

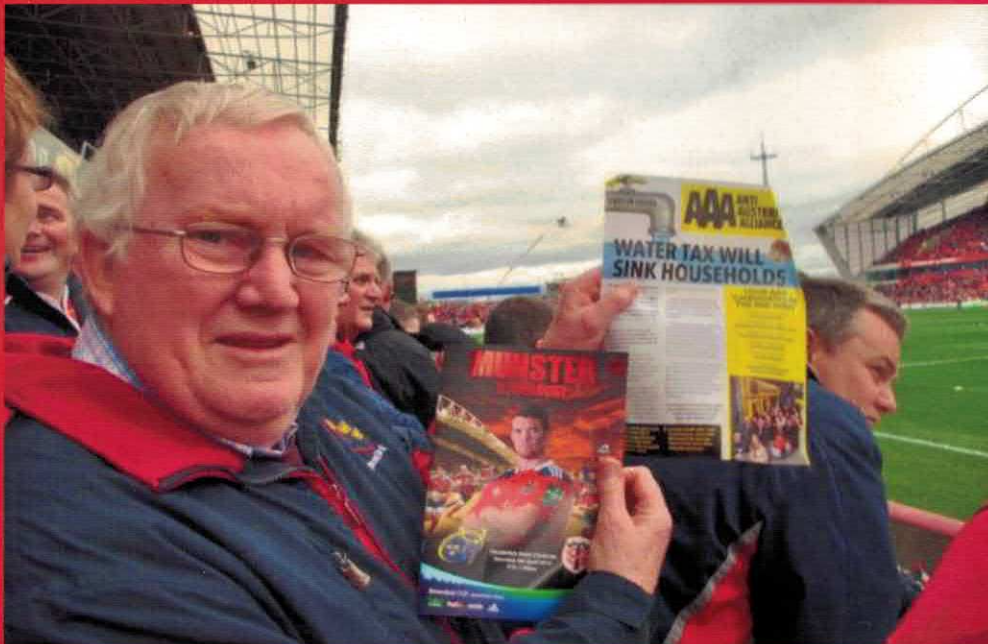


Pat outside the AAA HQ 2014



Pat O'Connor 1948-2015

This pamphlet is a keepsake in remembrance of our dear friend and comrade, Pat O'Connor, who passed away on August 3, 2015. In a very fleeting way it recalls the political issues Pat was engaged in over the decades from the 1960s. The movement for socialism had lost a resolute fighter but his steadfastness to the cause of labour and justice over such a long period can be an inspiration to a new generation picking up the torch.



Pat O'Connor – Socialist and sports fan.

## Down the decades



Pat O'Connor opposing racism in the period of apartheid...



...and calling for financial support for the struggle against austerity in more recent times



Pat O'Connor

### Politics – Activities - Campaigns

1968 - 1974

- Limerick Young Socialist 1968
- 1968 Irish Young Socialists (Labour Party)
- Supports EI Strike in Shannon
- Close to Official Republican Movement – interested in their potential for revolutionary politics.
- Opposition to Vietnam War – campaigns against visit to Ireland of US President Nixon. (1970)
- Anti-Internment Campaign (1971-75)
- Socialist Labour Alliance (1970/71)
- Anti-Apartheid – Protests against Springboks (1970)

- Founding member of Revolutionary Marxist Group (RMG) (1971)
- Campaigned for No vote in EEC Referendum (1972)
- Marches to The Curragh Camp in support of Republican Prisoners (1972/73)
- Campaigns in Support of Price Sisters/Michael Gaughan/Frank Stagg

#### 1975 – 1982

- Support for Spanish anti-Fascist struggle – pickets and protests
  - Chile Solidarity Committee – political and practical support for Chilean refugees
  - Part of founding group of Limerick Family Planning Clinic
  - RMG changes its name to Movement for a Socialist Republic (MSR) (1976)
- A fluent Spanish speaker, Pat acts as an interpreter for visiting Spanish speaking comrades of the Fourth International, the international organisation to which RMG, MSR and PD belonged.
- The Bottom Dog (1976) – Pat is leading member of group around the paper and was a prolific contributor and speaker at its public meetings.
  - Support for Ferenka workers. Co-author of the Ferenka Pamphlet with Joe Harrington and Mary O'Donnell, defending the workers there..
  - 1977 General Election – Bottom Dog Candidate Joe Harrington
  - Foundation of Socialist Labour Party - SLP (1977) – member of Republican Socialist Tendency within SLP with other PD comrades.
  - Merger of MSR with Peoples Democracy – under PD name.
  - Limerick Campaign Against Repression/Support for Murrays and IRSP 5
  - 1979 Local Elections – Joe Harrington, Socialist Labour Party candidate.
  - Founding member of Limerick H-Block/Armagh Committee (1979) – a key activist, speaker and strategist of local H-Block campaign
  - Campaigned in support of Solidarity Trade Union in Poland 1980 - 82
  - 1981 & 1982 (Feb) General Elections – Joe Harrington People's Democracy
  - 1981 – winding up of Bottom Dog

#### 1983 - 1990

- Opposed the 1983 United States-led invasion of the of Grenada. While visiting the USA, Pat addresses a meeting organised by the US SWP on the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland and opposing the visit of US President Reagan to Ireland
- Anti-Amendment Campaign – opposed 8th Amendment on Abortion

- 1984 European Elections – supports Bernadette McAliskey's campaign in the North.
- Actively supports British Miners' Strike (1984/85)
- Active solidarity work in support of struggles in Latin America – especially Chile, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Helps organise Limerick part of Irish tour by revolutionary musical group from Nicaragua. (1984)
- 1984 Actively opposes visit to Ireland by US President Reagan.
- 1985 Local Elections – Director of Elections for Joe Harrington, People's Democracy, who was elected to Limerick City Council.
- 1985 Significant schism within PD as some key activists leave to join SF. Pat supports majority of members who agree to maintain the organisation.
- 1986 – First Referendum on Divorce
- 1987 General Election – supports Pdraig Malone (SF)
- Opposition to Single European Act
- Activist within the ant-extradition campaign – supports Fr Paddy Ryan (Anti-Extradition Candidate) in 1989 European Elections.
- Anti-Water Charges Campaign – key activist

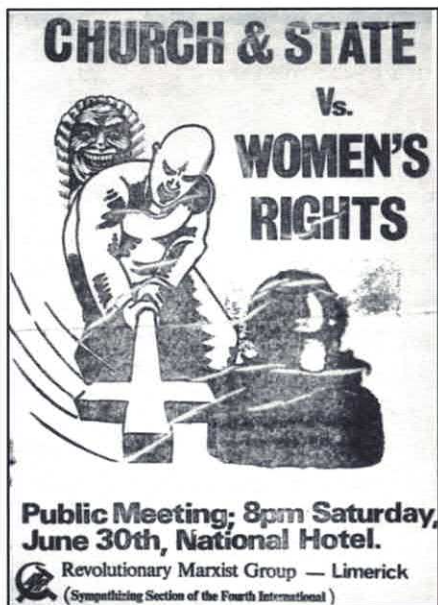
#### 1990 – 2000

- 1991 Local Elections – Joe Harrington (PD) re-elected to Limerick City Council and is joined on the Council by anti-water charges activists John Gilligan (Ind.), John Ryan (WP) and Sean Griffin (Lab.)
- Opposes Gulf War (1991)
- 1995 Second Divorce Referendum
- Supports campaign for Release of Republican Prisoners in wake of IRA Ceasefire – although generally critical of the Peace Process from a revolutionary socialist and anti-imperialist standpoint.
- Involved in Irish Committee for a Marxist Programme – a PD initiative to foster revolutionary left unity.
- 1996 PD dissolves itself and re-constitutes as Socialist Democracy
- 1998 Opposes Good Friday Agreement
- Joe Harrington elected Mayor of Limerick for 1998/99
- 1999 Joe Harrington retires from Limerick City Council after 14 years – Pat supports Pdraig Malone (SF) in 1999 Local Elections.

#### 2000 - 2015

- 2003 Campaigns against Second Gulf War and US led invasion of Iraq.
- Opposes use of Shannon Airport by US troops and aircraft.

- Gives critical support to SF in 2004 Local Elections and 2007 General Election
- 2011 General Election – Gives critical support to both Maurice Quinlivan (SF) and Cian Prendiville (SP).
- Supports campaign against Household Charge and the later Property Tax.
- Heavily involved in evolving movement against Water Charges.
- Gave critical support to United Left Alliance (2011-2014)
- 2014 Active in Anti-Austerity Alliance and was part of the local election campaign that saw three AAA members elected to Limerick Council.
- 2015 Treasurer of Limerick AAA.



Posters from the past



## Learning from the Limerick Soviet.

*Pat O'Connor was closely involved in popularising the story of the Limerick Soviet of 1919 as an example of the ability of the working class to organise itself to bring about change and treachery of the 'Labour leaders'. He was involved in the production of all five editions of Raynor Lysaght's The Story of the Limerick Soviet. The following is taken from the foreword he wrote for the last edition.*

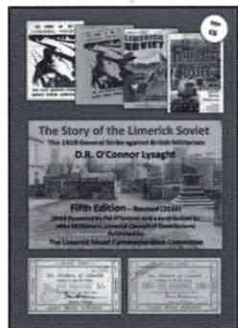
The first few decades of the 20th century marked an intense period of working class and socialist struggle. At a time when the aristocracy and barons of industry called on the masses it employed to spill their blood in the pursuit of ruling class interest in the battle fields of Europe, the working class developed a new sense of confidence. This was represented in the emergence of a strong Trade Union Movement. In the aftermath of the Great War, uprisings occurred in Germany, Hungary, Austria and Italy. Of course the Russian revolution of 1917 set an example that the workers of Britain and Ireland followed in their struggle for the forty hour week.

It was against this background that the events that became known as the Limerick Soviet began. What emerges from this struggle is the linkage between the social economic and national struggles. In 1919, despite Britain's protestations that it was the main defender of 'small nations', it occupied all of Ireland with an iron fist. In a secret document issued by the Royal Irish Constabulary in March 1919 Ireland was described as being ...'unquestionably in a highly inflammable condition ... at no time was there more urgent necessity for the presence of an overpowering military force'. This declaration, which was not for public consumption, clearly outlines the role of Britain, an occupying force, in its relationship with the Irish populace. No surprise then that young Bobby Byrne was arrested in January for his Republican activities. Bobby, as well as being a member of the Irish Volunteers, was a leading figure in the Post Office Workers' Union. His subsequent hunger strike and attempted rescue, which led to his death in a cross fire at the City Home hospital, opened up a series of events that could have changed the course of Irish history.

The declaration of a state of emergency by the British Government caused the trade unions and Republican activists to unite in a situation of Dual Power. The Limerick Council of Trade Unions co-ordinated all of the activities that would normally be carried out by capitalist commerce.

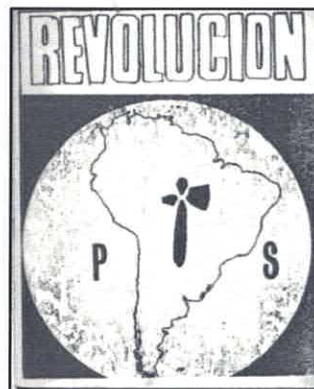
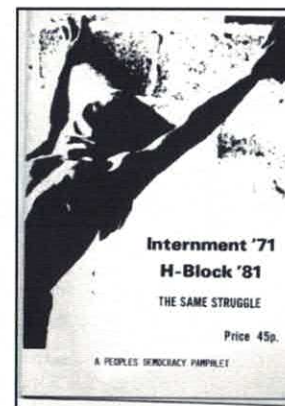
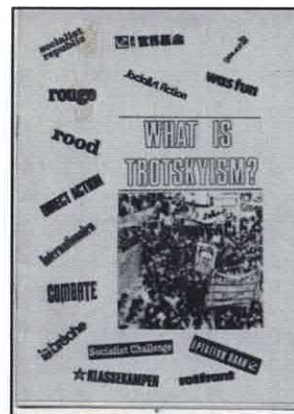
They made their own bread, printed their own money and policed their own communities to such an extent that there was a marked decrease in petty crime and no incidents of looting were reported. The Strike Committee also issued its own publication and the Workers' Bulletin of April 18th. 1919 reported "tis true that the British soldiers have been asked in the past to do the dirty work of their capitalist bosses; men who enlisted 'to fight for small nationalities' have been forced to dragoon their fellow workers, of course in the interests of freedom moryah...". This passage captures the twinning of the National and Social struggle, underpinning the imperialist and anti-working class nature of the British occupation. This is in the same genre of Connolly's ideas when he declared that 'only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland'. (1910).

The Limerick Soviet in its two week epic struggle was a microcosm of how the Irish struggle for freedom could succeed, whereby, as Connolly prophesied, working people could be the only class to deliver it. However, then as now the leadership and support required was not forthcoming. The Limerick General Strike of 1919 came to an end because the Labour leadership vacillated in its support. The Catholic Church, through its Bishop Dr. Hallinan, used the Labour Executive's suggestion that the city be evacuated (a conscious excuse to avoid a general strike) as a signal to unite with the Mayor in calling for an end to the strike. In addition, the Railwaymen's Union's refusal to back the strike sounded a further death knell! Of course, the Chamber of Commerce also lent its comments as the Strike petered out adding the perennial chant that strikes always cause hardship! Rayner Lysaght has played a significant part in popularising and explaining the Limerick Soviet and in this fifth edition of his "The Story of the Limerick Soviet" he continues to do this important work.



Pat with members of the Limerick Soviet Commemoration Committee

## Publications that Pat O'Connor helped to produce back the years



In 1999, Pat at the placing of a plaque on Thomond Bridge to mark the 70th anniversary of the Limerick Soviet.

Mid-1970s 52 page pamphlet on the closure of Ferenka.  
Pat O'Connor was co-author.



**Ferenka**

THE BIGGEST SINGLE JOB LOSS  
IN THE HISTORY OF THE 26 COUNTIES

AS SEEN FROM THE WORKERS SIDE

Compiled for the Bottom Dog group by  
Pat O'Connor  
Joe Harrington  
Mary O'Donnell.

We would like to extend special thanks  
to the following :

Steve McDonagh  
Jim Pidgeon  
Former Ferenka shop stewards who checked  
the draft of this pamphlet for factual  
errors.



Pat chats with his old friend, Roger (Ruairi) Faligot, on a visit to Brittany



ELECTION AGENT

County Courthouse,  
LIMERICK.

DAIL ELECTION 1982.

Constituency of LIMERICK EAST/WEST

Admit bearer Pat O'Connor  
to the counting of the Votes.

P. B. O GADHRA,  
Returning Officer.

Peoples Democracy Election Campaign  
109 O'Malley Park  
Limerick June 7 '81

Two Belfast City Councillors visited Limerick on Sunday and addressed a number of aftermass election meetings in the Limerick East constituency. Councillor John McAnulty and Councillor Fergus O'Hare, who unseated Gerry Pitt MP in the recent 6 County local elections, called on voters in the area to cast their votes for Peoples Democracy candidate, Joe Harrington.

Both Councillors spoke of the support which was evident for the prisoners in the country as a whole. Cllr McAnulty said he believed that the widespread concern for the H-Block prisoners would be reflected in a large vote for candidates who actively support the prisoners and for the prisoner candidates who are standing in other parts of the country.

Cllr O'Hare called on Limerick people to vote for Joe Harrington "so as to show the incoming government that it should stand up to Mrs Thatcher on the question of the H-Blocks."

Both Councillors also expressed their support for the prisoner candidate in Clare, Tom McAllister.

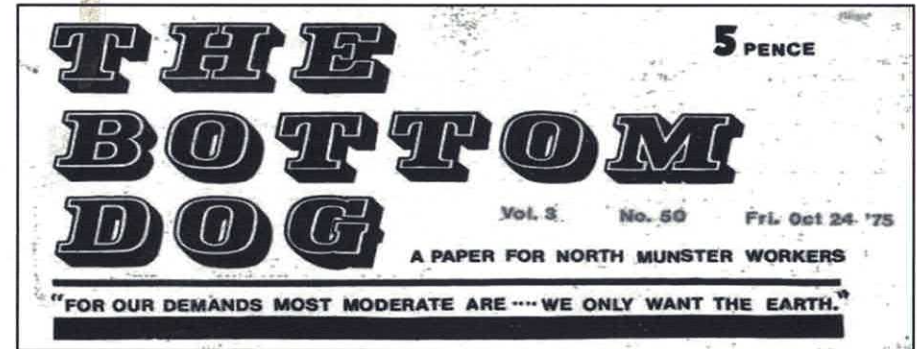
Earlier, Bernadette McAliskey issued the following statement. "A vote for Joe Harrington is a vote against the torture and humiliation of young Irishmen and women. It is a vote to stand up to Mrs Thatcher and force her to implement the 5 demands. Joe Harrington has been a tireless and consistent worker for the 5 demands of the prisoners. I support his candidature and would urge Limerick people to vote Joe Harrington No 1 on 'une IIth'".

*Pat O'Connor Election Agent.*

Pat celebrated some election victories!



Pat was one of the founder members of the Bottom Dog and was one of its most frequent contributors. This was one of his articles...



### Ferenka – The union Reaction...

On Saturday, October 3rd, the Labour Party Mayor of Limerick, Thady Coughlan, organised a protest march through the streets of the city. It was supported by all leading trade union officials in the area. It was unique in so far as it was the first Trade Union march to pass through the city for many years, this despite the fact that in the last 12 months we have witnessed the closure of such established industries as Danus and Limerick Shoe Factory while widespread contraction and rationalisation has cost hundreds of workers their jobs in such place as SPS, IPI, Lana Knit, EI and now Ranks to mention but a few. With 5000 workers unemployed Limerick would be the ideal setting for a mass mobilisation against unemployment and redundancies. However, this was no such march – but a demonstration against the kidnapping of Ferenka's Managing Director, Dr. Herrema. In looking at the composition of the "protesters" mingled in with the union "leadership" could be seen fully paid up members of the FUE and loyal staff members of the Ferenka Steel Cord Works at Annacotty. On reading the slogans on the placards – *Release our Boss* and *Dr Herrema is a co-worker* – one could follow the logic of the presence of the latter in the march.

The kidnapping of Dr Herrema, who, at the time of writing, is still being held, apparently in conditions of luxury when compared to the tortures that have been inflicted on hundreds of internees (also victims of kidnapping but in this case being held for up to three years) has crystallised for many workers the real role and nature of their trade union leadership. This is one of allying themselves with the hypocritical outrage of the institutions of respectability in an unpalatable display of opportunism. After all, this type of event carries with it a whole barrage of publicity, not only local and national but international as well. The union bureaucracy has to be seen active in its capacity of "responsible leadership". This is the kind of responsibility which enables the railroading through Congress of National Wage Agreements which curtail the bargaining power of the Trade Union Movement and the right to strike. It's the same "responsibility" which motivates union officials to try and mop up strikes as

quickly as possible no matter how unfavourable the settlement may be to the workers involved.

In the strike at Callins in Shannon the workers were informed by management that the less publicity given to it the more favourable it would be to the workers in the final settlement. This was obviously a tactic to defuse any support that was building up in favour of the strikers. However, the significant thing here is that the union official accepted this while he was quite prepared to give publicity to the trade union opposition to the abduction of Dr Herrema when, in this case, it may well have forestalled the kidnapers in reaching a compromise on their remands.

The disappearance of the Managing Director of Ferenks has given the media great scope to develop one of their pet stories; the great benefits that foreign industrialists bring to this country. Many fears are being expressed that the kidnapping will discourage prospective Multi-nationals from setting up here. However, this is not the condition that they base their decision on but on such things as the availability of cheap labour, the lack of militant trade union organisation and above all the docile governments that are willing to generously distribute tax free concessions.... In Latin America where there are murderous dictatorships and, as a result, guerrilla organisations which commonly use kidnapping as a tactic firms like Ferenka and I.T.T. (which is acknowledged as having played a not so significant role in the overthrow of the Allende government in Chile) can be found in great numbers.

In the statement handed by Nicholas McGrath ITGWU to Thady Coughlan (who is making great political mileage out of the affair) at the end of the 7,000 strong march truly reflected the pet role being played by the union in Ferenka. Contained in it was a boast that during the past year and a half not a single strike had occurred, officially or unofficially, with the exception of the recent fitters' strike. This was not so much that the unions had nothing to grieve about but more so that the Union bureaucracy was well enough able to police the workers, especially since the firm needed to maintain profits to tide them over the present economic recession even if this meant leaving off workers in the process.

James Connolly, founder the ITGWU, would not see the role of multi-nationals in the same way as his counterparts of to-day. He wrote on the subject in *Erin's Hope - The End and the Means*. "Even under the most favourable circumstances, even if by some miracle, we were able to cover the green fields of Ireland with huge ugly factories, with chimneys belching forth volumes of poisonous smoke and coating the island with a sooty desolation - even then we would quickly find that under the conditions born of the capitalist system our hope of keeping our feet as a manufacturing nation would depend on our ability to work harder and longer for a lower wage than the other nations of Europe in order that our middle class may have the opportunity of selling their goods at a lower price than their competitors. This is equivalent to saying that our chances of making Ireland a manufacturing country depend on us becoming the lowest blacklegs in Europe". Yes, with Nicholas McGrath and his cohorts, the ITGWU has come a long way since Connolly's day.

## Pat O'Connor



**A socialist among us; going back to 68,  
A lifetime dedicated to a dream,  
On the workers side when needed and when the going got tough  
A willingness to swim against the stream.**

**To the office and the factory, the campus and the street  
He took a message workers understand  
That the wrongs and the oppression that working people face  
Won't be put right except by workers' hand**

**There were some who promised victory if workers were to take  
The opportunist's shortcut now and then  
"Be moderate, be reasonable, and play it by their rules  
Be "practical" - the only way to win".**

**But Pat would trudge the narrow road that's revolution-bound  
And set aside the plots and schemes and cant.  
And on behalf of workers he raised the battle cry  
"We're Moderate - the earth is all we want",**

**He pointed to James Connolly beneath the starry plough  
He pointed to the revolution's birth  
When men of property are gone and their power will be no more  
And the ninety nine percent will own the earth.**

**With Pat we raised the red flag and sung the protest songs  
And marched and rallied against the powers that be  
And now we march without him on the road he helped to build  
Towards the working classes final victory.**

Joe Harrington





September 1976, Thomas St Corner, Limerick Campaign Against Repression. From the left; Joe Harrington, Kieran Allen, Jim McNamara (speaking), Pat O'Connor, Padraig Malone and Stella Makowski.

## Obituary: Pat O'Connor, 1948-2015

D.R.O'Connor Lysaght 12 August 2015

Pat O'Connor's death deprives Ireland of a fine singer, a good parent, a good husband, a good friend and a great socialist. Many can claim to the first three titles. Few combine them with the last. That fact makes it the more necessary for his life to be celebrated here. Many more signed up for the struggle; very few fought it as consistently and staunchly as did he. Whether it was marching for political prisoners, picketing recalcitrant capital, canvassing, editing the revived *Bottom Dog* or organizing the commemoration of the Limerick Soviet he was to be seen in the thick of the action. Revolutionary socialist activism is, of course, a gruelling profession. It is well to ask how his activism was maintained compared to the dissipation of that of so many of his contemporaries, who had shown more initial enthusiasm and who seemed to enjoy greater physical stamina than he.

The answer must be that Pat entered the struggle unencumbered with the illusions that stimulated others before failing them. From the beginning, he knew that the road would be long and hard but he knew, also, that it had to be travelled. He recognized that the struggle for national unity then at its most intense, was one that could be achieved only by revolutionary means, that this would involve the mobilizing of the workers throughout Ireland to overthrow both the twenty-six county state and the six county province as against the brave but doomed strategy of relying on the arms of a minority representing a political minority of a religious minority in a territorial segment to drive the British Army into the sea and that revolutionary socialists could not bypass it. Acknowledging this, he was realistic about both immediate and ultimate possibilities. When the writer was staying in Limerick to try to organize a branch there it was often Pat who deflated the bubble of his impatience. He softened the sharpness of the dichotomy in his perception by a dry wit which cannot be reproduced in print.

It should not be assumed that Limerick itself posed a particular problem. While it was still the city of confraternities and of the anti-Semitic boycott of 1904, it had a relatively small but real countervailing left wing tradition in unearthing which Pat played his part. His problems and those of his comrades were with those who claimed to speak for this tradition. The increasingly rightist populism of deputy Steve Coughlan was too blatant to be a real threat. More serious was Jim Kemmy, a principled hard working reformist who believed in the myth that the Northern Irish Protestants constituted a distinct nation, denounced republicanism as Fascist and attacked anyone who allied with them, however temporarily. As opponents of partition from a clear revolutionary socialist standpoint, our Irish section had to fight to grow in Limerick more than elsewhere. Nonetheless, it did grow slowly until the end of the seventies.

The hunger strikes narrowed its field of manoeuvre. The republican movement emerged not only larger but ready to benefit from a new departure that would take into account socialist critiques and answer them sufficiently to fool people that they were revolutionary socialists rather than taking the slippery slope followed by so many of their predecessors into reformism. At the same time, and not just in Ireland, socialism itself was under pressure from that imperialist offensive identified with the names of Reagan and Thatcher, and which the leaders of the reformist left, including Kemmy, led the way in appeasing.

Pat O'Connor fought against the tide when others around him went under. As there were no other major initiatives open to him other than propaganda, he produced propaganda. The Bottom Dog was maintained, if irregularly and, on the broader theoretical front, he was a leading figure in the Limerick Soviet Commemoration Committee. In this last, he understood, better than the writer, the full significance of the event commemorated as an outstanding example of peaceful working class resistance to imperialism and as a launching pad for a workers' republic that was sabotaged by the political cowardice and organizational manoeuvring of the official national leaders of the class that staged it.

The writer has good memories of Pat: the political discussions in the kitchen of his flat in Rathbane, his encouragement when the writer wondered if his account of the Soviet was not better than Kemmy's (Don't be silly! He would walk the walk by publishing the paper as a pamphlet), Pat's fiftieth birthday party when all sections of Limerick's left came to celebrate his life. His second marriage when he presented the writer's wife with the cake to celebrate her simultaneous birthday. Less happily, there were the times when Pat turned up at Limerick station to greet the writer only to find that he had taken a different train to the one expected. Finally there was the last meeting at the premier of the Limerick Soviet DVD on Mayday last. Despite failing health he behaved with his usual ironic. The said DVD leaves its viewers with him giving the penultimate analysis of the event, as is only proper.

On behalf of *Socialist Democracy* commiserations are sent to all close to Pat: his wife Brima, his ex-wife and long standing friend Mary, his daughter Karen, his grandchildren and his siblings. In such cases, it is common to say that the subject's like will not be seen again. Here it can be expected that the struggle will disprove that cliché. The future of humanity requires it.



Pat with AAA comrades David Vallely and Cian Prendiville



Pat O'Connor addresses a gathering on a citywide tour of places connected to the Limerick Soviet