### SPECIAL 25th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

# The legacy of Seamus Costello

Republican Socialists commemo rate this year the 25th anniversary of the assassination of Seamus Costello. If he is unsurprisingly remembered as the nder of the IRSP and the INLA he should also be commemorated as one of the main architects of the left turn taken by the then unified Republican Movement during the 1960s. In contrast to Connolly, whose background was the workers movenent, Costello came from the conspiratorial politics of the 'secret army", understood their limits, and developed a strategy to reconstruct them on a left Seamus Costello applied to join the IRA aged 16, and became the commander of an ASU in South Derry during the border campaign. He was arrested in 1957, and was interned in the Curragh. Like others, he reflected on the reasons for the failure of the 1956 - 1962 campaign, and came to realise that there was an objective need to move away from a purely military conception of struggle. The IRA had sepa-

rated itself from the people. Costello thought that the Republican movement should be organically linked to the masses develop a solid political programme to give political leadership and if necessary complement mass struggle by military action. Through the efforts of Costello and others, the Republican Movement adopted a socialist stance by 1966/1967. This part of Costello's political life has much relevance in 2002. Forty years after the end of the border campaign, Republicans have still to understand the defeat of the 1990s. While some Republicans join the status quo and other "pan nationalist fronts", Republican Socialists will find inspiration in Costello's 1960s strategy. What is required of Republicans is to be organically linked to the struggles of the working class and give political leader With the outbreak of the

struggle in the North and

Republican

Movement. Costello remained with the Officials. He was on the left wing of the Officials, pressing the rest and his supporters that the Official IRA adopted a more aggressive policy in 1971. But under the pressure of reformist elements, the Official IRA called a ceasefire in 1972. The strategy of the Officials in the North was seeking to unite Catholic and Protestant workers under the Civil Rights banner, reform Stormont and demand a Westminster Bill of Rights. The Official leadership argued that military activity alienated the loyalist working class and endangered electoral prospects in the 26 counties. The Official leadership was totally out of step with the mass struggle that was going on. They stated that the abolition of Stormont was a regressive measure! They were still stuck at the Civil Rights stage when the struggle against British rule was the main issue. No wonder that the Officials lost a lot of political credibility with the Nationalist working class. This political line was opposed by Costello and his supporters. Strategically, Costello argued that there was too much emphasis on appeasing lovalists rather than defending Nationalists, that the principal contradiction was partition and not the reform of Stormont. Tactically, he criticised the absence of armed struggle and the over-emphasis upon electoralism in the 26 counties. One of the lessons of this period, is the necessity for Republican Socialists of never being out of step with the mass struggle. Any struggle out of step with mass struggle is condemned to fail. It is also important to understand what the main contradiction is, and how the principal aspect of that contradiction manifests itself. The Officials failed to see what the principal contradiction was and embarked on the road to

At first, Costello tried to reform the Official Republican Movement from within. In 1972, in an attempt to open up a discussion on political and military strategy, Costello (who was still OIRA Director of Operations) and Sean Garland jointly formulated a policy document called "A Brief Examination of the Republican Position: An Attempt to Formulate the Correct Demands and Methods of Struggle". Their position was critical of the then leadership's gradual downgrading of the national question. The document was adopted at the October 1972 IRA convention and the subsequent Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, but never implemented. The Goulding- MacGiolla faction attempted to reverse the decision and tried to isolate and undermine Costello by perverting methods of internal democracy. In 1973, the Offical Sinn Fein and Army Council adopted new organisational principles as part of a strategy of isolating the opposition without creating a split. Costello was weakened when Garland changed sides. Things came to a head when Seamus Costello was court martialled and dismissed from the Official IRA in July 1974. At the 1974 Offical Sinn Fein Ard Fheis, Costello was also dismissed from the party. Costello supporters had been so thoroughly purged from both the party and the army, that there were only 15 votes against the motion. Costello was certainly no "splitist". He tried to work within the Officials until he was expelled, and when the conflict later erupted between the Official IRA and his movement, he did everything in his power to resolve matters peacefully. He was probably correct not to leave earlier, as he ultimately would have ended up isolated.

Costello and his supporters had little choice but form a new political movement. On 8 December 1974, Costello and eighty of his supporters set up the Irish Republican Socialist Party The same day, they discussed also discussed the formation of a new armed group that would continue the struggle the Official IRA had abandoned. They recognised the need for a revolutionary socialist party who would understand the relationship between the national question and the class struggle

based on this understanding. Costello and his supporters were at first busy laying the foundation and structures of their party. In April 1975 was the first national conference, the same year the party paper "The Starry Plough" was established and party premises were purchased in Dublin. But the party had to fight for its very survival before even thinking of developing. The party was faced with very serious objective and subjective problems that crippled its development and growth

First, the Officials attempted to wipe out Costello's organisation before it got off the ground, beating, pistol whipping and kneecapping its members, and on 20 February shooting dead Hugh Ferguson. Until a ceasefire between the two organisations was brokered in May, three comrades lay dead and over forty injured. But the Officials never lifted their directive to execute Costello, and assassinated him in 1977. Those who had refused to use their weapons against the armed forces of British occupation had not qualms about turning them against fellow Republicans ! If the fighting with the Officials had been mostly concentrated in Belfast, it nevertheless had a debilitating effect on the movement in the country as a whole. Costello's supporters had also to cope with hostility of some Provisionals. A number of people left the Provisional IRA (then on ceasefire) to join Costello's organisation. To dissuade further defections, the IRA assassinated one of its members that had joined the IRSP, and blamed the killing on the Officials. In such a climate, the immediate threat to the movement was not even the state or the loyalists, but former comrades.

On top of that, state repression attempted to crush the IRSP, in

the 26 counties in particular. This was no ordinary Garda harassment. In June 1975, they lay the blame on the IRSP for a UDA attempt to blow up a train carrying Officials to Bodenstown. On 31 March 1976 at Sallins, the Cork-Dublin train was robbed. Although the Provisionals later admitted responsibility for the robbery, the Free State government used it as an excuse to launch a vicious political attack on the IRSP. About 40 IRSP members were arrested, and most reported that they were tortured, deprived of sleep and food, brutally kicked and beaten. Doctors and human rights observers later confirmed their injuries. Three IRSP members were eventually sentenced to long term prison imprisonment by the Dublin Special Criminal Court in December 1978. All three had been framed, and after intense efforts by organisations such as Amnesty International to prove their innocence two were released in 1980. The last, Nicky Kelly, had to wait 1992 before being officially cleared! Costello always maintained that there had been a state conspiracy to smash the IRSP. What is certain is that round 1976, the Free State took a particularly repressive stance against left-wing groups. For example, Noel and Marie Murray, two Anarchists accused of killing a Garda during a robbery, where threatened with death penalty. But the IRSP particularly suffered. Ta Power estimated that the IRSM had by late 1975 about 800 members. Up to 15% of them had been injured -or even killed- in arrests or by the Officials. That means that for the first two years, due to these difficult objective circumstances, the movement had little breathing space and simply struggled for survival.

At the same time, Costello was busy building an armed organisation organically distinct from the party. The resumption of armed struggle was one of the decisive reasons for leaving the Officials. As Connolly wrote, "agitation to attain a political or economic end must rest upon an implied willingness and ability to use force. Without that, it is mere wind and attitudinising"

(Selected Works, p.45) In early 1976, the Army Council of a "National Liberation Army" issued its first statement. "The National Liberation Army was recently formed with the aim of ending British imperialist rule in Ireland and creating a 32 county Democratic Socialist Republic. As revolutionaries, we recognise the paramount necessity for the existence of an armed anti-imperialist organisation which will play an effective role in the current struggle. (.) After five years of struggle against imperialism, the Irish people have victory within their grasp We see it as our task as revolutionaries, that they are not deprived of victory through the acceptance of any compromise solution negotiated without reference to the long term interests of the Irish working class." The statement ended with a list of 15 operations carried out since May 1975 ("New Army Announced". The Starry Plough n.10, January 1976, p.4) Due to the lack of weapons and ammunitions, it was not easy for Costello's army to make an impact. In May 1977, the Starry Plough stated for example: "There is little known about the National Liberation Army (NLA) who have remained relatively guiet since December 1975 " ("National Liberation Army on the Offensive", The Starry Plough n.21, May 1977, p.6) The 1978 British Army document "Future Terrorist Trends" barely mentions Costello's organisation. The name of the group itself was not even clear. It is only in March 1978 that the armed group adopted the INLA name, and by that time Costello was already dead. Even if he was undeniably left-leaning. Costello remained true to the physical force Republican tradition, and for him the army was the privileged vehicle for revolutionary struggle. This gave rise to a debate leading to a split (or resigations) in the IRSP in 1975. A faction led by Bernadette Devlin-McAliskev argued that the army should be subordinated to the party on the basis of democratic centralism Otherwise, "Group B" would just be a smaller version of the IRA with left-leanings. The split significantly weakened the movement, as it lost experienced political cadres.

Whether with the party or the army, Costello was committed to the Connolly position on the relation between the national question and the class struggle. The Officials concentrated on the class question while ignoring the national one, and the Provisional Republican movement concentrated on the national question while ignoring class issues. In contrast, the Republican Socialist movement would concretely link the two. Unfortunately, since Costello's death, the idea of "For National Liberation and Socialism" merely remained a slogan and was not developed into a concrete programme. This partly related to the fact that the IRSP put too much emphasis upon the strategy of the Broad Front. For its time, the proposal to form a united front was very advanced -it broke with exclusivism and elitism latent within Republican politics to this day. Costello recognised that armed struggle on its own could not succeed, it needed to be grounded on a mass movement and collaborate with other progressive organisations. One must also note that the Broad Front envisaged by Costello had little to do with the so-called "pan-nationalist front" of today, as it would be limited to progressive social forces. The problem was that Costello elevated the tactic of the Broad Front to the level of a strategy. As a tactic, it is very valid for the IRSP to engage in joint actions, in a united front with other political organisations on specific issues and specific goals. However, the Broad Front is not the decisive catalyst for struggle. The development of the Broad Front should be subordinated to the necessity of building the revolutionary vanguard party based on scientific socialism as the decisive vehicle to bring about national liberation and socialism. There was a problem of priorities because in effect, the IRSP tended to subordinate the development of the

party to the construction of the Broad Front, and was willing to submerge its particular political outlook in a Broad Front (see for instance the experience of the Irish Front in Derry in 1977-78). Costello called for the Broad Front without clear indications of the dangers of popular frontism. The result is that the party was unable to develop a clear ideology nor define its politics beyond the slogan "For National Liberation and Socialism" and a vague call for the "Broad Front". However, this failure is not unique: from the 1930s Republican Congress to the League of Communist Republicans in the 1980s, no group really solved the problem of the relation between the strategy of party building and the constitution of the united popular front.

Added to objective (attacks on the movement) and subjective (resignations, political hesitations), the assassination of Seamus Costello in October 1977 by the Official IRA was a decisive blow against the IRSP. To all intents and purposes, he was the party. He was the main political and organisational brains behind the movement. It left the party in confusion and without direction. Today, the organisational strategy of the Republican Socialist Movement would differ significantly from that of Costello in at least one important aspect: the stress on collective leadership. Collective leadership would have helped avoid many of the problems that rose within the movement after the death of Costello. Twenty five years after the assassination of Seamus Costello, those are just some of the most important issues of Costello's legacy that Republican Socialists should reflect on.





Assemble 2pm, Sunday 20th October Town Hall, Brav for March and Rally to Little Bray Churchyard, Bray

Main speaker Bernadette Devlin McAliskey

Organised by the LR.S.P. Seamus Costello Commemeration Committee

For more details regarding the Commemeration contact: Dublin IRSP on 01-873562 or email: dublinirsp@hotmail.cu Bray IRSP contact details ring Stephen on 086-359004. Belfast contact details ring Fra on 028-90321024.

## Republican Socialism!

Ve strive towards a society that

the class struggle. Any attempt to isolate one from the other will esult in failure. It is meaningless to speak of a free nation, it one who refuses to challenge British imperialism in Ireland cannot claim to be fighting for socialism and the continuation of partition props up the divisions in the working class of Ireland that bodd us have from our own liber. old us back from our own liberidid us back from our own fiber-tition. We have no choice in whether or not we wish to con-ider the interconnection of the lational and class questions,

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can socialists we see the creation of a fighting 'rank and file trade union movement as something that still holds potential and