their hand. Teresa speaks Spanish, the Helmsman speaks English, she heard the reply 'American' when he wanted a better class of cigarette, and the Helmsman is guilty. Teresa must go before she's too old to rock 'n roll and too young to die. She does go, with a suitcase and a madonna. Alcohol is the only way to endure unendurable wakefulness. And so the wanderer sails on.

The Latin pace was fast but the Deep South text is slower.

Samuel is the type of guy who goes down the road some nights and lights a fire just for conversation. 'Sitting in a bar alone makes me feel like a tramp.' Samuel knows a wanderer when he sees one. You're a goddamn regular Na-v'-nad. The Wanderer smiles because he is happy and flattered to be thought of as an endless wanderer. But the endless misgivings, the suspicions, the fears, make him head for the nearest turn-off (literally and metaphorically), but this time he has not eaten for three days so he goes back to Samuel's family home. The old man had worked his ass off, but had not lived his ass off. He didn't know what he had missed in life but now it was too late and he regretted missing it.

A penniless sojourn in the steamy port of New Orleans ended in a prison in a cell marked 'Alien'. Borders are artificial, discriminating and evil. This time instead of a whore with a heart of gold, he ends up with a cop with a heart of gold. So he goes on the road again. Misgivings, suspicions, turn-offs, trickery turn a young Irishman into a cosmopolitan wanderer. They become dreamers bonded by dreams to the life of the wanderer. Isa, the daughter of Samuel, does not know such a man when she sees one in her father's kitchen. 'Looks just like another road bum to me.'

But she gets around to asking and he answers 'I jumped a ship in Heuston. I deserted.' 'Goddamn.' The pace now

may be slower and mellow, but it is fickle and uneasy just the same. Maternal-like sensible solutions are offered, such as cutting lawns and reaching visa respectability. 'Goddamn. He's roamed half the world and you're telling him the answers. You don't even know the goddamn questions.' Samuel knew the road he was on, and simply gave a bus ticket and slipped money between books to see him on his way. He was broke in three days and was deported to Shannon. This boy was not born in the USA, this boy was born to run.

The Watchman surveyed the London of '67 during night's solitude. Silence provided a kind of freedom when not sleeping in the day in the Seaman's Rest. Few wanted the job and he had asked for night silence. He watched during the night a house full of broken and knackered women who had had their fill of landlords, drunken and violent husbands, and men who didn't want to know. A home for the homeless. This was not California even if it was 1967 and the battered women were not wearing flowers in their hair. But love will have its way. The encounter began with a 'Fuck off'. They did and the Watchman found sexual healing.

He told her of the past and of his solitude and she was endeavouring to find sovereignty, and told him she wanted none of her own past. Rudely interrupted in the home, they went to a hotel and then to a bedsit. Finding love meant finding a job and finding a home. Happiness, boredom, domestic exasperations and lusts routinely began. The knackered women in the home were not aware that they were prisoners of realities they didn't recognise. He had fled Ireland fast. 'They were owners of property, holders of jobs, disciples of eternal beliefs, and all was accounted for. And thus embalmed they passed away their lives.'

Dublin was a bereaved city. And in exile they did not escape death. The American Mick was flattered to be thought apple pie, the British Paddy was flattered to be treated cor blimey. And then there were the Emerald Isle Irish full of endless and neurotic nationalism and patriotism. She readjusted his shirt collar. 'And her hand was moving again, for some further retouching of his appearance, when she stopped in mid-motion, hesitated, and in that hesitation he became conscious of his recoiling fear pulling him back from her concerned hand.' Freedom will have its way for the wanderer. He wanted rid of the young woman. She would find better men, she could get the best. The London style is more mature and detached, even for a lad of twenty summers in '67 when all the world was young.

John Mulqueen

LEFT BANK

BOOKS

4 Crampton Quay
Dublin 2

DUBLIN'S NEWEST
BOOKSHOP



Baby

by Liz McManus

Illustration by Patricia Hurl

ROBBIE TELLS ME I should stand up to her. He laughs at me for being afraid of her.

'She's only my mother,' he says. All the same, I know that he's afraid of her too. Robbie is the baby of the family and the apple of his Mammy's eye. He's real easy-going, not like the rest of his family. There's knacker-blood in them Deasey's, my Da says and I know what he means. All them Deaseys are wild, but Mrs Deasey's the wildest of the lot of them. Once Robbie's brothers came home from the pub and started a fight in the kitchen, over a bet. Mrs Deasey didn't say a word. She just picked up the kettle full of boiling water and emptied it over the two of them. Gerry was scalded all down his side and had to go to hospital, and Mrs Deasey went down with him in the ambulance, and she stayed until four in the morning in the Casualty ward. All the time, she was crying over him and screaming at the nurses to hurry up and look after her poor suffering son.

* * *

SO NOW WE'RE IN THE KITCHEN and I'm saying nothing. Mrs Deasey's at the cooker, not so much cooking as murdering the dinner. She boils potatoes until the saucepan is black through, and the spuds are like water on the outside, and still raw inside. And it never bothers her one bit. There we are in the kitchen, and the potatoes bursting out over the pot and steam building up like in a pressure-cooker.

'Did you get your others?' she asks me. She sticks her face up close to mine, and I can smell the onions off her breath and the heat coming off her armpits,

and her tits spread out, and I wonder how my Robbie was ever born out of that big ugly carcass. I don't answer and just nod my head. She probably knows already. You can hear everything through the walls of this house. Us in the bedroom next door to hers and never a moment of privacy. Jesus, it's not for want of trying. Shane came quick enough. And ever since it's the same story every month. Not that I care. Not with the way we're living now. She sighs. I know what's coming next.

'That Council should be strung up,' she says and I'm inclined to agree with her. 'There's many that gets houses. Unmarried mothers and the like and a respectable married couple can't even get one.'

'You need two children to get a house,' I tell her. We've had this conversation before but she refuses to believe me and says that it's all who you know in that Council and that it's all backhanders.

'If it's two children they want,' she says suddenly, slapping her hands down on the kitchen table. 'Then I'll give them what they want.'

I don't know what she means, but the way she says it makes it sound terrible, like a threat. When she talks like that I'm afraid of what will happen so I just shake my head.

'Don't you want a house?' she asks me slyly. I think of the new houses up at the other end of the estate, that the Council has nearly finished building, and of how, at this minute, there's nothing I want more in the whole world. I'd even move back home to get away from her only there's no room there, not with my Da being sick and so many of them still at

home.

I can hear myself saying yes I do, and it sounds like a voice belonging outside of me, but on this side, where I do my thinking, I don't want to have anything to do with whatever it is she's planning. Mad things come into my mind but I say nothing and I wait until Robbie comes in from the Labour.

When he hears what she has to say, I can see immediately that he's interested. 'You have it all worked out, haven't you, Ma?' he says when she's finished talking, and I can hear the pride in his voice. And that's that. So easy.

He doesn't even bother to look at me, to see what I have to say and, in a way, I've nothing to say. Thinking about that new house, with its garden, front and back, and even a little brick wall around it, I'm like a dummy, without a word to say for myself and deep down, I'm glad too for I know that it means a house for me and Robbie and Shane.

'We'll give it a try,' Robbie says later when we're in bed and Shane is asleep in the cot beside us. 'What have we got to lose?' He reaches out to hold me and I feel a shiver run through me. It's the kind of feeling you have when you're a kid making your Holy Communion. You're really scared but, still, you wouldn't miss it for the world.

* * *

ON THE DAY, THOUGH, I'm really frightened. Even Mrs Deasey is nervous. She can't sit still and she's walking around the house like a mad woman and jabbing, every minute, at her hair in the mirror. When the doorbell rings we look at each other and she gives my shoulder a fat squeeze.

The health inspector's new. She's young, as young as me, but I know by the way she bends over the baby in my arms that she's never had a baby herself, and that maybe she'd like one too. I lie back in the armchair in my old maternity clothes and try to look like someone who's just out of Holles Street with Robbie's sister's new baby, lying asleep in my arms.

'You should have informed the Council that you were having another child,' the health inspector says to me. Mrs Deasey doesn't give me a chance to open my mouth.

'What's the point?' she says. 'It's tempting fate depending on a baby before it's born. I should know for I've buried a few.'

The health inspector keeps moving around the room, without looking at her. Mrs Deasey jerks her head at me and says, 'They can't stay here. No way. Not with a second baby and me with my nerves.'

The health inspector doesn't look at her. Instead she keeps writing in her notebook. *She* doesn't like Mrs Deasey either, I can tell.

'So now you're going to give them a house,' Mrs Deasey says loudly. The health inspector straightens up and faces her.

'We'll see what we can do,' is all she says. Little Miss Prim. Then Mrs Deasey gets really angry. Her face goes purple and she starts going on about how disgraceful it is that unmarried mothers can get houses. I don't agree with her there. As far as I can see

any unmarried mother around here deserves a house, what with the trouble they get from the men off this estate. But, of course, I don't say what I think. I've more sense.

The health inspector just leans over my shoulder to smile at the baby in my arms. I can't help smiling too, for babies always have that effect on me. Inside, I feel all soft and sad, and I wish that I could keep the baby for always. Suddenly, there are tears in my eyes and I'm sniffing, and the health inspector puts her hand on the baby's head, and says don't worry to me. I feel like a fool crying in front of her, but I know that, behind me, Mrs Deasey is only jumping out of her skin with delight at the way things are working out.

* * *

AND THINGS DID WORK OUT. When the houses were allocated, Mrs Deasey was up in the Church every evening doing a novena, praying that we'd get one. And then the letter came. Jesus, I'll never forget that moment. My fingers were shaking so much I couldn't open the envelope. Instead, she opened it and I suppose, since it was her idea after all, she was entitled to read the letter first, and there it was in black and white.

We have a house.

* * *

THE NEXT DAY, Robbie goes up for the key just so as we can have a look. *She's* with us, of course. She wouldn't miss the big moment for the world. The house has got everything, kitchen fittings and a front and back garden with the brick wall around it. Just the way I'd dreamed our house would be. Robbie's brother Gerry, being in the trade, he comes too, to have a look around. He knocks on a wall and says 'Nothing but the best went into this house. You should've seen the insulation,' *bang, bang*, goes his fist on the bedroom wall. 'Thick as a mattress.'

And all the while, I'm thinking about Mammy. I think of her trying to live in our damp cramped cottage and fit so many of us in together. It seems so unfair. And yet, I know she'd never move. Even if I went and said, — not that I would, mind — but even if I offered her a swop she wouldn't leave it now. Her life has been lived in that cottage just the way that mine will be lived in this house. I can feel it in my bones as if the house was speaking to me. Everything about it is welcoming me, even the view from the windows looking out over the green, and the kids out on the new grass, playing football.

'Watch out for them windows!' Robbie shouts out the door at them, when the football rises up in the air and swings near to the house. The boys just stare at us and then they move away slowly across the green.

'Give them five minutes and they'll be back,' Robbie says but there's no animosity in his voice. He is sharing my happiness, I can feel it. Me and Robbie and Shane, And I push down any shadows and bury them deep before they get a chance to upset me.

She's poking around at everything, opening doors

and checking upstairs. Without saying much. It's almost as if she's disappointed about something. There's even a look of pain in her face like the time she cried at our wedding, and Robbie had to swear that he'd always look after her. Maybe it's Robbie leaving that has her this way. She must realise that she's lost him for good. This house is his future, while she's only his past now.

I nearly feel sorry for her.

'You should ask the Council to give you an end one so's you could build on an extension, some day,' is all she finds to say wrong about the house. Jesus, I think, she wants to move in too. But, for once, Robbie says no.

'No, Ma,' he says quietly, 'No, this'll do us grand.'

* * *

I NEVER KNEW there was so much to setting up house. We had to sign a load of forms and Gerry had to give us a hand with the painting and we were a whole week moving in the furniture. We've no carpets yet but the curtains are nice and warm-looking and they make the rooms look really cosy. Just as I'm standing back admiring them, the door-bell rings. I'm expecting Robbie so I shout at him to keep his hair on, but when I open the door it's not Robbie at all. It's little Miss Prim with her notebook.

'Can I come in?' she asks, as if she needs my permission, although she must know I'd never have the nerve to stop her. Her voice is like ice. I'm afraid of what she might do. She might take the house back. She might send me back to Mrs Deasey's. I want to tell her how I'd kill myself rather than go back there now but I can't say a word.

'It's my job, you know,' the health inspector says. She says that a couple of times. It's her job. Jesus, and isn't she lucky to have it? Her job or my life, is that the choice? I shake my head and I'm praying. As long as she doesn't take the house back, that's all that matters. She stares at me but I keep looking down at the floor and praying that she'll go away.

'You needn't worry,' she says tightly. 'Once you've signed the form, you're safe. She looks as if she expects me to thank her. Neither of us say a word, and then, into the silence, I suddenly hear myself speak.

'I did have another baby,' I say, surprising myself. There's nothing but disgust in her face. So I try it again. Louder this time and folding my arms the way

Mrs Deasey does, and I can feel my face getting hot. As I start shouting, the way she would, my cheeks wet with spit. I can hear the sound of my screams bouncing off the walls of the room. Like it was someone else losing the lid, not me at all. The health inspector shuts her mouth fast and just turns on her heel and walks out.

* * *

AFTER SHE HAS GONE, the room is big and bare all of a sudden. Big and empty and I'm lost in it. There's a great knot in my throat as if someone were trying to strangle me. I want to cry but my eyes are dry, and there's this knot in my throat that won't go away.

* * *

WHEN ROBBIE COMES IN, he finds me sitting on the floor and I feel him, warm and alive, against my face.

'Listen,' he says, 'It's alright. We've got the house. She said so herself. So let's enjoy it.' He gives me a hug and then grins at me. 'Listen,' he says, 'There's a football match on the green with the lads tonight. You can bring Shane out to watch.'

But his skin is soft and warm like a baby's, and it's burning a hole in my cheek. He goes quiet in my arms, so quiet, that I can hear the men's voices across the green.

'Listen, forget about the past,' he tries again, 'O.K?'

I say nothing. Outside the window, someone shouts. Robbee...

A bit shamefaced, he shrugs it off.

'The lads are expecting me already,' he says. I realize that he's itching to be gone so I stand back, and he gives me a peck on the cheek and then he heads out the front door. As the door slams shut behind him, a draught lifts the net curtains off the window and, for a moment, the room is filled with a clear bright silence. Then, outside on the green, the game begins and I can hear the thud of a football off the ground, and the men shouting as they call out to each other across the grass, and from where I stand it could be the sound of children playing.

Suddenly the room looks different; the bare floorboards and the white walls make it look naked and cold and dead and I look around it and think, this room looks the way I feel.

MAKING MUSIC

WHAT A STRANGE and interesting trip it was on the rock and roll rollercoaster. 1988 was the most important year in memory in terms of records released by Irish artists, new and established, and the amount of chart success and critical acclaim that they achieved.

Enya's 'Watermark' and the eclectic collaboration between the Chieftains and Van Morrison, 'Irish Heartbeat', were surely the major surprise packages. Two London exiles from Cork, Microdisney and Stump released what proved to be important albums for vastly different reasons.

Microdisney's '39 Hours' was their parting shot in a career that spanned four albums and two record companies. A disappointing goodbye of songs that were all too bland except for, perhaps, 'Singer's Hampstead Home'. Stump on the other hand won many new friends with their well practised anarchic rhythms of 'Chaos'. A pot-pourri of styles with much lyrical madness thrown in for good measure. Vocalist and lyricsmith, Mick Ryan is surely possessed by the ghost of Flann O'Brien. An acquired taste but worth the perseverance.

Cypress Mine's 'Exit Trashtown' was, rightly, highly praised. Fixed firmly in the trash/jangly guitar sound of the indies, it showed that given time they could be major contenders. A last minute release in the year was Cry Before Dawn's 'Shibumi' MOR pop/rock slush. They should do well somewhere in the USA, but not around these parts.

As usual, there was some mighty fine singles in particular The Stunning's 'Got to Get Away'. The Galway band's follow-up 'Half past Two' was not up to the standard set, but still a fine effort. Guernica, from Dublin, gave us 'Humming the Engine' and the wonderful sublime pop of 'Deepsea Diving'.

The Millenni-tedi-um was broken by the release of eight albums by Dublin bands, three delivering their debuts. Aslan got the party off to a steady, if unspectacular, start with 'Feel No Shame'. It was a confident effort which augurs well for the future. Vocalist Christy Dignam has since left in controversial circumstances and they could have problems in winning back the ground they have undoubtedly lost.

Hothouse Flowers weighed in with their eagerly awaited debut 'People'. Liam O'Maonlai's fiery vocal talent is given full rein and a good job he did too. The highlight of an overall patchy record was 'If You Go', a song that haunts the memory long after the

BRIAN KILMARTIN looks back on a 'strange and interesting' year in the world of rock.

closing chords.

The end of May saw the Stars of Heaven, in *Tua Nua*, and The Fountainhead in action. The Fountainhead's 'Voice of Reason' is as good an example of synth-based rock that you will get. The atmospheric 'The Rain Comes Down' and the single 'Someone Like You' shows the progress they have made but 'Voice of Reason' is no classic.

In *Tua Nua*'s 'The Long Acre', their follow-up to the disappointing 'Vaudville', is more of the same. Pedestrian formulised song-writing beefed up in performance; not even Leslie Dowdall's convincing vocals can save it. A more relaxed approach may help.

The Stars of Heaven's 'Speak Slowly' is very much the definite article. Stephen Ryan's plaintive vocals almost become like another instrument. Overall, much more confident in approach than their mini-LP 'Sacred Heart Hotel'. Expect great things from them in the future.

September/October brought the debuts from Something Happens! and A House. Both albums are individualistic and possess enough energy that should see them through to a wider

audience. A House belong in the world of The Smiths and The Wedding Present and 'On Our Big Fat Merry-go-round' is a creditable highly listenable affair. If 'I'll always be grateful' and 'My Little Lighthouse' are signs of the potential there, A House's maturing will be something to enjoy.

'Been there, Seen that, Done that' from Something Happens! contains a staple diet of good old guitar-based rock. 'Forget Georgia' is a song that would melt the hardest of hearts. More subtlety and they could be really inspiring.

The less said about U2's 'Rattle and Hum' the better. Those who bought the tee-shirt probably fared the best. What a strange sight it was to see music hacks flounder in all directions searching for the right words to justify songs that were no more than well recorded jamming sessions. Searching for their roots indeed! Bono's comment 'we're only learning, starting out' is nothing more than a marketing ploy. U2 will release their ninth album later this year, not bad for beginners.

On the positive side, U2's example of staying here and doing it all from Ireland is an example that Hothouse Flowers, Something Happens!, A House, Aslan, Stars of Heaven and Enya too, have all followed. U2 have made that easier. They have helped shine a spotlight on Ireland that shows that there is a vast amount of talent here and that Ireland is a musical force to be reckoned with. May 1989 bring good tidings to all.



Microdisney reached the end of the line in 1988

Photo: Andy Carlin



The Red Dancer (detail) Kees van Dongen

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