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John Mulqueen, *'An Alien Ideology': Cold War Perceptions of the Irish Republican Left*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019, pp. xviii + 275, h/b, £75, ISBN 978 17896 20641

For many decades now, historical scholarship devoted to Irish republicanism has tended to concentrate upon the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Sinn Féin, and this is understandable, given the significance of the roles played by this movement in both the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland and the post-1998 'peace process'. In recent years, however, there has been some effort to recognize that there are many rooms within the Irish republican mansion, and research should not be confined to the Provisional incarnation. This carefully-researched and illuminating study broadens our knowledge of the 'Irish Republican Left'; specifically, the author analyses the Official republican movement, from which the Provisionals split in 1969/1970. Or, rather, Mulqueen studies the perception of this movement from within the British, Irish and (to a lesser extent) the US and Soviet states.

After a short-lived paramilitary campaign during the early 1970s (which resulted in approximately 50 deaths), the Official IRA called a ceasefire in May 1972. After this date, whilst the OIRA continued to operate in the shadows, periodically engaged in bloody feuding with the Provisionals and other republicans, as well as 'fund-raising' for the movement through various criminal enterprises, violent attacks upon the British Army and the police in Northern Ireland largely ended. The bulk of this book focuses upon the evolution of the 'Officials' in political and ideological terms. The name of the party was amended to Sinn Féin the Workers' Party (SFWP) in 1977, and simply the Workers' Party (WP) in 1982. From the mid-1970s, the leadership group (based largely around the ex-OIRA 'Chief of Staff' Cathal Goulding and SF and then WP General Secretary, Seán Garland) attempted to re-orient the movement away from more traditional Irish republican precepts, and towards becoming a pro-Soviet Leninist party, what Mulqueen terms a 'near-Communist' movement (246). The WP competed with the tiny Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) to become the privileged interlocutor of the Soviet Union in Irish political life, a process which took the best part of a decade after 1973. 'Fraternal relations' were formalized with the Cold War superpower by 1983 (10). Indeed, one of the reasons, though by no means the only factor, for the split with the Provisionals, was the traditionalists' concern that the late 1960s leadership was following the path of 'extreme socialism', the (allegedly) 'alien ideology' of the title.

One of the key motivations for Mulqueen's work is to investigate this process through the prism of the Cold War; he makes exhaustive use of the state archives (particularly the diplomatic communications) of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the United States, supplemented by a careful use of internal WP documents and memoirs. In comparison with the most comprehensive treatment of the Official Republican movement to date (Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*, Dublin, 2009), Mulqueen takes a different, but nevertheless productive, tack. Relying less on oral sources, he is primarily concerned to reveal the extent to which the state authorities were genuinely anxious about the modest, but growing, influence of the WP during the 1980s. By 1989, the party had overtaken the Irish Labour Party as the most popular left-wing choice at elections in Dublin, it had seven TDs (members of Dáil Éireann) and its first member of the European Parliament. Yet, although the diplomatic communiqués suggest there was some concern in the corridors of power at this growth in influence, it is noteworthy that these judgments were somewhat tempered, for the UK government at any rate, by the WP's position in respect to the Northern Ireland conflict.

The Official Republican movement, despite its periodic bouts of bloodletting with other republican groups, adopted a non-sectarian policy towards the intensifying violence, whilst in the early years maintaining that it, rather than the Provisionals, was the authentic expression of the Irish republican tradition, tracing this ideology back to Wolfe Tone and the United Irish rising of 1798. As early as 1973, Billy (Liam) McMillen, a key OIRA leader in Belfast (later killed by a splinter group, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)), accused the Provisionals of fomenting sectarian conflict in the North (136). Mulqueen argues that the Officials displayed an 'ideological blindness' to what was happening on the ground in Northern Ireland (138). Later, during the tumultuous period of the hunger strikes in 1980/1981, SFWP vehemently opposed the campaign for 'political status' which was the ostensible cause of the strikes (this despite the fact that some of the OIRA's prisoners remained in jail). The author argues that this stance marginalized the Official movement, earning the opprobrium of not just the Provisionals and their erstwhile comrades in the INLA, but of many 'constitutional' nationalists. Ironically, the SFWP stance was not shared by the Soviet Union either, which viewed the hunger strikes and the Provisionals' 'anti-imperialism' as an opportunity to discomfort the UK state. Mulqueen cites Olivia O'Leary's comment that the movement 'began digging a hole for itself ... and kept digging.' (202). He

argues that supporting the 'criminalization' policy of successive British governments 'proved to be a monumental tactical error.' (205).

But the point here is that the SFWP position was not a tactic, but a principled rejection of the Provisional campaign, its sectarian effects and the hammer blow it dealt to the potential for working-class unity. The movement tried to put itself at the forefront of attempts to undermine irredentist ideology in the South, and worked tirelessly, in an extremely dangerous environment, in an attempt to overcome the sectarian divisions of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. That it received little or no thanks for this stance does not make it inherently incorrect. In a certain sense, although sectarianism remains firmly rooted in Northern Irish society, and has been institutionalized in the post-1998 era of 'power-sharing' devolution, nonetheless the contemporary dispensation owes a good deal to the willingness of anti-sectarians in the WP (and among other civil society groups, such as the trade unions) to stand up to the remorseless logic of communal conflict. This may still be true, even if Mulqueen is right that the WP was rendered largely irrelevant to contemporary political life in Northern Ireland.

Ultimately, the tension between a conspiratorial Leninist core group, basing its politics on secretive manoeuvring behind the scenes, and a more transparent parliamentary presence, basing its activities upon reformist constituency work, became ever more difficult to manage. The roots of the WP's revolutionary elitism transferred quite easily from conspiratorial republican militarism to Leninist 'democratic centralism'. The collapse of the international communist movement helped to undermine the grip of the 'core leadership'; this tension burst into the public domain in 1992, when six of the seven WP TDs took the decision to leave, creating the Democratic Left, which merged with the Irish Labour party in 1999. For specialists on the fraught relationship between Irish republicanism and socialism, Mulqueen's book represents another valuable addition to their bookshelves.

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