

The following educational lecture was delivered by John Rees of the Bobby Sands / Anne Devlin Cumann, Nottingham, England to the 112<sup>th</sup> Ard Fheis of Sinn Féin.

## Decade of Centenaries

*"Leadership... organically rooted in our communities & workplaces"*



### **In the decade of the centenaries why is Education for practice so important?**

Firstly because in this period, 2016 – 2023 we will see a revision of history, supported by numerous scholarly articles and political narratives that over the years have attempted to airbrush the Irish Revolution of 1918 – 1923 out of history. This must be combatted.

Secondly this revision will involve the 'great men' view of history – that the period was characterised by war and negotiation led by the likes of Michael Collins on the one side, Lloyd George and Churchill on the other. The Irish people apparently absent!

Thirdly it will involve sanitising 1918 – 1923, pointing to 'created facts' about how the IRA fought a clean war for independence that was ultimately negotiated into a peace around the table leading to the 1921 treaty followed by an 'unfortunate civil war'.

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Fourthly and positively we have to, from the history of the period, show that indeed a revolutionary process was taking place in which large numbers of people in both urban and rural social spaces were taking strike action, land seizures,, mass boycotts, creating soviets and facing a British empire determined to crush such an uprising with murder and arson.

That Revolution emerged from the desires of 100,000 soldiers, demobilised, who wanted land that they could farm, it emerged from a rejection of conscription, it emerged from the slump of 1920.

A Revolution that fused National freedom with real political, social, economic and cultural demands for a New Ireland and a new society – Eire Nua and Saol Nua have their history in this process and these events.

Fifthly it will require an honest accounting with our own history. The reality that the Republican movement, for instance in Mayo, refused to engage in support of land seizures and indeed supported the land owners, the latter looking to the Republican courts to defend their property rights.

This is no idle historicism, we need to claim the mantle of radical revolutionary Republicanism and remember the journey of the Provisionals is a contemporary example of those who in the period 1917 – 1923 ran away from revolutionary demands for a new society and took up the green flag and promoted a nationalist ideology, the content of which was Arthur Griffiths militant advocacy of Irish capitalism.

The Provisionals have trodden that path – those who forget history are doomed to repeat it! And dare I say that the tragedy of counter revolution (from 1921 – 1923) is repeated today in the farce of the Provisionals attempt to face, Janus like, both established capital and Irish working people across the 32 counties.

Education for Practice clearly struggles to rescue our history from revisionists and those who simply wish to forget those years from 1916 all the way through to the embedding of counter revolution in the so called free state and the orange state in the six counties. Truly Connolly's carnival of reaction.

Education for practice however cannot simply be an honest accounting of our past. It also must guide our contemporary practice, enable us to ensure that principles and strategy are never reduced to replaceable tactics and indeed tactics are never elevated to strategy and principles. So often movements that begin to accommodate to the rule of capital will begin with a process of claiming that a strategy or set of principles are purely tactical manoeuvres in the struggle for a greater goal.

This is no dog whistle moment. Read the history behind the junking of abstentionism and indeed before that the ditching of Eire Nua and Saol Nua by the Provisionals.

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For Adams and his like principles and strategy were subsumed by the tactics required for personal advancement and the narrow needs of his own sectarian grouping. The result? The end of the orange state and the birth of the sectarian state that is the six counties.

So how do we create Education for practice and indeed challenge the use of education as a purely ideological tool for compromise?

Importantly, I think we should begin by rejecting the 'banking concept of education'.

Paulo Friere developed a concept of educational practice in which shared knowledge formed the basis of the educational process. He explicitly rejected the notion of the 'expert' teacher and the 'ignorant' student, whose head was to be filled with the facts created by his/her teacher as a result of the latter's control over information about our social world.

So we create an holistic view that our understanding of our social, political, economic and cultural world is a shared understanding that explicitly rejects the notion of the expert, 'the seer' the Adams of this planet and with Camus posits a different relationship in the process of learning and development:

I paraphrase Camus here, it's not an exact translation!

" Do not follow me, for I may not lead,

Do not walk in front of me for I may not follow,

But walk beside me and be my friend."

That discussion between friends, which has powerful antecedents in our own cultural history, begins with a principled and philosophical approach to life that rejects the great leader and goes to the heart of our co-operative and Socialist vision of Saol Nua.

It is admirably summed up in the teaching a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Bishop – the Bishop of Orleans, Felix Duponloup, who in his classes on liturgy impressed upon his students the following catechism:

"Where does humanity come from?

Where is it going?

How does humanity proceed?"

And his pupil, Paul Gaugin, in a painting composed in Tahiti, translated that into:

"Where do we come from?

What are we?

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Where are we going?"

These profoundly materialist questions, notwithstanding their source in Catholic social teaching, I would argue prevent, stop any slide into opportunism and pragmatism precisely because we constantly challenge and question a political and social strategic and tactical turn that might divert us from the struggle for a new Ireland and indeed a new Scotland, Wales, England and Cornwall.

These questions form the narrative basis for a discourse throughout our society that will be created by Organic intellectuals – those who Gramsci described as the activists and movers of a movement built in our communities and workplaces. Leaders, yes, but only leaders in the sense that they walk with people as guides toward a common destiny.

Break that bond – ‘indeed follow the leader not the cause’ and you create the mire that drew the Provisionals into abandoning our programme with their capitulation to the institutions of Capital – Leinster house, Stormont and Westminster.

### **So what is this process – Education for practice?**

In the first instance it is the use of statistics, empirical information, the political, social, economic and cultural information that bombards us daily, as the basis for our political argument, our own discourse and narratives in the political spaces we inhabit.

Information at this level is often characterised as a set of facts about any given situation.

The point here is that facts are socially constructed, they are opinions, ideas and indeed ideology of different classes, groups of people as they seek to colour that information with their own ideologically driven views. Our task is to use the information to hand to create new facts – to argue cogently that a set of social and economic relationships in the two failing states in Ireland are not the new and immutable facts of life for us.

That all the statistical and empirical information, their ‘facts’, is no more than dry as dust economics dressed up as fact, as the cover for the ideology of neo liberalism.

But we can use the data, the economic and monetary statistics to resist this ideology, we can create a new fact – the fact of a new Ireland.

In the creation of new facts – Eire Nua, Saol Nua – we draw on our principles, strategy and the tactics of our movement’s programme for a democratic socialist 32 county federal republic.

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These principles, strategy and flexible tactics emerge from and are informed by our history, they meet contemporary Ireland in a dialectical relationship.

What does this mean? All the evidence, all the information points to a crisis in the body politics of both states, quantitative evidence that change must take place. Our programme meets that quantitative evidence head on and points to how a new governance and a new way of organising society will provide the qualitative material for the leap from the cronyism and sectarianism of the failed states into a new way of organising society that indeed calls back into our history, a history of collective and co-operative endeavour so clearly written about by James Connolly.

Two opposites, daily life in the social spaces of 2016 and our islands history can be united in an understanding that our fight for the principles of the proclamation will meet the full force of the state and the rule of capital: the bloody struggle of 1916 replicated in our in current war for peace and social justice.

Our fight to grasp political and social power for our people in 2016 based on and rooted in history and requiring the people of our century to rise to this challenge will be met by bloody resistance from the ruling class.

### **Why?**

Because Eire Nua and Saol Nua directly challenge the capitalist law of value, the use of its power to dictate how the relationship between the forces of production and relationships of production are governed and steered by neo liberal ideology. The point here is that we are again presented with 'facts'. The 'fact' that nothing is produced without profit, Saol Nua confronts this as it confronts the power of the big corporations, the latter hand in glove with both the 26 and 6 county states.

Our practice then in organising protest, resistance and ultimately organising for the new society should be informed by a realisation that a commitment to British withdrawal from the 6 counties and the struggle for a new political settlement will meet, without illusion in a negotiated peace deal, a resistance from the rule of capital that will surely be expressed in armed violence from the state.

The struggle would continue on all fronts.

At their roots Eire Nua and Saol Nua throw up a powerful theoretical and practical challenge to the rule of capital on the world market. National in form they are International in content.

They have at their centre a discourse that both challenges the rule of capital and crucially proposes a method for de – coupling Ireland from the capitalist law of value.

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### How?

Through a negotiated participatory model of socialism that surely means the ruling class will come for us as they did in Chile, Venezuela, Cuba and all those historic attempts by people across the world to free themselves from the tyranny of capital.

Education for practice should engage all our efforts to understand this process, resist and prepare for Revolution.

We can excite and engage all our people and I suggest our younger people in this process in a way that no other movement can. We have the Social and political programme that points a New Ireland.

We can spell out what the struggle will mean, that goes beyond idealistic dreams of what might be.

We can do that because we can take the information of daily life, our history and principles and combine them in a programme that demands change and does not genuflect before Westminster, Stormont and Leinster House.

We can make the link between principled abstentionism and Revolutionary change, we can make that link through a rigorous programme of education through which people will make the connections between 1916 – 1923 and 2016.

At the same time this knowledge can be the bedrock for a vision of the future, one achieved through potentially bloody struggle. That struggle will forge an alliance – the working class of urban and rural communities with all of our people as they experience and face unemployment, homelessness and discrimination and oppression of all kinds.

But lets be clear, the struggle will throw up broad alliances that of their nature can be fragile and fragmentary, fluid, unless we build a conscious Republican leadership, a yeast for the risen people, a leadership formed and organically rooted in our communities and workplaces, a leadership that truly walks with the people towards Social Justice and peace – a new Ireland!

*Samhain, 2016*

*[www.rsf.ie/positionpapers](http://www.rsf.ie/positionpapers)*