

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES ON REPUBLICANISM AND SOCIALISM IN CORK CITY, 1954–69

By Jim Lane

Note: *What follows deals almost entirely with internal divisions within Cork republicanism and is not meant as a comprehensive outline of republican and left-wing activities in the city during the period covered. Moreover, these notes were put together following specific queries from historical researchers and, hence, the focus at times is on matters that they raised.*

1954

In 1954, at the age of 16 years, I joined the following branches of the Republican Movement: Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army and the Cork Volunteers' Pipe Band. The most immediate influence on my joining was the discovery that fellow Corkmen were being given the opportunity of engaging with British Forces in an effort to drive them out of occupied Ireland. This awareness developed when three Cork IRA volunteers were arrested in the North following a failed raid on a British military barracks; their arrest and imprisonment for 10 years was not a deterrent in any way. My thinking on armed struggle at that time was informed by much reading on the events of the Tan and Civil Wars. I had been influenced also, a few years earlier, by the campaigning of the Anti-Partition League. Once in the IRA, our initial training was a three-month republican educational course, which was given by Tomas Óg MacCurtain, son of the Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomas MacCurtain, who was murdered by British forces at his home in 1920. This course was followed by arms and explosives training.

From a very early stage, I associated with a small circle of people within the movement who saw themselves more as socialist republicans than simply republicans. This diverse group included a Spanish Civil War veteran, Jim O'Regan, who had also been involved in the IRA bombing campaign in England after his return from Spain. He was arrested and served about eight years in English prisons during and after World War Two. There was Norman Letchford, an Englishman who had been a member of the Connolly Association (CA) in England. The CA was a political organisation in Britain that campaigned against the partition of Ireland and was known to have links to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Then there was Gerry Higgins, who had been a member of the Cork Socialist Party (CSP) in the 1940s. He had also been a member of the Liam Mellows Branch of the Irish Labour Party. The CSP had been led by Michael O'Riordan¹, another Spanish Civil War veteran, who was also a former IRA member and former Curragh Camp internee. Mick Fitzgibbon², another ex-internee, was also in the circle. Mick worked on the railway, where he was known as a very fine trade union representative. Within the Thomas Ashe Memorial Hall, the local Sinn Féin headquarters, he regularly sold copies of the CA paper, the *Irish Democrat*. We were not organised as a group, committee or society – we simply tended to have a sharing of views. We would meet openly in the 'library'; it could be any night of the week and anyone could join in. In fact, few did, and we were generally left to ourselves.

¹ Michael 'Screwback' O'Riordan never forgot to pay attention to his native city. Regularly, down through the years, he visited the city and, on every occasion, an invitation-type meeting would be arranged in a hotel room where old comrades and potential recruits for either the IWL/IWP or CPI would meet up with him. Queen's Hotel, Parnell Place, was a favourite venue or the Munster Hotel in Coburg Street. Other Communist Party people such as Billy McCullough and Betty Sinclair were known to visit as well. At most of the meetings, attended by Jim O'Regan and Gerry Higgins in the early days, O'Riordan used to try to get Jim O'Regan to dump on the Republican Movement and join 'the party'. At that time, Jim was Adjutant of the 1st Cork Brigade IRA and had fundamental differences with O'Riordan's party on their approach to the national question. Gerry Higgins believed they did not have any policy on the national question, they just wished it would go away in the goodness of time.

² For a profile of Mick Fitzgibbon, see Uinseann MacEoin, *The IRA in the Twilight Years* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 585–92.

The 1950s was a period of great hardship in the lives of most people in Ireland, particularly the urban working class, rural labourers and small farmers. Widespread unemployment gave rise to poverty, hunger and mass emigration to Britain and America. Confidence in the politicians of Leinster House was at a very low ebb. The De Valera attempt to build an 'independent' Irish capitalism behind tariff barriers had failed. However, Sinn Féin, which did not even see itself as a political party in those days, made no serious attempt to give leadership to the people on the social issues that troubled them. They were unable to because their policies were quite similar to the Free State parties they derided – all were bourgeois democratic. Sinn Féin simply offered a more honest approach and pledged to do better than those they sought to replace. No thought of socialism entered their minds; they simply stuck with the bourgeois democratic concept of republicanism that was about 160 years old at that time. They considered that because it was revolutionary in Wolfe Tone's time, it was good enough for them. It was as though everything in the world had stopped since Tone's period. Undoubtedly, in Tone's time bourgeois democracy represented a revolutionary phenomenon and could be seen as a progressive response to the Irish situation; as a consequence, Irish republicanism could be defined as revolutionary bourgeois democracy, tailored to suit specific needs and conditions in Ireland. But, long before the 1950s, conditions in Ireland and elsewhere had changed, and the needs and demands of the people were obviously dramatically different to what they had been in the 1790s. Bourgeois democracy had ceased to be revolutionary; it had been superseded by socialist democracy.

James Connolly was among those who understood this shift and he gave great credit to both Karl Marx and Frederick Engels for their contribution in bringing it about. He said of Marx that he was 'the ablest exponent of socialism the world has seen, and the founder of that school of thought which embraces all the militant socialist parties of the world.' It needs to be stressed, however, that neither Wolfe Tone nor James Connolly was a revolutionary simply because of their participation in armed insurrection; they were so because they also advocated the most advanced democratic concepts of their time: bourgeois democracy in Tone's time and revolutionary socialism in Connolly's.

1955

This was a year of great preparation by the Cork unit of the IRA for the struggle that they knew lay ahead. Training was stepped up greatly. The weapons of the IRA at that time were the Lee Enfield .303 rifle, the Thompson sub-machine gun, the Sten sub-machine gun and Bren light machine gun. Field training usually took place at the weekend in places such as Crossbarry, Mallow and wooded areas in east Cork. Some outdoor training took place on week nights in the Black Ash area of the southside suburbs. All in all, we were fairly well trained, given that we were a volunteer army, which had to operate in conditions of high security for fear of arrest by police.

In May, Sinn Féin contested all 12 Westminster seats in the Six Counties. They won two seats – Tom Mitchell for Mid-Ulster and Philip Clarke for Fermanagh/South Tyrone – and polled 152,000 votes overall. Mick Fitzgibbon and Norman Letchford were among a group of five from Cork that went north to help with the election campaign. In the June local government elections, Sinn Féin had two members elected to the Cork Corporation. They were Liam Early and Seán Ó Murchu. Owen Harold was elected to Mallow Urban District Council. That year, as a member of my trade union, IDATU, I spent three months on picket duty during the Cork drapery strike.

In December, Norman Letchford published privately his 20-page booklet titled, *Lives, Loves and Liberties – The Heresies of a Protestant Republican* (1955).³

³ There is a copy of this pamphlet in the National Library of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin.

1956

It was another year of hard training at the Black Ash, Crossbarry, Mallow and east Cork areas. Plenty of political discussion took place among the socialist republicans on developing world events. Meanwhile, Letchford was dismissed from Sinn Féin because of the contents of his book and alleged continued membership of the Connolly Association.⁴ Though he had shown the proofs of his booklet to the Sinn Féin Comhairle Ceanntair chairman, Derek McKenna, in advance of having it printed, he was nonetheless accused of not submitting it for approval. They maintained this approval was required, even though he published and paid for it himself. Jim O'Regan was his main defender, joined by Mick Fitzgibbon, Gerry Higgins, George Sisk and myself. Obviously, censorship extended way beyond State censorship.

In November, I was unfortunate enough to receive a bad eye injury while engaged in night exercises with the IRA. This occasioned a stay of a few weeks in the Mercy Hospital, during which time my employer sacked me for absence from work. I was released from hospital in time to go to the Six Counties with my comrades for the start of the IRA 1956–62 campaign. We left from Mayfield in a covered lorry driven by Jim Woll of Cloyne. Our first stop-off was Athboy, County Meath, where we met other volunteers from Limerick, Tipperary and Wexford. Among them was Seán Sabhat, who was to be killed by British fire within three weeks. “An é seo an rud atha muid ath feitheamh le fada?” (“Is this the thing we have been waiting for, for so long?”) was his question to me when we met. It was here also that we met Seán Daly for the first time; he was a west Cork man who was in the army in Dublin.

The IRA campaign started in the Six Counties on 12 December. Interestingly, it received support in *Trud*, organ of the trade union movement in the USSR, but was condemned by the Irish communist parties. Our left-wing circle was very disappointed with that development, old comrades of Mick O’Riordan’s particularly so.

1957

The IRA campaign continued, but those Cork volunteers who had evaded capture were called home. I remember having to go to the home of Donal Keane, an IRA staff officer, to be debriefed. After it finished, I was told I was a lucky man to have managed to get back to Cork and to take his advice and not to go up to the North ever again. We soon learned that this was the view of the Cork No.1 Brigade IRA, and that they much regretted that they had ever supported the launching of the northern campaign in the first place. The O’Neill brothers, Brendan and Jim, Charlie Ronayne and myself continued to apply to be sent back on active service, but kept being refused.

I was only a short time back from the North when a general election (scheduled for 5 March) was announced. Sinn Féin entered this election, contesting 19 of the 40 constituencies in the state. They received 66,000 first preference votes in those 19 constituencies and had four candidates elected. The candidate for Cork city was Seán Hegarty, an IRA prisoner in Belfast. His imprisonment didn’t matter, as all Sinn Féin candidates were abstentionists. In the event, though he got a good vote, he missed out on the last seat. In Dublin, in order to lift their profile, a newly formed Unemployed Protest Movement (UPM) entered a candidate called Jack Murphy, who was an ex-IRA internee, and they won a seat. The UPM soon spread to Cork and elsewhere around the country. Many former members of the republican movement in Cork joined their ranks. In July, when the Fianna Fáil gov-

⁴ The following is the paragraph to which Sinn Fein took greatest offence.

‘Where were the Irish political leaders? They were in Ireland rallying the people. And what did they tell the people? Any attempt to requisition food, they were told, was an unwarranted interference with the sacred rights of property ownership. The pastors of the Catholic church denounced such “stealing” even more vehemently. So the simple Catholics who thought it better to ensure heaven for themselves than insist on having their daily bread, lay down and died. The Daniel O’Connellites who were kept well nourished to fulfil their divine mission of “liberating” Catholics, survived them. So also did the priests, we must presume, there being no record of any good shepherd dying alongside his flock. The clergy went to heaven later than their flock who, no doubt, were thankful to them for the opportunity of getting to the promised land so early.’ Norman Letchford, *Lives, Loves and Liberties* (Cork, 1955), p. 18.

ernment opened the Curragh Internment Camp to intern republicans without trial, the Cork UPM issued a strong statement condemning the action. This statement was written by Liam Flavin, a former 1940's IRA Curragh Camp internee and socialist republican.

Such support, however, was not mutual. It was made clear to members of Sinn Féin in Cork that, if they were involved in the UPM, they would have to resign or else they would be dismissed from the party. The reason given was that the UPM was now a Free State political party because Jack Murphy sat in Leinster House. Several people in our left-wing circle had been helping out the UPM. Consequently, some resignations from Sinn Féin did follow, but several of us just ignored the order and as much as dared them to take action, though nothing ever happened. Cork Sinn Féin, however, went even further than this in alienating potential support from working-class communities. For example, when a booking for the local Carpenter's Hall fell through for a UPM public meeting, due to the caretaker being absent in error, the unemployed leaders and a crowd of 40 to 50 people approached Sinn Féin at the Thomas Ashe Hall asking for the use of the main hall. They were bluntly refused. I counted upwards of a dozen republicans that night in that crowd of unemployed men, several of who were ex-internees. I wondered how Liam Flavin was feeling when he heard the refusal – he who wrote the UPM's statement of support for the republican internees who were locked up in the Curragh Camp the previous July.

A General Army Convention of the IRA was held in a Dublin suburb in November. It was held 'to regularise the new leadership, approve the progress of the campaign, and calm the doubts of the Cork unit over their losses.'⁵ Since the beginning of the campaign, following the capture on the first night of Volunteers Tony Cooney, Willie Gough and Jim Linehan at Torr Head, County Antrim, and the later capture of Volunteer John Madden at Dunnamore, County Tyrone, the Cork IRA leadership had been whinging about the extent of their losses. It had obviously become very tiresome for GHQ, having to listen to them putting forward their losses to excuse their unwillingness to supply volunteers for active service. However, because the Cork leadership were involved in acquiring arms, they were tolerated by GHQ – better, they must have thought, than face a possible split. The anxieties of the Cork leadership were calmed at the convention, which meant, in fact, that they were allowed to continue withholding their volunteers from the campaign. It was a ludicrous situation.

Shortly after the IRA convention, the republican movement updated its list of those imprisoned in British and Irish jails and this was published in the *United Irishman* in January 1958.

PRISON	NUMBER OF PRISONERS
Belfast Jail	
Penal servitude	48
Short-term	3
On remand	1
Interned without charge or trial	142
Detained awaiting trial/decision	46
Mountjoy Jail, Dublin	11
Curragh Camp (interned)	119
Wakefield Prison, England	5
Wormwood Scrubs, England	2
TOTAL	377

⁵ J.Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army* (Sphere Books edition, London, 1972) p. 370. The author of this book had the cooperation and approval of the IRA Army Council. The back cover carries the following imprimatur: 'Invaluable as an accurate chronological and coherent account of the role of the IRA since 1923.' – Cathal Goulding, IRA Chief-of-Staff.

Among the prisoners in Belfast Prison, there were three Corkmen jailed for their part in the Omagh Barracks raid in 1954 and four Corkmen jailed since the border campaign had started. Likewise, only five volunteers from the Cork Brigade IRA were interned in the Curragh Camp. Two Cork-born IRA volunteers – Seán Daly in Mountjoy Jail and Gearoid MacCarthaigh in the Curragh Camp – were domiciled in Dublin and were part of the Dublin Brigade IRA. Overall, the movement had 377 members in jails of one sort or another and, of these, the Cork Brigade IRA had a mere 12 volunteers imprisoned. Dublin had 50 members in the Curragh alone, plus 13 more in Irish and British jails. Belfast had 68 in jail overall.

Of the deaths, by shooting in Brookeborough, County Fermanagh, and the accidental explosion at Edentubber, County Louth, Wexford had lost two volunteers, Limerick lost one, Monaghan lost one, Down lost one, Armagh lost one and Louth lost one. Cork had a clean sheet.

These figures make a nonsense of the case made by the Cork Brigade IRA leadership at the November 1957 General Army Convention, and before and after, to supposedly justify exemption from armed participation in the campaign. It was pathetic special pleading and it was no surprise that many young Cork volunteers had limited respect for the local leadership.

1958

The UPM in Dublin had begun to falter after the defection of Jack Murphy, TD, from their movement. This defection occurred after the intervention of Archbishop McQuaid, who told Murphy that he was surrounded by communists and advised him to stop fronting for them in the Dáil. By early 1958, following the resignation of Murphy from Leinster House, the UPM was all but finished. The IRA campaign continued, but the Cork IRA leadership still refused to involve their volunteers in active service.

Other activities did continue. For example, on 8 May 1958, when the Holland-America liner, *Ryndam*, docked at Cobh, County Cork, a young Belfastman, Hugh Kennedy, disembarked to be met by waiting police and custom officers, who arrested him and impounded a trunk containing arms and ammunition. He was remanded in custody for a week. Ultimately, he was found guilty of attempting to smuggle the contents of the trunk into Ireland. In his possession there was also a letter, which read:

Dear Mick,

The bearer of this note is anxious to contact the right people up above. Purpose active service. The consignment he took over includes two German submachine guns, 4 P38 German automatics; all six of these fire 9mm ammo. Also two .45 auto Colts and one Carbine calibre.30. Ammo. enclosed to suit. I could have sent more, but was sceptical of weight. If all goes well, let me know if additional weight could be handled. Must close now.

All the best.
George.

Kennedy was fined £25 or three months in jail. He refused to pay the fine and was sent to Limerick Prison. Thereafter, he was known in republican circles by the sobriquet, “Machine Gun Kennedy”. The ‘Mick’ involved was a well known Cork republican, Mick McCarthy, and ‘George’ was George Harrison of New York, a well known republican arms smuggler.⁶

That spring, after over 15 months of applying in vain for active service, Brendan O’Neill and I went to see the IRA leadership, then ‘on the run’ and staying with Brendan’s uncle, Tadhg Lynch, in his home at Balbutcher, Dublin. We met with Seán Cronin (Chief of Staff), Charlie Murphy (Adjutant General) and J.B. O’Hagan (Quartermaster General). We outlined the difficulties we were having with the Cork leadership and their refusal to supply any further volunteers for active service

⁶ I am sure of these identities as I was involved with Mick McCarthy the evening before the liner docked, in an effort to try and arrange to contact Kennedy before he disembarked and advise him to abandon the trunk and introductory letter. The IRA were aware that the police were on to him.

in the northern campaign. Though it was very clear that, as leaders of the IRA, they were aware of the situation in Cork, they were also obliged to point out that we were in breach of Army procedure in going over the heads of our local leaders. We claimed extraordinary circumstances, given that the army was committed to a campaign and our area's leadership had opted out. They promised to consider our situation further and be in touch. Shortly after that, Charlie Murphy came to Cork and requested that they supply a number of volunteers for active service in an area with which we happened to be familiar. He pushed the needs of GHQ strongly, but the Cork Brigade leaders were, as ever, steadfast in their desire to stay out of an active involvement in the northern campaign. We felt this ended all our hopes of active service as part of the IRA.

A Saor Uladh (Free Ulster) member, Aloysius Hand of Clones, was killed in an armed engagement with the RUC at Clontivrim, County Fermanagh, on 2 July. Then, on 15 July, IRA Volunteer Patrick McManus was killed in an explosion on the border near Derryrealt, County Cavan. Two days later, two IRA volunteers, one from Kerry and one from Limerick, were arrested in Armagh City. These events were followed on 24 August, with the killing by the RUC of James Crossan, a Sinn Féin organiser for County Cavan. Crossan was a native of Carrigallen, County Leitrim, and was buried at Kilnavart, County Cavan. As a member of the Cork Volunteers' Pipe Band, I attended the funerals of both McManus and Crossan, as the lone piper playing a lament ahead of the cortege. The deaths of these three men, coupled with the arrests of two volunteers from nearby counties in Munster, further fuelled our fire. We felt that if volunteers from Limerick and Kerry were allowed to participate in the campaign, why should Cork volunteers be deprived of the opportunity to serve? We were also losing men such as Hand, McManus and Crossan. Were we at war or not? If we were, as most Irish republicans believed, the Cork brigade of the IRA was obliged to play the part expected of them as a section of an army of national liberation.

During September, Jim and Brendan O'Neill and I, made one last effort to be accepted for active service. We approached members of the Cork IRA staff and told them we were aware that GHQ were looking for volunteers, particularly those with some previous active service experience and that we were ready to go at short notice. Our request was immediately denied – we then told them we were going to resign, which we did the following evening at the home of Jim O'Regan, the brigade adjutant, where we handed in our resignations. We then set about collecting arms and ammunition with the intention of going to the Six Counties and assisting the campaign.

I've still got memories of Mick Fitzgibbon secretly passing around copies of the *Irish Democrat* in the Thomas Ashe Hall up to the time I left the movement. I remember reading and discussing an exchange of letters in the *Irish Democrat* that were submitted by "J.B" (Jack Bennett of Belfast), Paddy Carmody and Tom Redmond, among others, on the subject of partition and the communist policy on it. In retrospect, it is interesting that, at a time when we strongly rejected the view of Irish communists on the armed campaign, we were still reading the Connolly Association paper. It must have been because they at least provided a platform to discuss the politics of the matter and that we remained tolerant of other people's views, even though we were in disagreement with them.

Our first attempt at involving ourselves in the campaign in the North was aborted when we were involved in a car accident on the way up to the border. This accident occurred on 12 October on a road at Stormanstown, Ballymun, Dublin. Then, in December, Charlie Ronayne of the east Cork unit of the army, Brendan O'Neill and I went up with the intention of operating on our own in the border area. We accomplished this with some degree of success, considering we lacked the backup that an organisation like the IRA provided. We were successful in arranging for billets and got the support of local republicans, which was, without doubt, a primary consideration in the circumstances. However, though we were operating right on the Leitrim/Fermanagh border, we found it near impossible to make contact with any members of the enemy forces. We stalked the Fermanagh roads in the dark evenings and cold nights of winter, but devil-a-one made an appearance. We used Molotov cocktails to burn down a B-Special training hall, on the border near a village called Garrison, in an effort to draw the military or police out of barracks. We waited in hiding, but no arm of the British forces made an appearance. Actually, this was a very common problem for IRA units in those times. Targets were hard enough to find.

1959

In January 1959, we moved further up the border towards Belleek, still in County Fermanagh, and after some period of time reconnoitring, we satisfied ourselves that we had a target. The only problem was that an old .303 Lee Enfield rifle captured from British Forces in the Castletownbere area of West Cork during the 1920s, plus the few short arms that we had, were inadequate to accomplish the job we had in mind. We needed three submachine guns, preferably Thompsons, with a few fills for each weapon, as the intended operation was to be carried out at close quarters.

We repaired to Dublin and went straight to see Jack McCabe who we were friendly with since 1956, in the hope that he might be of help in getting the weapons we needed. Jack was well aware of the difficulties we had been encountering in Cork with regard to active service and was very sympathetic to our case. He and his friend Joe Collins had encountered difficulty getting back into the IRA since they were released from prison in England in 1948. They blamed their problems on Tony Magan, IRA Chief of Staff (1948–1962), who made it very clear that he demanded a very high standard of disciplined volunteer in the army and evidently he thought the likes of Jack and Joe, and many others, didn't meet that standard. Many were wrongly blacklisted as being either 'gunmen' or incapable of being subjected to discipline. The latter objection was, more often than not, applied to those who had minds of their own and asked questions. In my opinion, unlike a regular army, a volunteer army cannot afford to adopt such inflexibility and expect to retain a high quality of volunteer. In the event, with regard to our arms requirement, Jack was unable to help us. Then, Charlie Murphy, on a few days parole from internment in the Curragh Camp, happened along. We explained our situation to him and he set about helping us immediately. Within hours, he had made arrangements to have us supplied with three Thompson submachine guns from a Dublin dump. After Charlie had returned to the Curragh Camp, we went to collect the arms from the Dublin IRA officer who had control over them, only to be told that they were no longer available to us. It was very clear that he had been got at by supporters of the '3 Ms'. At that time, Charlie Murphy was in deep conflict with the triumvirate of Tony Magan, Paddy McLogan and Tomas MacCurtain, better known as the 3 Ms. Early in December 1958, 14 volunteers had successfully escaped from the Curragh Camp. The escape was organised by Charlie Murphy, J.B. O'Hagan, Frank Drivers, Willie Gleeson, Liam Fagan and other militant activists opposed to the 3 Ms slowly, slowly, approach to escapes. The escape was unofficial from the army point of view, but they were in a dilemma; it was successful and popular throughout the republican family, and to condemn it would fracture an already creaking movement. So, they issued a statement as though it had been planned by a united movement. However, the differences that were developing between the 'old guard' and the militant activists were not going to go away. They were to continue throughout the summer months, even after the closure of the Curragh Internment Camp.

In the meantime, the news that went into the Curragh Camp to the 'old guard' about our intentions at the border was not welcomed either. They had stopped us getting supplies in Dublin, but still saw us as loose cannons, with the potential to upset whatever plans they claimed to have. It was too late for the February edition, but they made sure a notice appeared in the March 1959 edition of the *United Irishman* informing its readers (including the Special Branch) that neither Brendan O'Neill, Jim Lane or Charlie Ronayne were members of any branch of the Republican Movement. Why should any movement tell all and sundry that three named people were not members of any branch of its movement? We weren't in the public eye and we hadn't committed some outrage. No, it had to do with telling all republicans that we should be avoided and not helped. Also, and more important to them at the time, it informed all police forces, north and south, that should we be arrested for some anti-state activity, we were to be held solely responsible and that we had no connection with the Republican Movement. Most republicans, quite rightly, saw it as felon setting. In any case, internment without trial was ended on 11 March 1959 and all remaining prisoners released. Early in April, in despair, I left to find work in England. In the months that followed, despite several attempts to reconcile militant activists and the 'old guard', many drifted away from the movement, some never to return.

While in England, I became very involved in trade union work and did some home study on the

subject with my union, the Transport and General Workers' Union. I attended regularly at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London, and listened at many Connolly Association platforms. One speaker, who was destined to play an important role in Irish republican politics in the 1960s, was Corkonian Anthony Coughlan. I met some communists in my workplace in Fords of Dagenham, Essex (I worked in the assembly section), who told me that I had great potential, but that they would need to take the 'rough edge of Irish republicanism' off me before I would qualify as a 'comrade'. The great nation chauvinism of English communists always showed when dealing with, or should I say when ignoring, the Irish question.

1960

Seán MacStiofain took over leadership of the IRA in Cork that summer. This followed the ousting of the old crew, who had from early 1957 refused to supply volunteers for active service.⁷ This group was led by Liam Early, OC of the 1st Cork Brigade, IRA, who, when interned in the Curragh Camp, had still retained enough influence and power to ensure that the leadership in Cork continued the same line of non-cooperation with GHQ on the matter of participation in the armed struggle. It was well known within the movement that he had attended a meeting in Dublin prior to the launching of the campaign in 1956 and indicated his support and that of the Cork IRA for the armed campaign. But, when he returned to Cork with Tomas MacCurtain, he told MacCurtain that he was really opposed to such a campaign. On the spot, MacCurtain told him he was turning the car around and returning to Dublin, where he expected Early to repeat his remarks to the leadership. Early declined the offer, adding that he now intended to stand by his earlier commitment to support the campaign.⁸ However, no sooner had the campaign started in December 1956, than Early immediately used the excuse of too many losses, as soon as a few Cork volunteers were caught in the Six Counties area, to refuse to send more volunteers on active service. Sometime after his release from the Curragh Camp in 1959, he ran foul of the Kerry IRA, when they discovered he had attended a Michael Collins Commemoration at Beal na mBlath in a private capacity with a friend, Noel Lyons. It was their intention to have him give the oration at the Ballyseedy Memorial. However, following his attendance at the Collins commemoration, they reconsidered the idea of he giving the Ballyseedy oration, it was ruled out and his invitation was promptly cancelled. Liam Early left the republican scene when he emigrated from Ireland shortly afterwards, taking up a post in England as manager of a Free State government-sponsored Bord Fáilte office.

1961

I returned from England on 9 June, met Seán MacStiofain and was taken back into Sinn Féin and the Cork Volunteers' Pipe Band. He was to talk to me later regarding the army, but unfortunately he went on leave of absence in August. On 28 July, the three Cork Omagh Raid prisoners, Seán Hegarty, Seán O'Callaghan and Liam Mulcahy, were released from Belfast Prison where they had been imprisoned since 1954. Then followed a 'last hurrah' for the IRA. A great effort was put into resuscitating the armed campaign. Many volunteers from the south found long-awaited active service. With the Early clique eclipsed, Cork volunteers were again able to participate in the armed struggle. Many did and a number of them were captured and imprisoned in the south. Those volunteers were Joe Sherlock, Kildorrey (6 months in prison), Desmond Swanton, Blackrock, Cork City (4 months), Richard Nagle, Midleton (7 years), Denis O'Riordan Carrigtwohill (3 years) and Michael Hennessy, Kildorrey (6 months). The IWL launched their paper, *Irish Socialist*, that year. On 4 October, the electorate in the south went to the polls in a general election; it turned out to be a great setback for Sinn Féin, who lost their four seats and received a greatly reduced vote.

⁷ See Seán MacStiofain, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 87–9.

⁸ MacCurtain at the Army Council meeting, called to decide on when to launch the campaign, was a lone voice against starting at the time being suggested by the majority and voted against. However, he fully accepted the majority decision and worked hard towards that end. For that reason, he greatly resented the vacillating attitude of Early.

1962

The IRA called a ceasefire in February. Swanton was released on 17 April, having completed his sentence and the rest of the above mentioned Cork prisoners were given early release on 20 April. This was the year that the Republican Movement is said to have begun its rethink on the way forward. The Irish Workers' League became the Irish Workers' Party and the CPNI launched their paper, *Unity*. Gearoid MacCarthaigh of Cork, a traditionalist who as Adjutant General of the IRA, was credited with going around Ireland on a bicycle in the late 1940s in an attempt to rebuild the Republican Movement, came back into prominence when he was elected to the Ard Comhairle of Sinn Féin in October.

1963

1963 was the year of the very divisive Desmond Swanton Affair. It arose out of the proposed unveiling of a monument to Cork's patriot dead within the Republican Plot at St. Finbarr's Cemetery. The committee organising its erection was composed of IRA veterans who were mainly members of Free State political parties – the person chosen for the unveiling was Eamon De Valera. Republicans generally were opposed to De Valera's unveiling of the monument, not alone because they believed he was unworthy to do so over the graves of people like Terence McSwiney and Tomas McCurtain, but, more importantly, because he would also be doing it over the grave of John Joe Kavanagh, killed by De Valera's police near Cork Prison in 1940. All of the republican family in Cork looked to the Republican Movement to lead a protest against the coming event. As the time of the unveiling drew closer, republicans became aware that the Republican Movement was not going to become involved. It was then that IRA volunteers Desmond Swanton and Gerry Madden decided to make a protest. (For an account of what transpired after that, read Madden's statement.⁹) Following the event, where as a result of a premature explosion Swanton was killed and Madden seriously injured, several members of the Republican Movement were dismissed for seeing to it that Swanton had a proper republican funeral. I was among them.

Arising out of these dismissals, there was a coming together of a number of republicans who were disgusted at the way Swanton and Madden were treated. This merged with discontent regarding how republicanism was being represented locally for many years. Leaflets were distributed. There was nothing in them that should have upset the Republican Movement; they were aimed at bringing our existence as a republican group to people's attention. However, on 2 August, the IRA, in the shape of Seán MacStiofain and Gearoid MacCarthaigh, raided the premises where we were having the August issue of our newsletter *An Phoblacht* printed. They threatened the printing manager and took away the stencils needed to print the issue. We retaliated. Brendan O'Neill and myself went to the local railway station where we seized thousands of copies of the August issue of their paper, the *United Irishman*. We followed that up with two carloads of eight armed men raiding their local HQ, the Thomas Ashe Hall, on the following evening. That was followed by a visit to Seán MacStiofain's house and to the seaside village of Crosshaven where Gearoid MacCarthaigh was holidaying. Both were at that time leading members of the IRA and we told them, in no uncertain terms, that we would not tolerate such behaviour from them in the future and that we would meet fire with fire.

Jim O'Regan moved in to mediate and arranged a meeting between the Republican Movement leadership and ourselves. As a gesture of goodwill before this meeting, we returned the bundles of *United Irishman* that we were holding. Cathal Goulding, had come down from Dublin to chair the meeting, which was to be held at the Thomas Ashe Hall. When we arrived at the hall we were met at the door by MacStiofain, who told us that his orders from his Chief of Staff were to see that we had no more than three representatives present. He made it very clear that they were "his Chief of Staff's order" and he was duty bound to obey. I smelt a rat and cut quickly to the chase with the

⁹ See Appendix 1, p.p. 25-26, which is an account of the circumstances surrounding the death of Volunteer Desmond Swanton given in a statement to a fact finding committee of Clann na nGael, USA, by the survivor Gerry Madden. The statement was published in their organ, *Irish Republican Bulletin*, New York, USA, January 1964.

questions. “Could it be any three?” “No.” “Could I be one of the three?” “No.” There were five representatives from our side present and with one quick turn and away, we gave the Republican Movement our answer to their peace talks, adding in chorus “Fuck off”. While we were at the door, Liam Flavin, had taken the opportunity to ask one question, “Why did you do it?” MacStiofain told him that the Republican Movement believed that nobody, but they, should have the right to speak or write on republican matters and we were in breach of that. Liam responded by commenting, “It’s a wonder you haven’t taken on the *Irish Press* before now!”

Those who were involved in the raid on the Thomas Ashe Hall, and on MacStiofain and MacCarthaigh, were all socialist republicans. They were Kevin Neville (42-years-old, OC Southern Command, Saor Uladh), Thomas Kavanagh (40s, ex-IRA Curragh internee), Liam Flavin (40, ex-IRA internee), Jim O’Neill (52, ex-IRA internee), Brendan O’Neill (26, participant in 1956–62 campaign), Jim Lane (25, participant in 1956–62 campaign), Gerry Higgins (37, former member of Cork Socialist Party (c.1946–7) and Dan Neville (40s).

On 11 September, the *Cork Evening Echo* carried an advertisement to the effect that “an important general meeting of all members of the Republican Movement will be held in the Thomas Ashe Memorial Hall on to-morrow at 8.30 p.m.” The meeting was addressed by Gearoid MacCarthaigh, who gave his version of the events that had taken place over the August weekend. He painted himself and the Cork IRA staff as heroes acting “in defence of the Cork Republican Movement and its treasured memorial hall.” This was followed by a tirade against those he characterised as enemies of the Republican Movement, attempting to demonise us, and I being cast as the proverbial devil incarnate. Gearoid MacCarthaigh was more than a straightforward republican traditionalist; he was one who prided himself on being a strong anti-communist as well. He was in his element that night, as he would have seen all of us as purveyors of a foreign ideology. The Brits were well and truly forgotten that night.

In advance of the annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration at Bodenstown that year, a Wolfe Tone Bicentenary Directorate was formed. The following were the members of the directorate: Jack Bennett, Liam Burke and Sean Caughey (all Belfast); Seán Ó Ceallachain, Ruairi Ó Drisceoil and Jack Lynch (all Cork); Deasun Breathnach, Cathal Goulding, Lorcan Leonard, Unseann MacEoin, Richard Roche and Harry White (all Dublin-based).

Dave O’Connell of Cork, was released from Belfast Prison on 20 September, after serving almost four years imprisonment.

1964

The Desmond Swanton Commemorative Committee held its first annual commemoration at St. Finbarrs’ Cemetery on St. Patrick’s Day at which speeches were made and leaflets were distributed. The Gerry Madden Recovery Committee, to assist financially with the survivor’s recovery expenses, was formed in Cork, Dublin and New York. The New York committee was sponsored by Clann na nGael and the Dublin committee was in the capable hands of our close comrade Jack McCabe. Brendan O’Neill, his uncle Jack Lynch, a republican leader in the 1930s and 1940s, and myself frequently travelled to Dublin in those days to meet with Jack McCabe and Joe Collins, when they would be having a get together with their comrades, Harry White, Joe Cahill and other thirties and forties IRA men. Most of them had been kept out of the IRA throughout the 1950s and they felt that keeping in touch was a building block to a way back in. Usually, Packy Early, a Leitrim man, would be present – he had started out in the IRA, but moved to the Connolly Association when working in England and played a leading part in the campaign to have McCabe and Collins released. Though an active CPer, both Jack and Joe had the highest regard for him, as had we. What we learned from these men about revolutionary struggle greatly informed our thinking in the years to follow.

At the relatively young age of 43, our comrade Kevin Neville died on 16 June 1964. Kevin had joined Saor Uladh in the early 1950s and was among the small group from that organisation who attacked Roslea RUC barracks in County Fermanagh on 26 November 1955. A fellow Saor Uladh volunteer, Connie Green, lost his life in that incident. As a young man, Kevin had joined the IRA in Cork and was interned during the early 1940s. Gerry Higgins told me that, following the invasion

of the Soviet Union in June 1941, Kevin Neville heeded the advice of leading socialist figures and sought and received parole from the Curragh Camp, going on to join the RAF. The advice given at the time was that all able bodied socialists should join the armies of the Allied forces in the fight against fascism and in defence of the Soviet Union. Later, when back in Cork, he found there was no welcome for him in the ranks of the IRA and so eventually joined Saor Uladh. At his graveside at Inniscarra, County Cork, Frank Morris, a Saor Uladh leader, a native of Sheskinshule, County Tyrone, and the last man to be given the lashes of a cat and nine tails in Belfast Prison in the 1940s, gave the oration, which concluded:

Kevin Neville was no mere patriot following in old traditional steps. He was a progressive revolutionary, a man who preached the doctrine of James Connolly, that the fight was useless if we merely changed flags and masters and did not change the whole social and economic system. He also believed that a revolutionary's main principle should be the achieving of his object, that his hands should not be tied by petty principles and that he should change his tactics to meet changing situations.

In a statement issued by the Irish Revolutionary Forces (Cork), we said, "Though a tolerant man at all times, Kevin did not let his republican views set him aloof from his workaday world. He was well aware that the working-class people estimate their situation in life on the ground of stern realities. Ireland apart from her people meant nothing to him."

Around October, the Wolfe Tone Directorate was wound up and a new organisation was formed called the Wolfe Tone Society (WTS); its address was at 22 Belgrave Road, Dublin. This was the home of a Roy Johnston, a former member of the Connolly Association who had returned to Ireland from London in 1963. He had been involved in the work of the Dublin Directory and became the vice-president of the WTS on its formation. A short time later, his friend Anthony Coughlan joined the WTS. He too had returned to Ireland from London and, likewise, was a prominent member of the CA while there. In Cork, we formed a committee to erect a headstone over the grave of Kevin Neville at Inniscarra, County Cork.

1965

The Kevin Neville Commemorative Committee met at Dun Laoi, North Mall, to do its work over the winter, but suspended its meetings a few months before the unveiling, as its work was near done. When the chairperson, Maura Sheehan, reconvened a meeting, to our surprise she announced that the oration on the day of the unveiling would be given by Michael O'Riordan of the Irish Workers' Party. Jim Savage and Maura Sheehan, both members of the IWP, brazenly attempted to defend their action of arbitrarily deciding to invite him to speak. The socialist republican element challenged this departure from basic democracy and won over the middle ground to successfully win a vote to stop the O'Riordan oration.

Throughout the early part of the year, following our Kevin Neville committee meetings at Dun Laoi, Jim Savage worked hard to try and convince both Gerry Higgins and Liam Flavin that they should go back into Sinn Féin. According to Savage, left-wing republicans, who had at one time or another been in the Republican Movement, should go back into the movement. He explained to them that 'the party' now had a great foothold in the Republican Movement and that the Wolfe Tone Society was going to prove of great value in 'educating' republicans to their way of thinking. The WTS would form the 'bridge' between progressive republicans, Irish Labour Party people and the party comrades. He reminded Gerry Higgins that the Roy Johnston that he knew back in his Cork Socialist Party days was now an important person in republican circles, as was Corkonian Anthony Coughlan in the WTS. It would only be a matter of time before Johnston, and others who were coming into the movement, would be running it. Following discussion within the socialist republican group (we were organised under the name Irish Revolutionary Forces), it was decided that Savage should not be challenged, so as to gain further information. The veracity of this information when checked proved good and we became alarmed. After all, Savage was the person who in the 1950s spent time trying to encourage republicans to leave what he referred to as "the movement of

dinosaurs” and here he was now encouraging some of the same people to rejoin.

We had as a group been studying the socialist classics for quite a while at that stage, but it was a study of the debate that was raging within the international communist movement that led us to a greater understanding of what was afoot, given that we understood the CPGB and IWP to be Moscow-line parties. The members of the CPGB, IWP and the CPNI, to a lesser extent, were involved in entryist tactics within the Republican Movement. Gerry Higgins remembered he being involved in such tactics in the 1940s within the Irish Labour Party, as a member of the Liam Mellows Branch in Cork. Such entryism was the order of the day for years within the British Labour Party by the CPGB and a number of Trotskyist groups. Within the Republican Movement, they would work together like a faction to influence its policies in a direction compatible with their own party line. In this case, it was about getting republicans to adhere to the Moscow line and the so-called “peaceful transition to socialism through parliamentary means.” Ultimately, they would seek control, but, if that was impossible, would settle for a strongly influential role. If need be, they would abandon any party or movement if their policies ceased to be what they would consider ‘progressive’ and simply move their tent elsewhere. It was the tactic of parasitism. In fact, it all poured out from Savage: there would be an end to armed struggle, recognition of the partitioned parliaments and Westminster, then entry into them by Sinn Féin. There was an admission that the IWP candidates would never go beyond a few hundred votes, while Sinn Féin had a considerably better public image and would be expected to do relatively well at the polls. It appears that Savage mistook our interest for potential support and badly advised his party. The apparently positive interaction with Gerry and Liam must have encouraged Savage and his comrades to presume that they were home and dry with regard to using the Kevin Neville unveiling at Inniscarra as a party event. In the event, they refused to accept an alternative speaker to O’Riordan, even though our proposed speaker was Jim O’Regan, a member of the Republican Movement, a Spanish Civil War veteran and long-time comrade of Kevin Neville. This decision to cut off the nose to spite the face lost them a lot of face in Cork at the time. They had begun to behave like amateurs.

We greatly resented the idea of Savage and his comrades engaging in entryist tactics within the Republican Movement because, as negative as the movement was towards socialism in those years, we felt there was an inexorable leftward trend worldwide that would hardly fail to pass it by. But it needed time to ferment. Unfortunately, a lazy leadership, unwilling to undertake the hard work required to prepare the path for revolutionary struggle, abandoned their role to the parasites who were eventually responsible for dividing the movement.

In March, we issued a statement under the name Irish Revolutionary Forces. The Connolly Youth Movement, an offshoot of the IWP, was also launched that year. Likewise, we founded the Cork Vietnamese Freedom Association later that year; this was a group open to people of all parties and none and focused on supporting the Vietnamese resistance to American imperialism. The publication *An Phoblacht*¹⁰ (using the same title as our earlier short-lived news-sheet) was launched in October by the Desmond Swanton Commemorative Committee. The following people were appointed agents for the editorial committee: Brendan O’Neill, Gerry Madden, Jim Lane and Gerry Higgins. Among the leading contributors to *An Phoblacht* were Seán Daly, Gerry Higgins, Jim Lane and Jack Scott. Jack was born in Belfast in 1910 and grew up there as a Methodist. He emigrated to Canada in 1927 and joined the Canadian Communist Party in 1930. He was expelled in 1962, due to his role within the party opposing what he saw as a drift away from revolutionary Marxist Leninist principles. He also found the party too wedded to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. He died in 2000.¹¹

¹⁰ The file of *An Phoblacht*, if not available in your local reference library may be found in microfilm form in the *Left in Britain* Primary Social Sources series by Harvester Press Microform Publications Ltd., Brighton, Sussex, England.

¹¹ Jack Scott, like Kevin Neville, fought in World War Two to oppose fascism. He joined the Canadian Army and was awarded the Croix De Guerre by General Charles de Gaulle for gallantry under fire during the Allies’ Normandy landings of 1944.

1966

Michael O’Riordan, of the IWP, came to Cork in January to speak at a public meeting titled ‘After Free Trade’, which was advertised as having Jim O’Regan as its chairman. Jim’s public identification with O’Riordan was indicative of closer relations between the parties. In the June issue of the *United Irishman*, Roy Johnston argued that the rosary should not be said at republican commemorations. Seán MacStiofain in his book recalls the developments within the movement following this comment.¹² We didn’t make comment, other than to tell all those we came in contact with that we agreed with Johnston on this matter. Sinn Féin held an extraordinary Ard Fhéis that year. We also opened a small bookshop, Tower Books, during the year; it was situated in Tower Street just to the south of the city centre and attracted a wide range of customers.

In March, a British Sunday newspaper carried a headline, ‘New Violence Outbreak is Feared’ and followed with the lead-in, “Are breakaway members of an illegal organisation planning a campaign of terror to mark the 1916 Easter Jubilee celebrations for which all Ireland is preparing?” They then claimed, “a secret publication proves that a breakaway faction in an illegal organisation is urging an immediate return to the violent policies of 1933 when arson, shooting and bombing were rampant. The breakaway group originates in Cork and for the past four months has been circulating an illegal manifesto under the title, *The Republic*.” This was followed by further extracts from our paper, *An Phoblacht*, to give the readers the impression that a “series of outrages” could be about to start. The only outrage that occurred was their attempt to stir up trouble by suggesting that we were “urging an immediate return to the violent policies of 1933 when arson and bombing were rampant.”¹³

Interestingly, in view of his later manifestations, Tomas MacGiolla, speaking at the republican plot in Cork on Easter Sunday that year, departed from his prepared oration to cast his eyes down at some of us in the crowd and give out a tirade against atheistic communism.¹⁴ Despite anti-communist denunciations from the likes of MacGiolla, the circulation of *An Phoblacht* grew steadily and, more importantly, began to have an impact, bringing us support for our views from all over Ireland and from individuals in Britain, the United States and Canada. We also made contact with a group of republicans in Dublin who had left the IRA, disillusioned with the IRA leadership because of their unwillingness to seriously prosecute the armed struggle against British imperialism. Also, in July that year, Seán MacStiofain, Command OC of Cork and South Kerry IRA, left Cork and went to work and live in Navan, County Meath.

In the August issue of *Tuairisc*, organ of the Wolfe Tone Society, in an obvious reference to the IRF and its publication, *An Phoblacht*, the author of an unsigned article titled ‘Our Ideas’, took a swipe at our work. Under the heading, ‘The Need for Theory’, the author commented:

If ideas are needed to counter the ideas of Ireland’s ‘Establishment’, they are also needed to counter the false and confusing theories which various elements have been seeking to propagate among people in the republican movement in the recent period. Taking advantage of our own slowness, various enemies of the movement, who are fully aware of the importance of theory, have been seeking to spread false and confusing ideas with palpable aim of causing confusion and dissention. Various news-sheets and bulletins have appeared of late, usually anonymous and sent through the post to individuals in the republican and labour movement in some parts of the country. These have been crammed with pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric and phraseology such as to gull the politically innocent, but concentrate their main fire not on imperialism in Ireland, but on the elements in the republican movement who are seeking to organise a more vigorous fight against imperialism.

An Phoblacht, was sent in the main to local leaders of the Republican Movement throughout the 32 counties of Ireland. Practically all had been involved in the movement in the 1950s and would

12 See MacStiofain *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 96.

13 See *The People*, 6 March 1966.

14 See *An Phoblacht*, May 1966, p. 9.

not have seen themselves as slow in their thinking. Nor would our ideas have caused them to be confused. Certainly they would not have seen themselves as ‘politically innocent’. How patronising can you get? As for the “labour movement in some parts of the country”, we doubted if they either would appreciate being listed in any of the above categories. As for our anonymity, the previous October we sent out a circular giving the names and addresses of four well-known Cork socialist republicans, who we said were agents for *An Phoblacht*. Curious that an author of an unsigned article should make an issue of anonymity. In fact, the unsigned article, ‘Our Ideas’ was written by one Anthony Coughlan, who was neither in the IRA nor Sinn Féin. Nonetheless, this apparent outsider had been entrusted with the task of influencing the politicisation of republicans. He was a member of the Wolfe Tone Society, which presented itself as an independent republican body, having no organisational or disciplinary commitment to any arm of the Republican Movement. He was also the Dublin correspondent of the *Irish Democrat*, organ of the Connolly Association. For the record, we did not accept that the WTS was independent of the RM, to whose members Coughlan’s article was addressed. The links were very strong, although carefully hidden.

While the ‘progressives’ were busy trying to get the IRA to ‘deal’ with those who produced *An Phoblacht*, the Special Branch (Ireland’s political police) were not idle with their own push against the producers of a journal they considered subversive. In Cork, a trawl of printing and duplicating offices was embarked upon in an effort to trace where it might be printed. This proved fruitless. Also, a young unemployed house painter and member of Sinn Féin, Frankie Noonan, was approached by a Special Branch man and propositioned with the offer of employment, if he were to approach me and procure a copy of the current edition, plus the information as to where it was printed. This approach backfired, as when he did approach me, it was only to inform me of the proposition that was made by the branchman. The disadvantaged circumstances that people found themselves in, be it unemployment or lack of housing, were very often exploited by the police. They would promise either a job or money as a reward for information that might implicate political activists in what they considered subversive activity.

In the September issue of *An Phoblacht*, the IRF made its socialist politics clear with the declaration, “Let us proceed with the building of a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist organisation dedicated to the construction of a new society in Ireland, and for true independence of the nation.” This was the sort of Marxism that the ‘stickies’ were later credited with bringing into republican politics, when in fact people such as MacGiolla were hostile to our political position through the 1960s.

An IRA General Army Convention was held on the weekend of 15–16 October, at which Roy Johnston of the WTS was confirmed as the Director of Political Education, a department that he had been connected to since early 1965. He was also elected a member of the 12-man Army Executive. At the Army Council meeting that followed in November, it was decided, “That action be taken to stamp out IRA splinter groups”. Word filtered back to us that we would want to be on our guard. That year also, IRA volunteers were ordered to join Sinn Féin. When nominations came up for the Ard Comhairle of Sinn Féin, volunteers were informed who the preferred choices of the IRA were and they were ordered to vote for those candidates. Another thing that IRA members in Sinn Féin had to do was join a trade union. This was certainly new to some who never previously saw the need for a trade union; many of them had a preference for working ‘on the lump’ in the building trade and, frankly, didn’t welcome this intrusion by the IRA into their working lives. Great material for a socialist future, we thought. In the November/December issue of *An Phoblacht*, we referred to those who said they would ‘deal’ with us in an article titled ‘The Yahoos and *An Phoblacht*’.¹⁵

On the political front, following a direction from IRA headquarters, the Cork IRA organised the setting up of a branch of the Wolfe Tone Society in Cork in December. Among those who joined were Jim Savage, Maura Sheehan, Eddie Williams, Uinseann O’Murchu, Dave O’Connell, Jim Blake, Brian Titley, Mary Leland, Helen Hanrahan and Pat Magner. The fact that a branch didn’t start in Cork until a full two years after the Wolfe Tone Society was founded in Dublin is indicative

¹⁵ *An Phoblacht*, November/December 1966, pp. 4 and 7.

of how weak the influence of both the Sinn Féin party and the Irish Workers' Party was in Cork. The fact that the IRA had to take the initiative substantiates that opinion. The Cork branch never served the purpose intended by the schemers in Dublin, it just whittled away.

1967

Early in 1967, control of Clann na hÉireann in Britain occupied the minds of those in the Connolly Association, as it did of those in the Republican Movement who were collaborating with the entry-ists. It was an issue that we also paid some attention to and an account of these developments appear in several issues of *An Phoblacht*.¹⁶ At that time, we had people in the Clann keeping us informed. A very interesting article appeared in the March issue of *Freedom* (London anarchist paper) titled 'Disarming the IRA'. The article was signed Siobhan Campbell, but I suspect that the information came from ex-IRA people who we would have referred to at the time as the 'Dublin republican group' and which included such well informed republicans as Frank Keane and Joe Dillon. The same people, I suspect, were supplying information to the *Irish Militant*, a London-based Trotskyist paper, which had both Gerry Lawless (ex-IRA and Saor Uladh of the 1950s) and Eamonn McCann of Derry as columnists. The Dublin republicans were not making it up like the tabloids, as I had much of it checked at the time and found it to be on the ball. In the September issue of the *Irish Militant* an article, 'Sinn Fein to Split – Eamonn Thomas purged?', made a reference to the existence of our publication *An Phoblacht*. It further commented, in reference to a recent clandestine republican meeting held in Dublin, that this meeting had "decided to take steps to stop publication of *An Phoblacht*."

For the IRA leadership, it was always a matter of getting rid of *An Phoblacht*, or, in other words, just more of their militaristic behaviour in Cork in 1963, which had failed. They never considered engaging in political debate with those they saw as their inferiors. They sought to do to us what they resented others doing to them – ignoring our political position. Trouble for them was that we had the confidence of many republicans and socialists throughout Ireland, particularly in the Cork area. Our capabilities were recognised and our courage in standing up to bullying was admired. Threats that they would deal with us, in what they often referred to as "the time honoured way", were seen as in sharp contradiction to the image of "seeking a peaceful transition to socialism, through parliamentary means." They could not have it both ways. I believe that the resistance that was put up in Cork in 1963, followed by our defiance, caused them to pause and worry if aggressive action would make matters worse and upset the new image they were seeking to create. Following more rumblings from Sinn Féin, we hit out again against the schemers in an article in the October issue of *An Phoblacht*; also in our August issue we dealt with an article in the May issue of the *Irish Democrat* on 'Politics and the Gun'. Apart from that response, Brendan O'Neill and I paid a visit to the Cork City OC of the IRA, George O'Mahony, and made clear to him what the consequences would be should they take any action of a physical nature against any of our members.

In July, the Cork Vietnamese Freedom Association conducted a week-long picket of an American warship, the *USS Courtney*, in Cork Harbour, which got a lot of attention. All the left-wing papers had a photograph. In committee, we were having trouble with Savage because he was putting the party line, which was weakening in its support for the Vietnamese military resistance. We heard defeatist talk of the Viet Cong leading its people to genocide if they didn't do some deal. As usual, he was boasting to Gerry Higgins following our meetings of the inroads the 'party' was making into the RM. This time it was Derry Kelleher who had joined Sinn Féin, another friend of Gerry's from his Cork Socialist Party days; he was namedropped as proof of the onward march of the 'progressives'. Kelleher, like Coughlan and Johnston, was a former member of the Connolly Association. Savage's letters to Michael Flood, of Derby in England, concerning a move he was organising with Desmond Greaves of the Connolly Association against Clann na hÉireann gave us a flavour of what he and his cohorts were up to at the time.¹⁷ These letters not alone gave an insight into his and his

¹⁶ *An Phoblacht*, January 1967, p. 4, article titled, 'Will the Clann be sold out'.

An Phoblacht, March/April 1967, p. 6, article titled, 'Clann Ard Feis'.

¹⁷ Letters are in the possession of the author.

party's manoeuvrings against the Republican Movement, but also are insightful of how they viewed the people who were producing *An Phoblacht*. They showed the extent of badmouthing and lying that they were prepared to indulge in rather than deal with the views of *An Phoblacht* in a forthright and political way. These letters also indicated how good our intelligence department was at the time. Disaffected republicans stayed where they were within the movement and kept us briefed.

The state of the Republican Movement in 1967, five years after they had embarked on their new way forward, was outlined in July 1970 in an interview to the *This Week* magazine by Cathal Goulding. He revealed that:

By 1967, the movement was dormant. It wasn't active in any political sense or even in any revolutionary sense. Membership was falling off. People had gone away. Units of the IRA and the cumainn of Sinn Féin had become almost non-existent. We felt that something dynamic was needed or the movement was going to break up and splinter into pieces. We called a meeting of the Republican Army's local leadership at the end of August 1967...at that conference of 1967 we started on a Friday night and finished on a Sunday evening...they suddenly realised that they had no movement at all. They only thought they had a movement. Out of this conference there came a number of recommendations. The first was that we should openly declare for a Socialist Republic. That was now the objective of the Republican Movement; to establish a Socialist Republic as envisaged by Connolly and in keeping with the sentiments of the Proclamation of 1916. We felt that with this resolution passed, we had got away from the claptrap and clichés that we had allowed ourselves to be caught in over the years.¹⁸

With a dormant movement, the IRA and Sinn Féin almost non-existent, badly in need of a dynamic shot in the arm, the tattered remnants got together for one weekend and came up with the good old Socialist Republic. By November, Sinn Féin followed the IRA and amended the party constitution to read that the aim of the party was to work for "the establishment of a Socialist Republic". The Army had decided the matter and the party had followed. This was truly indicative of a socialist vanguard party. The Republican Movement now had that "something dynamic"; their own brand of utopian socialism, economic in-betweenism.

Based on reports that we in IRF had been receiving since we launched *An Phoblacht*, which disclosed the extent of weakness that existed, we feared that as the Republican Movement moved closer to integration with Free State politics, there would be a tendency amongst militants in the IRA to momentarily lose perspective, and they could disintegrate into 'splinter groups' on a regional basis. Above all, we did not want this to happen. In the October issue of *An Phoblacht*, we used our editorial to appeal to volunteers to organise to avert such an outcome. To deal with the problems we were convinced they faced, we advised concerned revolutionaries to:

Start thinking on these problems; they should begin preparations to meet them now, and not wait until the last moment. If the 'Progressives' are allowed to retain the initiatives within the Republican Movement, they will possess a good chance of achieving a maximum success in their designs, and creating a maximum chaos throughout the ranks of their opponents in the movement. *This is what they hope to do*, and their plans rely very much on the natural hesitancy of Republican activists to act in forceful opposition to the established leaders...There are many Republicans who agree with us on all of this, but who will still hesitate to "stick their necks out." This is natural enough. However, we fail to see how one is really "sticking their neck out" by participating in *secret preparations* to counteract the adverse effects from a sell-out on the part of the Sinn Féin 'Progressives'. We do not seek the cooperation of men for the destruction of the Irish Republican Cause; and we do not seek the allegiance of men to a "rival" organisation. Insofar as the destruction of the Cause is concerned, the 'Progressives' are bent on doing just that without help from anyone; and all we are striving to do is to establish a common ground for all real revolutionary Republicans, so as to prepare effective counter measures to that betrayal, and to be in the position to swiftly regroup Republican activists in a new organisation *when events dictate that this is essential to the perpetuation of Republican objects*.

¹⁸ *This Week*, 31 July 1970.

We went on to suggest that,

participation in this vital work does not require *an open commitment* to the ‘Committee for Revolutionary Action’, which is responsible for the publication of *An Phoblacht*. As we have said; the CRA is not an organisation; by self-definition, it is a “Committee” whose object is to combat reactionary trends within organised Republicanism, and to make preparations to bring a new organisation into existence only when this is absolutely necessary. Many of our original members continue their membership in the Republican Movement; and many of those who have joined us over the past year or so have also remained in the movement on our advice. In this way, we have strenuously laboured against the emergence of ‘splinter groups’, while at the same time building a structure designed to act with the minimum of delay and with maximum nation-wide effect when the need arises. If the need does not arise, at this stage this appears an extremely remote possibility, then our people can continue, as active workers within the Republican Movement, and CRA will dissolve. On the other hand, if the need does arise, and we see it coming in the very near future, at least some preparation will have been made to meet the obvious demands of such a situation.¹⁹

In an interview with a spokesperson for the local IRA in the November issue of *Spectre* (published by the UCC branch of the Labour Party), it was stated that in the event of Sinn Féin entering Leinster House, the IRA would split from Sinn Féin. Great stuff, were it not for the fact that many in the IRA leadership were as anxious for such a development as those in Sinn Féin, and so it proved in time.²⁰

1968

It was decided early in the year that we would cease publishing *An Phoblacht* and move later in the year towards launching an organisation with a public image and newspaper. This occupied much of our time in 1968, especially our efforts to complete arrangements to have a regular-style newspaper. In January, the Cork Vietnamese Freedom Association demonstrated in Nenagh, County Tipperary, against the American presence in Vietnam. We picketed a function attended by the American ambassador Raymond Guest. What was remarkable about the picket was that the ‘ladies’ who attended the function in the Ormond Hotel, sported themselves by emptying bottles of drink down on the heads of the picket of four from the first floor windows of the hotel. Not to be outdone, the local ‘gentlemen’, in a five-to-one encounter, descended, fists flying on the picket, as the ambassador left the hotel. While this was going on the local gardai stood by laughing. When we were well beaten, and only then, did the gardai intervene to order us to leave town. In fact, they escorted us to the outskirts of the town. The social columnist, Patsy Dyke, in the *Sunday Press* of 14 January, wrote that the anti-Vietnam war demonstration “was rather naïve with a few placards telling the American ‘Black and Tans’ to go home, but what impressed me were the undercover men who suddenly materialised.” She concluded her article:

By now everyone was in good spirits, except the frozen demonstrators with their two placards, and my friends the plainclothesmen. However, it was the evening-clad guests who ‘dealt’ with the pickets. As Mr Guest jumped into his car and was whisked away, photographs were taken and questions asked...it was all marred by the unhappy and embarrassing incident outside the hotel.

It seems that she failed to see the damage that was inflicted on one member of the picket, Gerry Madden, he with only one leg and one eye, who found it hard to defend himself against overwhelming odds. Obviously, like the other ‘ladies’ in the Ormond Hotel that night, she also found it great fun. It was tough to be on even a peaceful picket in those days.

As Clann na hÉireann prepared for their 4th Ard Fheis on 25 February, the plotters went into action again, but failed to make the hoped for progress. In April, *Tuairisc* was again openly worried

¹⁹ The full editorial can be found on pp. 1 to 3 of *An Phoblacht* No.13 October 1967.

²⁰ *An Phoblacht* reported on this development in its December 1967 issue, pp. 3 and 11.

about so-called splinter groups upsetting their grand plans.²¹ However, all was not smooth sailing within the Republican Movement itself at that stage. For example, at the annual republican-organised IRA commemoration held at Dripsey, County Cork, the traditionalist Gearoid MacCarthaigh gave the oration, which he used to launch an attack on Roy Johnston and the part he was playing in the movement. Following that event, MacCarthaigh launched an attack on the speaker who spoke at the republican plot in Cork city on Easter Sunday. He did this in the local *Evening Echo* of 18 April 1968 and there was an exchange with Sinn Féin spokespeople, which lasted until 25 June.²² As this spat was coming to an end, the local IWP was at last beginning to move ahead of the pack. A Republican Movement publication, *Republican News*, was launched in Cork in July and it was announced in the August issue of the *United Irishman* that Jim Savage had been appointed its editor. He was referred to as a leading member of the Wolfe Tone Society, while no mention was made of his membership of the Irish Workers' Party and his being a columnist for the *Irish Democrat*.

When the IRA expanded its Army Council from seven members to twenty that year, Cork after many years without an AC member, got one in the person of a friend of mine, Eddie Williams, who was OC of No.1 Command, Cork and South Kerry, IRA. Given that the IRA had practically given up operating as an army, what with they reducing parades and weapon training to once-a-month, they also finally came to a decision to allow the GHQ to lapse.

The organisation Saor Éire (Free Ireland) and its publication *People's Voice* were launched in November. Those of us behind it were all involved with the IRF. Seán Daly²³ was chairman, Jim Lane was secretary, Gerry Higgins was treasurer. Our headquarters was at 9 St. Nicholas Church Place, Cove Street, Cork City. We opened a bookshop at our premises, selling republican and socialist literature. Our one great failure was that we failed to secure a means of publishing *People's Voice* as a regular-type newspaper. This situation arose because of the earlier visits by the police to printing houses when they were trying to trace where *An Phoblacht* was being printed. As a result, we had to become self-sufficient and used a double-width duplicator.

1969

People's Voice continued until May 1969. All the information coming into us about this time indicated a weakening Republican Movement throughout the country, and this at a time when we were gaining much influence.

In February, Stephen Barrett, a Cork City Fine Gael TD, speaking in the debate in the Dáil on the Second Stage of the Criminal Justice Bill, 1967, was reported as saying that he had “read a pamphlet published by an organisation called Saor Éire which referred to the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.”²⁴ It just shows that you never know who reads your paper – and to think that you could offend them so easily by simply referring to the bourgeoisie and proletariat!

In Cork, when some young volunteers, alarmed by developments in the Six Counties, looked around them and saw the lack of effort by the IRA to acquire arms, they decided to take independent action – shades of Swanton and Madden of 1963. In May, four young volunteers went to Dagenham, Essex, England, and unsuccessfully raided Sterling Engineering Works in an effort to acquire Sterling sub-machine guns. Two of them, Conor Lynch and Pat O'Sullivan, were captured and received seven years in prison. The IRA had actually followed them to England and in a failed attempt tried to convince them to call off the operation. The two volunteers who evaded arrest succeeded in returning to Ireland, but not to the IRA as involvement in ‘unofficial action’ meant automatic dismissal. However, at a later date in 1970, following the split in the Republican Movement, at a stage when opposing

²¹ *Tuarisc*, April 1968, pp. 10–11.

²² This exchange of correspondence can be read in Appendix 2, p.p. 27-30.

²³ Seán Daly (1932–1991) was a column leader at the beginning of the IRA campaign in 1956 and was later arrested at the 26 counties side of the border. He received a six-month sentence, which he served in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin. He was later to author two labour history books: *Cork – a city in crisis: a history of labour conflict and social misery 1870–1872* (Cork, 1978) and *Ireland and the First International* (Cork, 1984). He also ran a bookshop on the South Main Street for many years called Tower Books, a continuation of the name of our earlier bookshop in Tower Street.

²⁴ *Irish Press*, 14 February 1969.

sides were fiercely contesting for support, the ‘official’ movement suddenly remembered the two in prison and claimed them as their prisoners. The fact that Conor Lynch’s father, Jack²⁵, was seen as an iconic figure within the republican family and aligned himself to Cathal Goulding in the republican split of late 1969 had a lot to do with their reinstatement in the ‘official’ movement.

Some members of the Dublin republican group, who we had by now known for a few years, came down to Cork to meet us with a proposal on the way forward. They proposed that we should merge our combined efforts, with them engaging in prestigious armed activities, more often referred to as ‘spectaculars’, and we following up with statements that would politicise such events. However, as a Marxist-Leninist organisation, we believed in building a revolutionary movement by involvement in class struggle and progressing to armed activity as part of that struggle, but only after the revolutionary movement had been built up to such a level that it had secured enough support from the people to do so. We saw our politics as being primary and that it was political necessity that dictated the use or non-use of armed struggle. Because of the unresolved national question, where an area of our national territory was occupied by British armed forces, the likelihood was that armed struggle for national liberation would be high on the agenda. That said, we were in total disagreement with the suggestion of engaging in ‘spectaculars’ as a tactic to attract and gain public support. We, therefore, ended the talks at that point, though we did part on friendly terms.

The methods proposed by the Dublin group for building a revolutionary movement were not unusual in the late 1960s. They were no exception to the worldwide search of would-be revolutionaries, looking for new ways to bring about revolution. Many admired the style and methods of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Members of the Dublin republican group were certainly admirers and advocates of Guevarism. Developments in Latin America, particularly in Cuba and Bolivia, allied to the writings of Regis Debray, caused much confusion in Ireland for those seeking new ways forward. Che Guevara, seen as a brave iconic figure throughout the oppressed countries of the world, had left behind a body of writings on guerrilla warfare, which was studied and interpreted in many ways.

However, attempts to transfer tactics intended for use in Latin America were in most cases unlikely to work in Ireland. The conditions under which state power was achieved in Cuba in 1956–59 could not be replicated in Ireland, no more than they could have been in Bolivia in 1967. In fact, in the August 1967 issue of *An Phoblacht*, we stated as much when we published a condensed article on guerrilla warfare by Che Guevara. We pointed out that in Cuba it was possible to have *military bases* that were inaccessible to the enemy, whereas in Ireland the general terrain does not normally complement the setting up of bases of the type referred to by Guevara, who was primarily concerned with the Latin American theatre of operations. Conditions in Ireland dictated that guerrilla units should build such bases in the sense of building areas of *political support* and with maximum co-operation from the people. This requires your movement to be in the front line of class struggle, fighting with the people on all issues that are of concern to them in their lives. In the final analysis, it is the co-operation of the people that is vital and this can only be achieved by working with them, rather than above and away from them, carrying out ‘spectaculars’. During the Tan War, the IRA did not possess bases of the type referred to by Che Guevara, but it did possess the *political support bases* that we advocated. They proved sufficient to meet the demands of the struggle under the conditions peculiar to Ireland. Sadly, Guevara was to find in 1967, that the conditions in Bolivia were unlike those encountered in the Sierra Maestra during the Cuban revolution and the outcome was isolation and defeat. Frankly, we believed that the independent Dublin republican group was composed of hard-line republicans who were anxious for a reopening of a military campaign in the North, but had given little thought to the building of an organisation to engage in class struggle throughout Ireland. We had different priorities.

In Cork, the infiltration of the Republican Movement continued under Savage’s editorship of the

25 Jack Lynch (1907–1990) veteran of the 1930s and 1940’s IRA. Became Command OC, Cork and South Kerry IRA in late 1969, then sided with Goulding’s ‘officials’ in the split, but was later to depart with Séamus Costello to form the IRSP and INLA in 1974. In the early 1980s, he was on the Cork H-Block/Armagh Committee.

Cork news-sheet *Republican News*. In the June 1969 issue (no. 7, pp. 15–16), an appeal to establish a branch of the Connolly Youth Movement, the youth section of the Irish Workers' Party appeared, boldly indicating the Thomas Ashe Hall, the republican hall, as their address. They had put their boots firmly under the bed. Another old comrade of Jim Savage, Michael Tierney, joined Sinn Féin around this period. Michael was once prominent in the Unemployment Protest Movement and had been a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain in the 1950s.

When the Republican Movement began to indicate that they were interested in establishing unity between radical groups throughout the country, we decided to make an approach with a view to opening discussions on the question. I wrote the necessary conciliatory letter to them on 2 July 1969, as follows:

I have been instructed by a special meeting of the Saor Éire organisation to communicate with the leadership of the Republican Movement with the view to opening discussion on the question of establishing unity between radical groups in the country. This decision has been influenced by the recent appeals of the Republican Movement for such unity, by a study of a document issued in connection with the Special Commission set up by the last Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, and by our own analysis of prevailing conditions and conclusions drawn therefrom. We feel that a considerable area of agreement on the question of what is to be done exists between the Republican Movement and ourselves which warrants this approach, and the onus for initiating it must, under the circumstances, rest with us.

The letter went on to suggest arrangements for a preliminary discussion.

Our information at the time was that the emergence of the 'National Liberation Front' was inevitable. Those who were being lined up as participants included Sinn Féin, Irish Workers' Party, Connolly Youth Movement, Wolfe Tone Society, Connolly Association and Clann na hÉireann. The last two were based in Britain and the Irish Workers' Party was about to merge with the Communist Party of Northern Ireland to become the Communist Party of Ireland.²⁶ It should be borne in mind that all this was developing before the events of August 1969 and the resultant split in the Republican Movement. We were proceeding in the belief that the 'progressives' and their collaborators in the RM were on a winning streak and would win out in a struggle for control of the RM and proposed NLF. But the anticipated fall-out of a large number of republican activists as a result of this development was something we sought to avoid. We believed if we were inside the tent, we could provide the leadership for a fight back. We had grown in strength and felt confident of our ability to forward our political positions within the NLF. Following our appeal in *An Phoblacht* in October 1967, calling on IRA volunteers not to panic or splinter in the event that they saw their organisation being taken over, we had received a great response, which urged us to give leadership in such a crisis. We believed that to be within the NLF would provide us with that opportunity. No grouping, claiming to be a national liberation front, could expect to get wide support if they began by excluding organisations like ours, especially one that was confident of widespread support from within the republican family. We had also reason to believe that some student organisations, who opposed the Moscow line parties and organisations, would seek involvement in the NLF and that they could hardly be excluded if the Connolly Youth Movement had already been accepted. There was always the likelihood, of course, that the People's Democracy, which had been formed in Queen's University Belfast in October 1968, would want to be involved. When within the NLF, we had hoped to produce a theoretical journal, giving a far different perspective than that of *Tuairisc*, organ of the WTS, and as a consequence provide us with a tool to further advance our Marxist-Leninist politics. As it happened, the North exploded within a month and everything changed utterly. We never received a reply and didn't bother pursuing it, as circumstances were changing quickly and our IRA friends soon found an outlet to their liking in the emerging Provisionals.

When trouble broke out in Derry in August 1969, Saor Éire of Cork already had members there

²⁶ This merger came about on 15 March 1970.

to observe and report. When the cry went out for help, we immediately responded, sending trained and armed men to Derry to assist in the defence of the people in whatever manner was called for. We also facilitated two young Corkmen, ex-IRA volunteers, by bringing them to Derry. These men had escaped from England the previous May, following a failed raid for arms in Dagenham.

In Derry, I had occasion to meet with John Kelly (Belfast) on Saturday, 16 August. I had last seen John leaving a meeting at a bungalow off the Omagh/Cookstown road in County Tyrone in 1956, only for him to walk down a country road to a billet in Dunnamore and be arrested by the RUC at 8 a.m. the following morning. Up the road, Brendan O'Neill, Charlie Ronayne and I had risen early and left our billet just before the RUC raided. We considered ourselves very lucky, as we, like John and his three comrades, were also in possession of arms and ammunition and they were each sentenced to eight years in Belfast Prison. That day in Derry, John told Seán Keenan and myself that following the attack on the Falls he had been sent by concerned republicans in Belfast to see the IRA in Dublin to seek arms for defence purposes. He complained that their response was to tell him to go back to Belfast and raise a large sum of money and then they would go about buying the required arms. His reason for going home to Belfast via Derry was to seek any help that Keenan might be able to give him in the way of supplying arms, but as far as I know he left empty handed. As I understood the situation then, both Kelly and Keenan were ex-IRA members.

When I returned to Cork early on Sunday 17th, it was primarily to return Gerry Higgins, who was in great pain with his feet, due to a diabetic complaint. I found on arrival that Eddie Williams was looking for me. When I made contact, Eddie requested my help in arranging northern billets for the Cork IRA unit, in an area that he knew I was familiar with and where it was known I had good contacts. Despite all the disagreements and threats that had occurred with elements in the IRA over the preceding years, I agreed to help.

Early that afternoon Eddie and I went to Dublin, where Eddie had to report to IRA headquarters for further consultation. I ended up in the Sinn Féin head office in Gardiner's Place that evening and, at one stage, was sitting beside Liam Cummins, the IRA organiser for the West Ulster area, who was making a report to a member of the Army Council on the holdings of IRA arms and ammunition in his area. Listening to the report, which mentioned the likes of two rifles and a few unspecified handguns here, a Sten Gun and three rifles and little ammunition there, it was more than enough to set alarm bells ringing. All I had ever feared had come true. Jack McCabe's reports to *An Phoblacht*, of how bad the situation was, had been proved correct.

Meanwhile, Eddie had attended a small unscheduled army meeting in the Castle Hotel, Gardiner's Place, which was chaired by Cathal Goulding and where a leading 'progressive' who was neither a member of the IRA nor for that matter of Sinn Féin, spoke, urging a retreat from the intended actions that had earlier received army approval. At a later date Eddie told me he was appalled that a non-member of the army was involved in such a discussion and cited this incident as an example of how people outside the army had gained such influence over its activities

The following day, Monday, I proceeded to Derry with Eddie Williams and Liam Cummins. In the car going up, I thought of Johnny White the previous week, he who had to take much stick from angry locals insisting that the IRA bring out its weapons to defend the people. What weapons? Eddie, who was a member of the Army Council, had been appointed the previous week as OC for the ASU that would cover the Derry, Donegal and West Tyrone area and, with Liam's help, he set about his task on arrival. I went about seeking billets in County Donegal and as ever I was able to depend on Frank Morris of Convoy. I had an opportunity to view the Cork unit's stock of arms, which they had brought up with them. Nothing great, certainly not enough to have much effect in an offensive campaign, but possibly enough to use for short-term defensive purposes. I noted that a revived GHQ had not supplied them with any additional material.

Eddie was only a short period in charge, when Dave O'Connell arrived and informed him that when he went down to Dublin headquarters to re-enlist, he had been given Eddie's command by Cathal Goulding, the IRA Chief of Staff. Dave was living in Glencolumkill, County Donegal, at the time. Earlier in the year, Liam Cummins, as organiser, had gone to Glencolumcille to see Dave and request him to become involved again in the movement, but he had refused. This was a time when

the army had become so run down that a decision to try and entice a select few former members to return was attempted. Such an invitation was later extended to Tomas MacCurtain, by Jack Lynch of the Cork IRA, but he also refused. MacCurtain had not been involved with the movement since he had come out of the Curragh Internment Camp in 1959. At that time, he had reported back to the army in Cork, only to be told by Liam Early that he was surplus to requirements. There were many who faulted MacCurtain for his role as OC of the Curragh Internment Camp, but very few in Cork agreed with the way he was dealt with by Early.

When in Letterkenny, County Donegal, I met a long serving member of the IRA Army Council, who availed of the opportunity to congratulate me on the excellent work *An Phoblacht* had done in highlighting the problems existing within the Republican Movement. He also confirmed that a leading 'progressive' had been for some time agitating within the IRA to have "the *An Phoblacht* stopped and Jim Lane dealt with", only to find John Joe McGirl always obstructing him. Whenever the 'progressive' referred to *An Phoblacht* in a derisory way, McGirl interjected with remarks such as, "If you say it's all untrue, what they print, why not just ignore them?" It would seem that this kind of countryman's logic always ended the conversation.

The fact that Eddie Williams' leadership role was taken from him rankled, considering that O'Connell who replaced him had not been a member of the army since he came out of prison in 1963. Tom Mitchell also arrived on the scene with the news from HQ that all planned actions were called off pending a review meeting, which was to take place at Operations HQ in Ballinamore, County Leitrim, that week. This made sense as the unrest had by now died down, following the intervention of the British Armed Forces. The IRA had been seen the previous week to have failed to defend the people from the attacks of the RUC, the B-Specials and the sectarian mobs. To have engaged with the military and police at that time, *unless in the defence of the people*, would have made a bad situation worse for the IRA. The republican enclaves in Belfast and elsewhere had but a pittance in the way of arms and ammunition to defend themselves with and were, in objective terms, hostage to how the IRA belatedly reacted to the events of the previous week. Furthermore, the armament that the IRA possessed was pathetic in the circumstances. *Years of running down the IRA had left its mark*. The cover-up of the true situation was over at last.

When Eddie attended the Ballinamore meeting, he discovered that Seán Garland, though Director of Operations, was unaware that he had been replaced or that Dave O'Connell had enlisted and been appointed to a command position. Garland went berserk over this development and told Eddie that he was to return to Letterkenny, where O'Connell had set up his HQ and reclaim his command. The outcome was that Dave and Eddie²⁷ ended up in joint command of the ASU.

When it became obvious that unrest was unlikely to recur in Derry, many of those who had come to help began to return home. At the time that Dave O'Connell was in sole charge, he offered me membership of the IRA. This I refused, as I was already committed to Saor Éire, who were awaiting a reply from the Republican Movement to our letter sent in July asking for talks. However, Dave departed from army procedure when he appointed me Intelligence Officer of the ASU for the period I would be in the Derry area. All this entailed was going into Derry and bringing required information back to Dave at his headquarters in Letterkenny. When in Derry on one of those trips I encountered members of the Dublin republican group. They had also come north in response to the call for help. I introduced the two Cork ex-IRA members to the Dublin people.

I returned to Cork a short time later when everything had cooled down, but to keep in touch I was back up again in early September with Brendan O'Neill. On that occasion, we visited some

27 Eddie Williams (born 1922) returned shortly afterwards to Cork. There the army gave him the task of fundraising in the Munster area. His earlier responsibility as Command OC of Cork and South Kerry had been taken over by Jack Lynch. Though a member of the Army Council, he was not notified of either the Army Council meeting in October or the early December Extraordinary General Army Convention, both of which voted in favour of the proposal to end abstention in the three parliaments, Leinster House, Stormont and Westminster. He became estranged from the movement when he realised he was being edged out. No effort was made by either side of the sundered movement to involve him any further. In the early 1980s, he was on the Cork H-Block/Armagh Committee.

Cork IRA volunteers who had stayed on in Derry to act in a defensive role if needed and we also attended an IRA commemoration ceremony in County Donegal where we met Dave O'Connell. Arising out of a conversation we had with him, we became aware that plans were being hatched to keep the army operational in the North, even if it meant the establishment of a Northern Command with greater flexibility to operate or a change of leadership at national level.

On Friday, 19 September, I was in London, attending the trial at the Old Bailey of Conor Lynch and Patrick O'Sullivan, who were charged with attempting to rob sub-machine guns from the Sterling Engineering Works in Dagenham. I appeared as a witness for the defence and, in the course of my evidence, the prosecution began to question me about my republican activities in Cork and my connection with *An Phoblacht*. They had gone a good distance in trying to discredit me as a reliable witness, before the defence objected to that line of questioning, and not before time. The judge upheld the objection and the jury were told to ignore what was said. As often occurs in such circumstances, the jury probably did not forget or ignore. I was convinced that the information on my political activities known to the prosecution could only have been supplied by the Special Branch in Cork. As stated earlier in these notes, Lynch and O'Sullivan were eventually sentenced to seven years imprisonment.

A meeting to form a Central Committee to regulate all Citizens' Defence Committees activities in the Six Counties was arranged for the afternoon of Saturday, 27 September, to take place in Lurgan, County Armagh. The Saor Éire organisation was invited to send delegates. We accepted, and Gerry Higgins and I attended. On the journey north, when going through Dublin, by sheer chance we came upon some members of the Dublin republican group. We stopped and had a brief talk and took the opportunity of enquiring about the two Cork ex-IRA men, who we had reason to believe had joined their ranks. An arrangement was made for us to meet them on the Sunday morning near Fairview Park.

The meeting in Lurgan was well attended and was chaired by Vincent McDowell, a member of the Civil Rights Association. Once the meeting got going, delegate after delegate gave vent to their anger towards the IRA for failing to adequately defend the nationalist people. This anger was mainly directed towards the leadership in Dublin. They, likewise, made known their fear that should similar events recur, unless they were armed and ready, more deaths would occur and homes would be burned. They cited Bill Craig, prominent unionist, as one who could be counted on to ensure the unionist mobs were well armed. At this point, three men, who had arrived as the meeting was in progress, interrupted and in one voice assured the meeting that the citizenry of the nationalist areas would not be without arms on the next occasion they were attacked. They told the meeting that they would shortly have to leave the meeting as they had an important appointment to keep in Dublin. That appointment they said was with a man of equal importance in the Dublin government as Bill Craig's importance was within Ulster unionism. These remarks were greatly welcomed by all in attendance that day. That said, they left the meeting for the Dublin appointment. As they left, word went around the room that their meeting was with Charlie Haughey. The three men were Paddy Devlin²⁸, Jim Sullivan²⁹ and Hugh Kennedy³⁰. At the meeting also, a report was made advising Defence Committee members that military training for young men was now available over in County Donegal in a Free State army camp. It was stated that permission was given at the highest level of government.

This meeting was also attended by members of the Republican Movement and included Rory Brady, a member of the Army Council. Late to arrive was Dave O'Connell, who was elected unanimously as Military Advisor to the Central Committee.

The following morning we kept our appointment at Fairview Park, Dublin, with the two Cork ex-

28 Northern Ireland Labour Party MP for Falls and later a founder member of the Social Democratic Labour Party.

29 Adjutant of Belfast Brigade, IRA and strong supporter of Cathal Goulding's leadership of the IRA at the time.

30 This was the Hugh Kennedy who unsuccessfully attempted to smuggle in arms and ammunition into Cobh, County Cork, in May 1958, for which he received a three-month sentence in Limerick Prison (see pp 4–5 of these notes for further details of this incident). In 1969, he was involved with the Fianna Fáil-backed paper, *Voice of the North*.

IRA men who confirmed that they had joined up with the Dublin republican group. We then went home to Cork, only to be met on arrival by fellow members of Saor Éire, enquiring about a report that a group, calling themselves Saor Éire in a statement to the newspapers, claimed that the Saor Éire Action Group had robbed a bank in Kells, County Meath, on the previous Friday. After a hastily convened meeting, a statement was issued by Saor Éire, making clear that the organisation was not involved in the Kells robbery. We then investigated further and concluded that those involved were more than likely the Dublin republican group who we had met with earlier in the year. Indeed, it appears that when some of their members spoke briefly to Cork Saor Éire members in Dublin on the Saturday, it must have brought to mind memories of the meeting earlier in the year, when they had laid out their proposal for amalgamation of both our organisations. However, due to some mental aberration on their part, they had completely forgotten our rejection of their proposal, or perhaps they were still in denial about the rejection. To have arbitrarily decided to name their organisation Saor Éire, at a time when an organisation named Saor Éire already existed, was bizarre to say the least. The whole affair had very negative consequences for us. It was a time of rumour and counter-rumour, due to widespread recriminations within and without the Republican Movement, as to who was making the correct response to the crisis in the North. Some republicans, with whom we had been developing strong connections over several years, expressed themselves amazed that we were putting armed robbery ahead of a duty to physically help northern nationalists against threatened onslaught. Denials of association were not always accepted, particularly in the prevailing climate of the time. Very few could credit that a group would steal another organisation's name (though, it wasn't long before a name dispute arose as to who were the true IRA and Sinn Féin).

By late October 1969, we concluded that we had lost the initiative to hold together the republicans and socialists with whom we had developed relationships over the years, first through our publication *An Phoblacht* and then through the Saor Éire organisation, all organised under the umbrella of the Irish Revolutionary Forces. Saor Éire, which had great potential, finally lost out with the emergence of the Provisionals, who offered a potent mix of military action and traditionalism.

Cork, 6 August 2005

APPENDIX 1

Statement from Gerry Madden, the survivor of the St. Patrick's Day, 1963, explosion at Cork's Republican Plot. The statement was published in the *Irish Republican Bulletin*, New York, USA, January 1964.

On March 17th 1963, Volunteer Swanton gave his life for the Cause of Irish Republicanism and by so doing preserved the right of Irishmen to bear arms against the foreign army of occupation as well as against those who defend either of the British satellites in this country.

In 1959, four years prior to the death of Volunteer Swanton, RIP, a committee was set up whose members were selected from a group which gave its allegiance to the Free State cult. The names of the members of this committee were published.

Despite several approaches to the OC [IRA] by volunteers, this condition was allowed to continue.

The planned memorial was to be unveiled on March 17th and the Free State President was selected to be guest of honour. The fact that this was published in all the national papers [informing the public of the memorial to our fallen comrades] the task of doing anything constructive to prevent the Free State ceremony from taking place was made all the more difficult especially as it was to take place over the graves of our dead patriots, who had fought and died for the Irish Republic as proclaimed by Pearse, Easter 1916.

The OC of the area was again contacted and was told that if he did not face-up to his responsibility in preventing this unveiling that there were men who were prepared to act. The cause for which Terence MacSwiney and John Joe Kavanagh died must not be used as a political football by those who have sold our nation.

After carefully considering several courses open to us, Volunteer Swanton and myself decided that at this late stage in the proceedings there was only one alternative open to us that was to blow up the memorial to prevent the desecration of our patriots' graves by those who had sold out the Irish Republic.

On the night prior to St. Patrick's Day, Volunteer Swanton and myself were engaged in preparing a mine when two members of the Army [IRA] came upon us. They were looking for a useless revolver, which we gave to them. These men were very obviously under most terrific pressure at the time. Members of the Staff were aware of this and had supplied them with a car to collect the weapon. This interruption delayed us an hour and also endangered the security of the operation. Apart from this interruption, everything went according to plan, up to the time of the premature explosion in which Volunteer Swanton lost his life.

The morning following the tragedy, the Swanton family were visited by the OC and told that the operation was OFFICIAL, but some time later, these same men claimed that it was UNOFFICIAL.

The Swanton Family received abuse from the Free State element who were gripped by panic at the time. The Irish Republican Publicity Bureau issued a statement in which it said, "It is not the Movement's policy to carry out such incidents – as is well known".

This statement proved not only evasive but revealed complete ignorance of the significance of the situation and of Irish History as well.

In 1922, a similar attempt was made to degrade the cause for which the men in the Republican Plot had given their lives. The Prime Minister at that time came to lay a wreath on the Republican Plot but was stopped by an armed guard of the IRA. They warned him that if he were to enter the plot it would be desecration. The Prime Minister returned to his car.

Compare this action with what happened at Volunteer Swanton's funeral. The Thomas Ashe Hall [Sinn Féin] was closed for two days and the band equipment and uniforms were collected and locked away. This was done in order to prevent their use for Swanton's funeral. Several people were dismissed for attending the funeral. Others resigned in protest over the action taken by the political element in smashing a printing press, which had produced pamphlets that contained an article on Volunteer Swanton's death.

A statement was issued by a spokesman from Cork for the Republican Publicity Bureau to the

effect that those who remained faithful to the teachings of Tone and gave military honour to Volunteer Swanton came only to pay their own, personal, and individual respects.

In 1957, after the funerals of Sean South and Fergal O'Hanlon, a similar statement was issued by the then Free State Prime Minister, Mr. Costello, in a radio broadcast to the nation when he stated that the large crowds which attended the funerals were only a show of sympathy and could not be accepted as support for their action. However, this attitude that has been adopted by those who control the Republican movement in Cork cannot come as any surprise to us, since it is only two years ago that all delegates from Cork to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, with the exception of myself, voted in favour of entering Leinster House, the Free State Parliament. The same semi-Free State element in the movement has kept the situation stagnant in Cork for years, and those who tried to remedy this serious condition were blacklisted. Several approaches were made to GHQ concerning this matter and as late as last year the vast majority of the volunteers in Cork wrote to GHQ and made charges against the staff in Cork but the only satisfaction we received was negligible.

If we look back in our history and take example from men like Seán Treacy, Cathal Brugha, Rory, Liam, Dick, and Joe, we will find the answer to all our problems.

It is the responsibility of every Republican worthy of the name to do his duty in his area and rid the movement of the type of men who believe in co-existence between the Free State Satellite and those within our Movement who preach the decadent policy that we should not take action against fellow Irishman, even though they wear the uniform of the Crown in the North or that of the Free State.

I was only a month out of hospital after this incident when I reported to the Army [IRA] and asked them to clarify my position. As of this date, I have had no reply.

(Signed) Jeremiah Madden

APPENDIX 2

An exchange of letters in the *Cork Evening Echo* (18 April to 25 June 1968) between Gearoid MacCarthaigh, and representatives of the Republican Movement. Two letters by anonymous writers, one by 'Ex-Gunman', who was believed to be a well informed member of Sinn Féin, are also included.

APRIL 18, 1968: Opening letter by Gearoid MacCarthaigh, who titled himself, ex-OC Briogaid a hAon Corcaigh, Oglaiigh na hEireann.

A Chara,

On Easter Sunday I attended an Easter Commemoration ceremony at the Republican Plot in St. Finbarr's Cemetery. The speaker, in the course of his oration, gave the impression that driving British Armed Forces from occupied Ireland is now only a secondary consideration in the policy of the Republican Movement and that the primary consideration now is to fight social injustice in the 26 county area. He mentioned James Connolly on numerous occasions.

I would welcome an opportunity to debate the points made by Denis Foley in public, but since it is very unlikely that the present Republican Movement will give me an opportunity to do this I would like to make the following points, through the columns of your paper.

1/ When I was a member of the movement (a period of about 37 years) we always accepted Wolfe Tone as being the father of Irish Republicanism and Tone taught us that, "the root cause of all our country's evils lie in the connection with England". Tone died because he fought to end this connection.

The speaker seems to disagree with Tone's teachings – why? Does he prefer those of Marx, Lenin and Roy Johnston? Does the Republican Movement also prefer the latter?

2/ James Connolly was executed by a British firing squad because he fought British forces of occupation during Easter Week. Connolly was a nationalist first and a socialist second, but perhaps the speaker and the Republican Movement would prefer the British Connolly Club's interpretation of James Connolly's teachings.

3/ Can the speaker or any member of the Republican Movement show me the grave of one soldier of the republic in the republican plot in Cork or anywhere in Ireland whose primary objective was not the driving of British Armed Forces lock, stock and barrel out of Ireland.

MAY 6, 1968: Reply by 'Unemployed Man', Douglas Street, Cork.

Sir,

As an unemployed married man, I would like to reply to Mr Gerald McCarthy's letter. If, as he says, Wolfe Tone and Connolly were only interested in driving the British out, then my kind of people have nothing to live for. However, I know that Mr McCarthy has his tongue in his cheek and I have no intention of judging Tone or Connolly on his letter. Both Tone and Connolly made it very clear in their writings that, "Ireland apart from her people" meant nothing to them. If this is the best that Mr McCarthy can do after 37 years, then he can keep his pipe band, his bugle and flag if such things make him happy.

MAY 15, 1968: Reply from 'Ex-Gunman' of Ballyphehane, Cork.

Sir,

Your correspondent "G McC" seems to be out of touch with the new progressive policy of the Republican Movement. He fails to realise that the day is gone where the Movement had a narrow minded isolationist policy which centred on the British Army in Northern Ireland.

During the past two years at duly convened and democratic conventions the Movement had made some major and radical changes in policy.

For instance it is now our policy to give recognition to the courts of the land, to assist and cooperate with other bodies, political and otherwise, who are actively engaged in furthering the cause of the people and to encourage our members to join other bodies, cultural, sporting etc. to get the Republican viewpoint across.

No longer is there emphasis on physical force. We now realise that our first objective is to raise the standard of living here in the Republic and this cannot be achieved by sending young men across the border with guns, it is better to send them across with a good social and economic policy.

We aim to establish a truly democratic Irish Workers Republic, through constitutional methods and in order to do this we will, in the not too distant future, abandon our abstentionist policy.

If "G McC" thinks that by coupling the name of one of our leaders, Dr. Roy Johnston, with those of Lenin and Marx he will damage our image and have us labelled Communists, he is sadly mistaken, because nowadays the masses of the people are beginning to realise that a good socialist doctrine is better than the present capitalistic set-up.

I would suggest to "G McC" that there is still a place for him in the ranks of the Republican Movement if he is prepared to renounce physical force and agree to further the cause of a Socialist Irish Workers' Republic.

MAY 24, 1968: At last, Sinn Féin enter the correspondence, but refrain from responding to Gearoid MacCarthaigh. Instead they take issue with 'ex-Gunman' who, remarkably, put the developing official republican position quite well. The letter was signed by Gearoid O'Maolain, Cathaoirleach Sinn Féin, Cork, and Niall Moore, Press Officer Sinn Féin, Cork.

A Chara,

The local Sinn Féin executive, Cork, is fully satisfied that your anonymous correspondent, "Ex-Gunman", Ballyphehane, is not a member of the Republican Movement and we hereby denounce this letter as a fraudulent distortion of Republican policy. We further wish to state that on national issues no change whatever in this policy has taken place.

In social and economic matters many changes are contemplated due to changing social conditions, under which the people of this country, North and South, are forced to live and this includes the publication of a new, "Social and Economic Programme" which is at present being studied at Cumann level.

Finally, we wish to state that only statements and letters on official paper and signed by duly elected officers of this organisation should be taken as representing the policy of the Republican Movement of which Sinn Féin is the political wing.

June 5, 1968: Gearoid MacCarthaigh responds to the Sinn Fein letter.

A Chara,

I wish to reply to the letter under the heading “Republicanism” signed by Gearoid O’Maolain and Niall Moore, which appeared in the *Echo* of May 24.

In this letter it was stated that “Ex-Gunman” is not a member of the Republican Movement. This I am prepared to accept. But not the later statement that “Ex-Gunman’s” letter was “a fraudulent distortion of Republican policy.” If it was, then so also were the speeches made by official Republican speakers at Easter commemorations all over Ireland, including Cork City on Easter Sunday 1968. “Ex-Gunman” was only repeating the policy laid down by these official speakers and also by a Dublin speaker when he appeared on the “Late, Late Show” some weeks ago.

Gearoid O’Maolain and Niall Moore also state in their letter that there have been no fundamental changes to the national policy of the Republican Movement. Surely, G. O’Maolain remembers the “Extraordinary Sinn Fein Ard Feis” at which very serious changes were made in the whole policy of Sinn Fein. G. O’Maolain was a delegate, just as I was, and every bit as much in opposition to these changes as I was. Of course, he had not been educated by the Director of Political Education, at that time.

In conclusion, I would ask the Republican Movement to meet me in public debate on present day Republican policy and perhaps we would bring the truth to light.

JUNE 18, 1968: Republicans Gearoid O’Maolain and Niall Moore reply to Gearoid MacCarthaigh.

A Chara,

The Republican Movement in common with national, cultural and political movements everywhere is, by its very nature, open to criticism and correction when it strays from a declared policy. The only qualification necessary for any critic is that his remarks are fair, just and truthful. In violation of this simple rule and the elementary principle of charity and brotherhood, your correspondent Gearoid MacCarthaigh seeks to vent his personal venom on the movement, which he claimed to be a member of for 37 years.

Regarding the extraordinary Sinn Féin Ard Fheis of 1966, he is fully aware as we are that most of the ten proposals were defeated by a large majority. His now belated reference to that occasion and delegates who supported or opposed any proposal can only be taken as an indictment of the democratic procedure.

In conclusion, we wish to state that we concede the same right to an tUasal MacCarthaigh as we do to every citizen to expound and debate any policy they like, anywhere they like – but that as far as we are concerned the only policy we are at present interested in is that which is decided by our own members at Ard Fheis and convention.

JUNE 25, 1968: Gearoid MacCarthaigh replies to the Republican Movement's representatives and there is no further correspondence from them following this letter.

A Chara,

Gearoid O'Maolain and Niall Moore in their recent letter accuse me of departing from the rules of fair and truthful criticism. Obviously the old Irish proverb which states, "the truth is often bitter" is having its effect.

Perhaps these two men who are so fond of the truth would like to deny the following:

1/ The following statement made by their Director of Political Education at a meeting in Trinity College last January: "Force as a means of winning freedom is out and this is now the thinking of Sinn Féin."

2/ That republican organisations marched with the Communist Party at a James Connolly commemoration in Belfast in June 9, 1968.

3/ That the Connolly Association of London (a well known Communist organisation) was officially invited to the commemoration in Bodenstown last year and have been invited again this year.

They speak of the democratic procedure adopted at Ard Feiseanna, but where was the democracy in the order given to a large body of the delegates to the extraordinary Sinn Féin Ardfheis that they were to vote in favour of all the resolutions dealing with the new policy.

In their letter, Gearoid O'Maolain and Niall Moore accuse me of venting my personal venom on the Republican Movement. They are, of course, well aware this is not so, but that I am attacking and will continue to attack by every means in my power those who would use the Republican Movement to propagate policies which are anything but Republican.

Once more I would ask the present Republican movement to meet me in public debate on present day Republican policy and let the public decide who is telling the truth and who is not. Surely they are not afraid of one man who according to them is untruthful, unfair, uncharitable and venomous.
