

[**Eoghan Harris: Seeing clearly despite the hecklers and watery eyes - Eoghan Harris**](http://www.independent.ie/opinion/columnists/eoghan-harris/eoghan-harris-seeing-clearly-despite-the-hecklers-and-watery-eyes-2880074.html)

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Subject: Lynch and Aubane
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Fermoy is Aubane territory. I knew they would be there in force. So the speech was a political polemic not an academic essay. No point in anyone nit-picking details. 'as Burke said: " Some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to concision.' And settling scores with Aubane - I improvised extra bits about nationalist nitpickers on the Dunmanway killings and asked about local Prods who went missing in 1922 and have not been found since- that caused about a fifth of the crowd to leave - loudly.

Eoghan

**Speech in Kilcrumper Cemetery‏**



11/09/2011

Jeff,

This is the speech I gave at Kilcrumper. Most sat silent in shock. Some heckled, a fair number left, one guy spat at me - but two tough young men stood on either side of me and the spitter moved on. Very enjoyable.

Towards 2016 : Re-thinking Republicanism: Re-thinking Unionism.

Speech by Eoghan Harris at annual General Liam Lynch Commemoration, Kilcrumper Cemetery, Fermoy County Cork, 11 Sept 2011. Embargo 5pm, Sept 11.

It is early 1922. The black cloud of civil war is coming closer. Liam Lynch, Chief of Staff of the anti-Treaty IRA, walking with Eamon De Valera, in the Knockmealdown Mountains, turns to him sadly and asks: “ What do you think Tom Clarke would have thought of all this?' Dev replies tersely “ Tom Clarke is dead. Our problems are our own.'

 That is as true today it was 88 years ago. Our problems are our own. Whether we want to roll back the recession or reach for a future republic, the first step is to forget the fantasies of the past, and face the truth, no matter how tough a truth it turns out to be.

 Liam Lynch was a brave man. He was also a humane man. His gallant treatment of captured British soldiers and members of the RIC, contrasts with the cruelty of some other Cork commanders, and reflects credit on the 2nd North Cork Brigade.

But if Liam Lynch was humane, he was also human. Like all human beings he could be wrong. He was wrong about the Treaty. He wrong in obsessing about the Oath of Allegiance. He was wrong not to walk away from Civil War. Above all wrong in believing that the basic problem was between Ireland and the United Kingdom.

 Like all republicans since 1916, Liam Lynch never faced the fact that the fundamental problem was not to break the connection with England, but to create a connection with Northern Protestants - who rightly feared a repressive Roman Catholic Republic.

 Given what we now know about the cover- up of child sex abuse, about the secret cabals mentioned by the Archbishop of Dublin, about the arrogance of the Vatican in dealing with the Irish Republic, we might admit that some Protestant fears about Rome Rule were well founded.

These Protestant fears fed into the formation of the Northern Ireland. Unionist fear of the Roman Catholic minority, and Catholic nationalist reaction to these fears, between them spawned a sectarian state, with bigotry on both sides.

Accordingly the first duty of all who called themselves Republicans should have been re-assure Northern Unionists that their protestant and British identities would be cherished. Remember they were the “children of the nation ” referred to in the 1916 Proclamation.

If Republicans really respected Wolfe Tone’s message, they would have lot more time for working class Loyalists than fat cat Anglo- Irish bankers. Northern Protestants only want to keep their British identity. They do no harm to the men of no property in the Irish Republic.

 But the bankers of the Irish national bourgeoisie did do us harm. Did us harm while waving the green flag. Did us harm while brazenly telling us –as Sean Fitzpatrick told us - that he wanted to show he was as good as the old guard Protestant bankers.

He was not. My generation remembers the rectitude of the Protestant bank managers of the old Munster and Leinster bank. They minded our money as if it were their own. Had Irish banking had stayed in their hands we would not be in the mess we are today.

In 1922, the Free State lost a million Northern Protestants. But 1926 it had lost a third of its southern Protestants as well- a total of 107,000 people. Those who went were not big lords looking down from big Anglo-Irish castles. They were ordinary Irish people: farmers, shopkeepers, clerks, rural people, people that Thomas Davis would call “race of the soil.”

Some left because they had served Britain. Some left because they felt their lives were in danger. Some had seen their neighbours murdered - 73 in the Cork City area alone. But all of them were afraid.

This flight, of which we still fear to speak, is a dark hole in our history. Far from protecting these defenceless Protestants, republicans actively took part in many of the sectarian actions against them. And their supporters to this day are still in denial, still ducking and dodging about what was done.

Today sectarianism is still the biggest barrier to a better future in Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement, although an amazing grace, has made no dent in the divisions between the two traditions. That is why Republicans must now finally step up to the mark, or stop claiming to be followers of Wolfe Tone.

Coming up to the Centenaries of 1912 and 1916, where Unionists will recall the Ulster Covenant, and Republicans the Easter Rising, it is crucial that both traditions do not settle for triumphalism but take another look at their lethal legacies.

Let me cut to the chase and make three points:

First: both states on this island have flawed and bloody title deeds. The treasonable actions of Edward Carson in 1912, and the gun-running of 1914 both fed the blood sacrifice blasphemy of Patrick Pearse. And 1912 and 1916, for all their physical bravery, ended the prospect of a peaceful evolution to home rule and an all-Ireland parliament.

Second: we should not use 2016 to cover up past abuses. Republicans should admit their historical responsibility for much of the murder and mayhem on this island since 1916. A public admission that republicans failed to honour their high calling would put pressure on Unionists to review their past actions.

Some Unionists have already tried to make amends. Gusty Spence and the Combined Loyalist Military Command went much further than the Provisional IRA when they expressed “true and abject remorse” for crimes committed against Catholics. So did David Trimble when he told his Nobel Prize audience that the Northern state “had been a cold house for Catholics.”

Third: Coming up to 2016 we need a new platform, a televised talking shop, convention, chamber - call it what you will - to facilitate a continual public conversation, not within Northern Ireland, but between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

The lack of public and popular interaction between the two states is striking. Belfast is only 104 miles from Dublin, two hours by road. Yet the majority in each society seems as indifferent to the Lives of Others as the old East and West Germany.

Neither the Good Friday Agreement, the Northern Assembly, nor the cross border bodies provide for a continual public conversation between the new pluralist Irish Republic and the progressive currents of Northern Unionism.

The Irish Republic recently welcomed the Queen. Surely it’s time we started a permanent public conversation with her loyal subjects in Northern Ireland about every subject under the sun? We might even persuade Sinn Fein to stop using the Irish language as an ideological baton

A civil conversation between the two major traditions could only do good. As my Roscommon mother would say. “Nior bhris focal maith fiachal riamh.” (A good word never broke teeth) Republican and Unionists could start by reviewing the record of their own side so as to produce a reciprocal response from the other side.

We could start the conversation by asking why Protestant Unionists pulled back from republicanism. Protestant Republicans invented Republicanism. They founded the United Irishmen in 1798. They put their trust in democracy and the common people. They rejected Absolute Monarchy, whether it came from King or Pope.

In recent years the Irish Republic has come to share some of these Northern Protestant fears about Papal influence. Enda Kenny's recent blistering broadside against the Vatican is the authentic voice of that democratic republican spirit. And if we look closer we see the same democratic spirit in locally-run organisations like the Orange Order and the GAA Club.

So why are we still so far apart? Some of the blame can be laid at the door of Unionist bigotry. But most of the blame belongs to Republicans who failed to follow Wolfe Tone and find a formula to unite Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. The big question is this: Why did Republicanism lose its way?

Republicanism lost its way because it never really respected the rights of Northern Protestants to be both British and Irish. Republicanism lost its way because it mocked legitimate Protestant fears that Home Rule means Rome Rule. Republicanism lost its way by becoming a closed, conspiratorial secular religion as arrogant and atrophied as the Roman Catholic Church.

Republicanism lost its way by believing that its own secular priests, the leaders of the IRA, knew better than the common people, by defending these secular IRA priests when they murdered innocent people, by looking after republican abusers rather than their victims, and by listening to republican theologians like John Mitchel and Patrick Pearse.

John Mitchel set himself up as slaver in America and sent two sons to fight for the US Confederacy. His pathological hatred of Britain deeply influenced his devout disciple Patrick Pearse, who wanted to deny his own British background, and sublimated his deepest and darkest urges by taking the lusty, life-loving republicanism of Wolfe Tone, and turning it into a death wish that defied mass popular democracy.

This contempt for democratic groups marked the birth of Sinn Fein. Republicans, working through the IRB, infiltrated and hi-jacked every mass popular movement of a resurgent Irish people and reduced every fresh idea to a narrow ideological instrument.

Republican agents took over the GAA from 1884, the Gaelic League and the Co-op Movement from 1913; the ITGWU from 1900; IRB purists pushed out Douglas Hyde founding President out of the Gaelic League, marginalised Horace Plunkett and his Co-op movement and sidelined Maurice Davin, first President of the GAA.

In 1912 they got a big boost from Unionism. In September 1912 Unionists challenged the constitutional rule of law which they claimed to hold dear. On ‘Ulster Day’ 28 September 1912, over five hundred thousand Unionists signed Sir Edward Carson’s Ulster Covenant pledging themselves to defeat Home Rule at all costs.

Carson’s challenge to constitutional rule in 1912, gave Pearse permission to play the physical force card in 1916. This twin legacy of Pearse and Carson was a moral and psychological disaster. Because once they turned on the tap of physical force, the blood never stopped flowing.

The Rising of 1916, in which my grandfather took part, began a circular process of bloodletting, pause for pardon, and renewal of bloodshed. Each generation of republicans would first defy the popular will, then murder and maim, then use the inevitable reprisals to work up a nationalist fever, then seek retrospective pardon from a temporary majority, then become armchair republicans, and from these armchairs applaud a new set of armed applicants.

This closed circle of violence, pardon, and more violence has continued for the past 100 years. Right now it is replaying with the Real IRA, the Continuity IRA, or what I call the Recurring IRA. It will continue forever unless Republicans cut the cord to the dead generations of Republican Cardinals who claimed to know better than the men of no property.

 Republicans are always reluctant to express remorse for the butcher’s bill that they ran up from 1916 to the end of Northern Troubles. And while they are the first to start shooting, they never mourn any dead but their own. And I speak from personal experience.

Growing up in a republican family I was taught to remember some Irishmen and to forget others. My own grandfather, a 1916 veteran and member of the First Cork Brigade, started out as an idealist with Terence McSwiney. But by 1920 he had hardened his heart and could no longer see the man, only the uniform.

So he stayed silent when on Wednesday 17th of November, 1920, Sgt. James O'Donghue who lived around the corner in Tower Street, and who never carried a gun, was shot dead on his way home, Stayed silent when every funeral home in Cork City , obeying IRA orders, refused O Donoghue’s family a hearse. Stayed silent when his stricken wife and children had to hire a private car to body back to Cahirciveen. For shame.

My grandfather was a 1916 veteran, a physically and morally brave man who remains my role model in all areas except one. Like most republicans he was a moral coward when it came to challenging republican peer pressure. So he went to his grave without a word of remorse about that foul deed, whatever he might have felt in his heart.

He was not alone in his selective mourning. In 1916 Republicans remember the 64 dead Irish Volunteers but not the 250 dead Dublin civilians. In the War of Independence, Republicans remember the 550 IRA volunteers- but not the scores of southern protestants they shot in sectarian atrocities or the 404 Irishmen of the RIC whom they killed for doing their duty.

Looking back at the Civil War, Republicans remember the 77 republicans executed by the Free State- but not who began the shooting nor the corrosive hatreds it left behind. And after the civil war Republicans became even more sectarian.

 During the 1930’s Protestant workers from the Shankill who marched at Bodenstown had their banners torn down. During World War 2 republicans degenerated further and flirted with fascism- while berating as traitors the 6,000 brave Irishmen and women in British uniforms, who died fighting Fascism

It got worse. In 1970, the Provisional IRA pushed aside Northern Civil Rights Movement and started shooting. Again Republicans only remember their own martyrs. They discard deaths that do not fit their mould: the 2000 civilians, the 302 Irish members of RUC, the 763 working class British squaddies who were sent to keep the peace.

Looking back over their actions in the past 100 years, why won't Republicans express remorse for bringing so much bloodshed and suffering into the lives of the men and women of no property ? Are they as arrogant as the Roman Catholic Church ? So steeped in self-regard that they cannot bring themselves to say sorry ?

Whether Irish Republicanism - or indeed the Roman Catholic Church- is capable of remorse and restitution is moot. But in 2016 the Irish Republic must not play the Recurring IRA’s game by waving a green flag or glamourising the gunmen of 1916 or 1921. The cult of Michael Collins is no less lethal than the cult of Liam Lynch

Likewise, Unionists should remember that for centuries the British elites saw them as the hunchbacks of the family, best kept hidden in distant bell towers. Remember that southern pluralists like John Bruton and Conor Cruise O Brien protected Unionists both from pan-nationalist conspiracies and from the cynical wheezes of British Prime Ministers who cared more about NATO than NICRA.

Above all, Republicans and Unionists should remember the dead.

The first public act of 2016 should be for the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland to raise a joint memorial, straddling the Border , to all victims of armed actions on this island, be they IRA or Loyalists, southern Protestants, RIC, working class British squaddies, RUC constables or soldiers of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

Such a memorial should include the names of *both*the Crean brothers: Sergeant Con Crean of the RIC who was slain at Ballinaspittle and his brother Tom Crean, the Royal Navy Petty Officer and hero of the South Pole who had to come home and keep silent.

Let us resolve in 2016 to give men like Liam Lynch the respect that is due to all men who died bravely. Let us treat them, however, as fallible human beings, not as infallible Republican Popes.

Let us step out of their shadow. Our problems are our problems. Let’s start solving them. Let’s get real. Let’s raise up a real Republic.

ENDS.

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