Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line

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Communism in the Schools

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[**EROL note**: Article from the Irish Times on the Maoist influence in Dublin secondary schools in 1970. The Maoist group in question was 'The Internationalists', soon re-launched as the Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist-Leninist).]

Communism in the Schools

Four pupils with Maoist views were suspended from O'Connell Schools, Dublin, last year. MICHAEL HENEY talked to one of them about what happened and about the relationship between the Trinity College group, the Internationalists and various secondary school pupils.



NOT ONE, but four pupils with Maoist views, were suspended from O'Connell's Schools, Dublin, last year, it was learned this week. The four pupils - 18 year-old Denis Healey, Summerhill; 18 year old Gerry Brady, Whitehall; 18 year-old Jimmy Fitzpatrick, Summerhill and 17 year-old Fintan Cronin. Ballymun Avenue - were all members of the People's Rights, an organisation based on the quays and dock area of Dublin and associated with the Trinity College group, the Internationalists.

Only one of the suspensions - that of Denis Healey received publicity at the time. Following a discussion with one of the three others, Gerry Brady, this week, the principal of O'Connell's Schools-run by the Irish Christian Brothers - the Rev. Bro. Purcell, confirmed that four pupils had, in fact been suspended.

Only a fortnight ago it was learned that another pupil, Carmel Gorman (17), had been suspended from the Sisters of Mercy convent secondary school, Inchicore, Dublin. She was accused of similar activities: "disrupting" classes and peddling political views in the school.

The Principal of O'Connell's Schools,the Rev. Brother Purcell, said this week: "Our policy, with the parents is that we will not allow the school to be used for any political activity. We regard the school as an educational establishment with well-defined aims which do not include political activity.

We always consult with the parents -in fact they would insist pupils be suspended. It is up to the management of the school to see that discipline is observed and this applied to any activity which might undermine the discipline of the school."

"I am not here," said Brother Purcell, "referring to the four boys at all. I am speaking generally."

Asked to define the aims of his school, he said: "First of all it is a Christian school and has a specific Christian aim. Parents send their children here because of this. Secondly, it is an academic institution where pupils get a broad general education and study to pass their examinations."

"It is not," he said, "the function of a school to become a forum for the spreading of political views. We wouldn't like to see any child using the school in this way."

A remarkable insight into the relationship between the Internationalist and these various secondary school pupils was provided by one of the ex- O'Connell's Schools pupils, Gerry Brady, when he spoke to me this week. Brady has broken with the T.CD. group, as he believes them to be too doctrinaire and academic in their approach to local people and local issues. He has transferred his allegiance to groups like Sinn Fein, Connolly Youth and the Dublin Housing Action Committee.

"Certainly, there was a lot of socialist talk in the school for six months before we were suspended," he says. "There were regular classroom meetings after school, sometimes from 4 p.m. until 6 p.m. The highest attendance was about 23, but the average, about 12.

- "We were standing up in class and putting forward, say, the Maoist analysis of agriculture. We could monopolise the time of class by discussing a particular point.
- "Healey was the first to be suspended. He was found reading a book called 'Food and Population.' He was told to leave school and not come back without his parents.
- "The other three of us who were members of People's Rights had a chat with Koye Majeko-dunmi. He was our guiding light, through contact with the Irish Student Movement (a group closely aligned with the Internationalists at the time).
- "We decided that people were making the wrong thing the issue, that we were Communists while the real thing was the classroom incident. We made out a statement. Koye and Peter Semper looked over it for us.
- "As we were not out of school yet the three of us-we were able to go back and do a lot of propaganda for Hea!ey. We turned the school into a big discussion group. The whole talk both inside and outside class was this issue.
- "Then the press came. The pupils formed a 'Save the good Name of the school committee. There was scuffling one day and a car carrying an *Irish Independent* reporter was almost turned over.
- "The next week-just before the Easter recess-we were taken up for a long lecture with the head. I had quite a liberal discussion with him. He said just as we were parting and I'll never forget it 'Friend, basically, I'm for the establishment, and you're against it and there lies the difference between us.'
- "None of us went back to school after Easter, but he arranged for us to sit our exams. Cronin got a university scholarship. I got honours in English, Irish and History, but failed the exam. Healey didn't do it at all.
- "We all left home, then. Things had gone from bad to worse there, especially after being thrown out of school. All of our parents went in to speak to the head. Then there was a big scare: about eight sort of liberal fellows supported us. Their parents were called in-it was touch-and-go if they would be thrown out or let stay.
- "Another pupil, Peter Keirns (18), from Colaiste Mhuire, a member of People's Rights, was also in trouble at this time in his own school. He didn't have to leave school, though. There was also around this time a row in a Cork convent school-a girl called Susan Curtis, who was connected with the Irish Student Movement through her sister. She got into trouble for a time and left the school, but she got back in. There was something in Midleton also,
- "Accommodation was got up for us by the Internationalists in Wicklow street. We led a communal type of existence. We pooled all our money and organised work on a rota basis. For about five or six weeks I was living in the group and drawing from the kitty although the only work I was doing was occasionally four hours in the bookshop in Townsend street.
- "If you were making £4 a week, or £10 a week, you put it into the kitty, and took out what you needed for food or cigarettes. A chap earning £4 might get £6 out of it some weeks, while a fellow earning £10 might only get £4. It depended on what you needed.
- "We carried on the same existence when we moved to a flat in Northumberland Road. If any-one failed to wash the dishes or make the beds, he might be accused of bourgeois slovenliness, or something like that.
- "The effect of the suspensions on the bookshop was that people were queuing up outside for books. Initially we only were taking in about £4 or £5 a day- but after the school business we were taking £15 to £20 a day.
- "In the bookshop we got books sent direct to us from Peking and Albania. We never had any trouble with customs or censorship. We didn't have to pay for the books until we sold them. Even then we only had to send a small amount back for each book there was a high profit margin.
- "However, the suspensions had the effect of breaking the Internationalists sole connexion with the schools. There were other radical groups young socialists in St. Vincents, Glasnevin, etc but we had not much to do with them.
- "We were the Internationalists' sole contact with schools. Once that was gone the thing came to a halt. Also, Koye went off to England, and he had been a unifying force. Carol Reakes took over, but she was not so effective.

Gerry Bradly had been in close touch with the Internationalists and their subsidiary groups now for two years. He believes they have for some time been divided between a doctrinaire group, who preach theory and doctrine first of all, and another, more pragmatic element, who demand that theory take second place to the reality of local conditions, and the level of political consciousness of the people. This division hindered the quayside operations of People's Rights, he says, and is currently causing stress within ranks.

He estimates their numbers as about 30, with a hard core of less than ten. While the O'Connell's Schools suspensions last year temporarily broke their contact with secondary pupils, he believes the Carmel Gorman case shows they are re-asserting their position.