

A TRAUMATIC TIME.

From time to time political developments can be traced to traumatic events. One such event which led to the formation of the LCR was the death on Hunger Strike of ten prisoners in 1981. Despite the pundits attributing the rise of Sinn Féin to the Hunger Strike emotion, the real effect of that period was the decline of the Provos.

However misguided the IRA strategy of the '70s may have been, there was always the underlying assumption that they could and would fight and that under given circumstances the publicity accruing from this would force the British to retire from their Irish involvement. The Hunger Strike ended their misconceptions. When the chips were down, it was the Provos who retreated. A retreat too into a 6 - County based populist electoralism, coupled with outright dependency on militarist propaganda.

Illusions that the 26 County establishment would be swept away in a tide of nationalist hysteria were cruelly exposed. Fianna Fáil's reaction to the Hunger Strike was not to fight Britain, but to go with a tea-pot to London and set in motion the Anglo-Irish Agreement process which imperiled what little sovereignty the South enjoyed.

HARD REALITY LEADS TO FRESH ANALYSIS.

The Hunger Strike was hard reality for those republicans who chose to face it. Many sought comfort in Sinn Féin electoralism. A few looked deeper. Amongst those who searched deepest were a handful of prisoners with left-wing leanings (albeit unsophisticated). Their soul-searching led to three fundamental conclusions. The first was that the Irish question was a 32 County problem and not one confined to the 6 Counties. Second, no radical change would be possible without the support of the majority of the Irish people. Finally, only one class in Irish society was capable of, or interested in, leading such change - the Irish working class.

These conclusions were reached in combination with a deeper examination of Marxism. What had previously been a superficial acceptance of socialism began to emerge as a clearer, more precisely defined, Marxist analysis coupled with an understanding of the Leninist method of struggle.

This Marxist-Leninist philosophy was not acquired by way of a dramatic revelation. It developed over time and through laborious reading. Unlike others who have the good fortune to be introduced to Marxism, the embryo LCR gained its grasp of the doctrine by self-instruction and through a determination to find solutions. As a

consequence we have often been labelled "juvenile communists" by unkind critics. It is hurtful but the encouragement from serious leftists has compensated for it.

An ideological struggle developed in the H-Blocks in the aftermath of the Hunger Strike and protests. It was not simply a struggle between right and left; such labels are at best imprecise in the Republican Movement. The argument centred on the best means of making the Republican Movement relevant on a 32 County scale. As a result many schools of thought were in contention.

Without tediously detailing the many opinions, it is simplest to say that two main positions emerged following the early capitulation of the traditionalists. One took the line that by slow patient work the Republican Movement could be moved on to a socialist axis. The other insisted that, while Sinn Féin remained essentially based on a nationalist philosophy (while many members would be sympathetic to the workers cause), the movement would not radically change without a radical assault on its beliefs and prejudices.

For a variety of reasons (not least being influential support) the gradualist approach enjoyed the upper hand. The major flaw in their argument lay in the fact that by confining themselves within Sinn Féin parameters they caused little debate within republican ranks.

They failed completely to challenge old assumptions

about the conduct of the armed campaign and the relevance of anti-partitionism. Worse, that lent a certain spurious leftist legitimacy to a Republican Movement drifting aimlessly into petit bourgeois electoralism.

Describing this position at the time, the Marxist group used the old Bolshevik condemnation of the Socialist Revolutionaries - "Your revolution isn't socialist and your socialism isn't revolutionary".

By 1986 the Marxists were encountering growing frustration. For example, an article for "An Phoblacht" on Irish agriculture was rejected on the grounds that the author was "a bloody Stalinist"! Prison politics, we were told by a leading gradualist, were to be guided by a "safe pair of hands", ie no radicals need apply. The final straw was when Sinn Féin opted for parliament on a purely opportunist ticket.

Whatever hope existed of turning the Republican Movement into a party capable of leading the Irish working class in a struggle for national and social liberation had faded. At best we could hope for a pale version of the Workers' Party. The time for decisions had come.

Marxists in the H-Blocks had hoped that following the 1986 Sinn Féin Ard Fheis there would emerge at least the nucleus of a workers' opposition to the Adams line. This did not come about, and so, borrowing a slogan from James Fintan Lalor, "Somewhere, somehow and by

somebody, a beginning must be made", they split from the Republican Movement and set up the League of Communist Republicans.

THE LCR IS FOUNDED

From its inception the LCR was under no illusions about its strength. Numbers were small and its argument alone gave it influence. The first major task was identified as establishing a means of proclaiming its message (this was mainly to be carried out through its paper Congress '86).

The message to be carried was the imperative need for a new vanguard party of the working class and the creation of a mass anti-imperialist movement. In an effort to combine the two concepts in one vehicle, the LCR paper advocated the building of a new Republican Congress. From this came the title of the paper itself.

In its early days the LCR encountered difficulties propagating its message and organizing itself. A couple of examples might help illustrate the kinds of problems faced.

In 1986 one comrade wrote a short mocking letter to a provincial newspaper. He pointed out that Sinn Féin might care to consider that Guy Fawkes was the only person to enter parliament with honourable intentions. The newspaper editor refused to print it and instead handed the letter over to Sinn Féin's Dáil candidate in the area. The gist of the letter resurfaced some months later at a general election rally in Belfast. We've wondered since has there been a connection.

A second episode was not so frivolous. Early in 1987 friends of the LCR attempted to organise a non-party political anti-Diplock campaign. An initial and quite successful meeting was held in Gallbally, Co Tyrone. Sinn Féin immediately moved against the group, threatening it as if it were a political usurpation rather than an effort to help political prisoners.

All Sinn Féin personnel in Tyrone were instructed to resist every move made by the anti-Diplock group and a message was circulated in the prison describing those who initiated the move as "counter-revolutionaries" and "people offering assistance to the enemy". This directive was issued under full IRA authority and was directed for the most part at an aging grandmother and a teenage schoolgirl.

Faced with such problems, the LCR opted to temporarily concentrate on propagating its message in print. Energy was concentrated on bringing out a magazine. This appeared in June 1987 and was received with scant attention. With a small financial contribution from relatives and assistance in the lay-out provided by an ex-prisoner, the first issue went to press.

UNDER THE TITLE OF A CONGRESS.

To a large extent the story of the LCR has been the story of its magazine. Congress '86 has been the point of contact, the method of carrying the group line and a means of organising. While the print run has been relatively small (no more than 1,000 copies per issue) the journal has reached a surprisingly wide readership. Though the LCR do not claim to have converted many to their way of thinking, the continuous publication of Congress '86 on a quarterly basis has won for the group a platform from which to at least address the left in Ireland.

Launching the first issue of Congress '86 was a triumph in itself for the LCR. By the time No 2 came out, however, the paper had gained the help of two comrades in Co Clare in editing the publication. Congress '86 No 2 was the first issue in which we carried the slogan "For a Workers' and Small Farmers' Republic". This has been one of the key planks in the LCR programme, identifying as it does our view on the present stage of Ireland's road to full socialism. The LCR argue that Ireland needs a radically democratic government for all the island.

The insistence on radical democracy - ie the Workers' and Small Farmers' Republic - is based on the belief that the simple reunification of Ireland carries no real attraction for the majority of our working people. Alternatively, to

demand immediate full socialisation of the economy is ultra-left daydreaming which does not reflect Irish conditions at present.

A second major article in issue No 2 was an enunciation of the LCR line on the armed campaign in the Six Counties. This article, entitled Critique of the Propaganda War was viewed by the LCR as a vital statement. It rejected the type of shallow thinking which underpinned the republican armed strategy and was important to the LCR in that it marked a break with guerrillaism.

This article drew much criticism from very different quarters. Sinn Féin supporters were extremely hostile, misreading and misinterpreting it as an attack on the Volunteers' integrity. In a way this could have been anticipated. Criticism we didn't expect came from some of those on the left who seemed incapable of distinguishing between a popular war for national liberation and a waning border campaign. Worse, they didn't seem to realise either that energy expended on the latter merely postponed a successful workers'-led struggle for national liberation.

However the LCR continued to produce Congress '86 and by issue No 4 we felt confident enough to add a four page supplement. This leaflet came out during the Sinn Féin - SDLP talks of 1988 and it condemned the drift to a right wing pan-nationalist solution to the Irish

problem. It is difficult to be certain, but we have reason to believe that on this occasion at least, our words were heeded by members of the Sinn Féin rank and file.

At any rate, the LCR was no longer willing to simply make a contribution through the pages of its journal. Since first publishing Congress '86 the LCR nucleus outside the prison had grown. They decided to make contact with other leftists interested in developing the concepts propagated by the LCR. Negotiations were protracted and rarely free from complications.

THE LCR REORGANISES ANDRE-EVALUATES.

The first consequence of these discussions is that the LCR is now sufficiently strong to organise itself free from dependence on its imprisoned members. The value of this development is hard to overestimate and evidence of its effect should be seen before too long.

Alongside this reorganisation, the LCR has re-evaluated some of its thinking in the light of practical experience. In a nutshell this amounts to a change of emphasis rather than an about-face on any major principle. From its inception the LCR has called for a Vanguard Party in conjunction with a Republican Congress. The Republican Congress envisaged was to have the slogan "For a Republic under the Revolutionary Democratic control of Workers and Small Farmers".

There was, we now admit, a certain ambiguity in this call. Most serious of all was the lack of a clear indication of the steps necessary for the building of a workers' Vanguard Party. Steps are underway to remedy this failing.

The LCR now believes that a new Republican Congress should broadly follow the course advocated by the 1934 majority resolution advocated by Mick Price and Nora Connolly. Very roughly, this means that the Congress would still have the "Workers and Small

Farmers" slogan but would also set itself the immediate task of organising a healthy party of the working people. Those joining such a Congress would understand this as a condition of membership.

This is a departure from the all-embracing popular front type of Republican Congress. We are still convinced of the need for such a wide movement but are now of the opinion that an essential first step on the road to it is the reorganisation of the working people into a coherent unit.

THE LCR IS READY TO MOVE FORWARD.

The LCR is now at something of a crossroads in its brief history. The comrades are nonetheless more confident than ever and invite all those interested in the cause of a free Ireland with a free working class, to join the struggle.

Since November the LCR has drawn a thin red line through a volatile section of Irish society. That red line has held under difficult circumstances and intends to advance even should circumstances prove yet more difficult.

SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE LCR

FOR:

1. An Independent Sovereign Republic of All Ireland.
2. A Revolutionary Democratic Government, under the control of the Workers and Small Farmers.
3. Administration of the State to be under the supervision of a National Assembly which practices Direct Participatory Democracy, ie deputies are subject to recall.