

IN DEFENCE OF IRISH REPUBLICANISM

Written by RSF President Des Dalton, 2013.

Many will find the following uncomfortable reading while more will argue the issues dealt with here should be avoided at all costs in the interest of 'unity'. I believe that to brush these issues under the carpet instead of confronting them head on would be to do a disservice to Irish Republicanism. I would go further and say that to confront these issues is a duty that can no longer be ignored. A time comes when certain things must be said and placed on the public record.

Irish Republicanism is possibly one of the oldest revolutionary traditions in the world. Its roots reach right back to the end of the 18th Century and the foundation of the Society of United Irishmen in 1791.

Throughout that long history it has faced many threats and at certain periods it appeared that it had been extinguished – in the 1940s 26-County Justice Minister Gerry Boland boasted that the IRA was dead and that he had killed it. Boland was no more successful than many who went before or would come after him, despite centuries of coercion the revolutionary flame has been kept alight. Republicanism has survived the gallows, the firing squad, internment camps, and prisons.

The full panoply of draconian laws and repression has been employed by Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House in an attempt to extinguish that flame. That they have not succeeded in doing so can be put down to a number of reasons. However one reason that stands out over all others is the simple fact that Irish Republicanism has commanded, at the very least, the respect and regard of large sections of the Irish people.

Even those who would declare themselves as opponents of the revolutionary Republican tradition have admitted to a grudging respect for the idealism and integrity that underpins it. Writing in the Irish Times on September 14 John Waters, whilst dismissing the organisations to which Bobby Sands and Patsy O'Hara belonged to in withering terms he still acknowledged: "there was something noble and redemptive about the conviction and sacrifice of these men".

Today the ranks of the enemy have been swelled with erstwhile comrades now prepared to administer and enforce British rule, but a new threat has emerged in recent years and in many ways one which is potentially the most serious of all that Irish Republicanism has faced throughout its long history.

The emergence of groupings styling themselves as 'Republican' but who in reality are merely using that noble title to mask their real purpose of extortion and racketeering. In some cases such groupings masquerade as anti-drugs activists, posing as 'champions of the community'. These gangs are an insidious threat to the very survival of the Republican ideal.

These pseudo-Republican groups seek to control their communities through fear. Posing as revolutionaries hides the grim reality that the only war they wage is not one of national liberation but instead a war on the youth of their own communities. The forcing of a father to present his son for a punishment shooting as happened in Derry is medieval and far removed from any ideal of progressive Republicanism.

The drugs' gangs who peddle their wares in communities throughout Ireland and across all classes are enemies of the Irish people. The community and political activists who oppose them deserve our full and active support. Irish Republicans are rightly proud of the part they played in groups such as Concerned Parents Against Drugs in the 1980s, and today it is vital that Irish Republicans continue to

stand by their communities both urban and rural in opposing these dealers of death and social destruction.

However the pseudo-Republican groupings that take money from the drug dealers are no less parasitical than the drug dealers themselves. In many ways they are worse in that they leech from the communities they purport to defend – in effect they are drug dealers by proxy with the added insult of sullyng the noble name of Republicanism in doing so. The activities of these pseudo-Republican gangs have the potential to eat away like a cancer at the very heart of Irish Republicanism, leaving in their wake an empty husk with neither relevance nor credibility.

The duty to halt this slide lies with those who claim the title deeds of Republicanism. We have a bounden duty to hold out against this hijacking of the Republican ideal; we must lead by example in ensuring that authentic Irish Republicanism continues to live in the hearts of the Irish people.

It is not enough to claim those title deeds without acting on them. To do so we in Republican Sinn Féin must ensure that a clear distinction can be made between what represents true Republicanism and those who instead provide a perverse and twisted parody of it. Over the past two years Republican Sinn Féin have been direct targets of such activity. A Limerick led grouping has attempted to steal our identity and good name in order to cloak their criminal activities. This particular gang meet the criteria of the classic black operations or ‘black ops’ engaged in by state forces whereby a shadow grouping is set up which is a perversion of everything that the legitimate revolutionary movement represents. The purpose of these bogus groupings is to sow confusion, lower morale and discredit the genuine revolutionary movement.

In the past, Republican Sinn Féin has been accused by its opponents of being “elitist”. I believe this is an accusation we should not be afraid of but indeed embrace. When it comes to ensuring our movement is a credible, motivated revolutionary political organisation to be described as elitist should be considered a badge of honour.

The Republican Movement throughout its history has prided itself on attracting the most idealistic, sincere and able of each generation. In his seminal history of the IRA The Secret Army writing of the Republican Movement in the 1920s, J Bowyer Bell had this to say: “The army council meetings and GHQ conferences seethed with ideas, disputes, options and suggestions; despite the attrition of time and politics, there remained within the leadership as much talent as could be found within one group in Ireland.” Thomas Davis sets out the what is required in forging a national movement: “We must be disciplined – disciplined in rigorous virtue and made strong in a sense of justice, truth and national trustfulness.” Terence Mac Swiney too sets a high standard: “We must get a proper conception of the great cause we stand for, its magnitude and majesty, and that to be worthy of its service we must have a standard above reproach”. In the Ireland of the 21st century that should be the bar we aim for. It is from such material that revolutions are fermented and through whom ideals and a cause live on.

To do other wise is to surrender a revolutionary tradition - which has survived the best efforts of both the British and 26-County states to destroy it – to dark forces dancing to the twitch of many puppet-masters.

I believe it is fitting to finish with the words of the 1916 Proclamation; these are words which all who seek to take up the standard of Republicanism should ponder long and hard: “we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine.”