

End of a liberal



The Literary Politics of Conor Cruise O'Brien

By D.R. O'Connor Lysaght

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Also by D.R. O'Connor Lysaght

D. R. O'Connor Lysaght is a direct descendant of Arthur O'Connor, the United Irishman, and of Feargus O'Connor, the Chartist Leader. Born in Wales in 1941, he came to Ireland in 1959 to take the Honours course in modern history and political science at UCD. Graduating in 1964, he returned to England and began writing for the periodical, *The Week*. His reports on Ireland attracted immediate attention. Back in this country again, he is now writing a study of the Irish Soviet Movement.



THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND starts where Connolly's LABOUR IRISH HISTORY left off. There have been many books dealing with the history of the Irish state since it came into being: this is the first to be conceived and written from a Socialist point of view. In his own words, Lysaght was moved to write 'partly (as a historian) by the sheer badness of ninety-nine per cent of Irish historiography on the pre 1916 period; partly (as a political scientist) by the lack of any attempt to analyse deeply the social structure of Ireland.'

The book begins by analysing Irish society up to the Famine, evaluating what the author calls 'the bourgeois historical myths of the period - Gaelic Ireland, Grattan's Parliament, and Daniel O'Connell.' Having thus set his own terms of reference, Mr Lysaght continues through the period between 1847 and 1910; studies in depth 'the Revolution Subverted' - between 1910 and 1923; discusses the Cosgrave Administration and the De Valera regime; and then deals with the later Party Governments and developments under the post 1957 Fianna Fail Governments. He considers throughout the economic and sociological interaction of certain key elements in the State: the petty bourgeoisie, the Church, the small farmers - and, of course, organized labour. At the end of the book he offers an appendix that is at once a comment on the past and a positive programme for the future. Will Ireland ever become Socialist? And if it does, how will Socialism develop in the new yet in many ways conservative country we live in? These are important questions and, whether THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND evokes admiration or violent disagreement, it is the first important attempt to answer them.

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THE AUTHOR

D.R.O'CONNOR LYSAGHT was a member of the Labour Party from 1963 to 1971, since when he has been a member of the Irish section of the Fourth International, the Movement for a Socialist Republic (formerly the Revolutionary Marxist Group). Other publications by him include 'The Republic of Ireland' (Mercier, 1970) and 'The Making of Northern Ireland & The Basis of its Undoing'.

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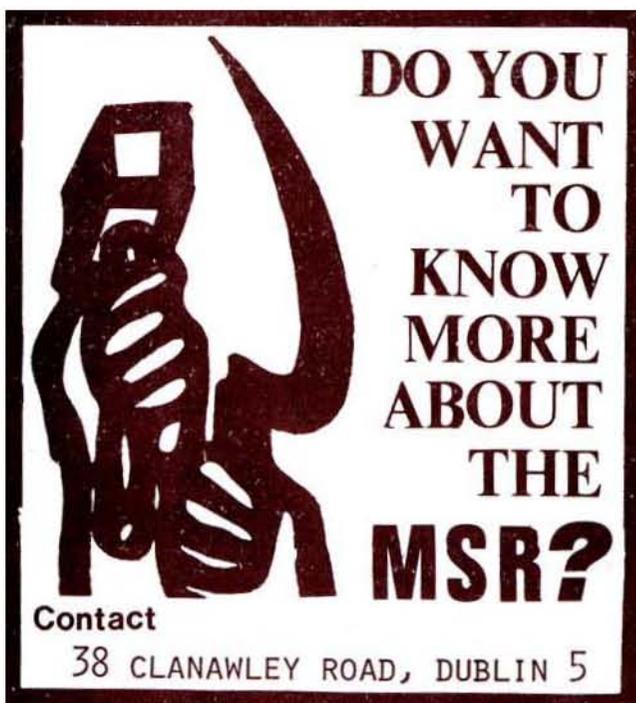


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FOREWORD

Whatever one's particular opinion of Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, it must be agreed that he represents an important phenomenon in Irish political life. Many who have welcomed his impact in the past as a breath of liberalism and a genuine assault on clerical dominance and other types of backwardness in 26-County society, have been bewildered by his more recent development. He has, in particular, played an important role in relation to both the programme and the practice of the Labour Party; - a role very different from what some members of the party expected.

The following study of Dr. O'Brien's published work offers a view not only of the particular individual, but also of Irish liberalism and the contradictions that led to its lining up with the most reactionary elements of society. This pamphlet was completed in 1975, but its contents have not dated. The only addition to his theoretical output since last year has been his Merriman Summer School lecture on Edmund Burke, which continues the train of thought begun in his introduction to the Reflections. (Irish Times, August, 31st 1976). Burke is held up to his audience as the moderate reformer, the sensitive voice of colonial America, the spokesperson for the conservative heart of Catholic Ireland, and the loyal Whig politician (a blow, perhaps, at David Thornley and others who occasionally allow conscience to overcome their party loyalties). Above all, he is viewed - although O'Brien does not use the phrase - as the empiricist advocate of "politics as the art of the possible".

In practice, the past year has revealed Dr. O'Brien in the act of trying to refurbish his liberal image while giving actual support to illiberal initiatives. In his speech to the Irish Humanist Association in March he made the gesture of opening a debate on the secularising of 26-County society. That this was a gesture can be shown by the fact that actual agit-

ation on the question of contraception has been going on for five years without any support from him; and he was to remain silent when his Governmental colleagues, Minister Burke and Secretary Flanagan, made proposals to copperfasten religious education (and, hence, sectarian divisions) on every child in the country.

Even as a gesture, the March speech was inadequate. In the first place, he carefully avoided the central question of whether the people of Ireland really want to have their lives run according to a formula that sacrifices all earthly human rights to the hopes of pie in the sky when they die. (On this point, his Fine Gael colleague, Garret Fitzgerald, managed to be more principled in his reply to the Bishop of Limerick.) In avoiding the question, O'Brien chose to base his case on economic grounds. Understandably enough for one who has lightly dismissed Marxist economics as "archaic and doctrinaire", he found these grounds in the shifting sands of one of the most "archaic and doctrinaire" schools of all: that of Malthus. In other words, the "humanitarian" O'Brien favours contraception because it will prevent a population explosion just as Malthus and his disciples thought the famine would "solve" this problem. ("Starry-eyed idealists" like Marx, argued of course, that this was an attempt to justify the brutal nature of British rule and his followers today suffer from the same "delusion" when they see the denial of contraception as one of the many aspects of the lack of democracy caused by the continuing interference of imperialism in Irish affairs.) All in all, the March speech was not impressive or convincing: it alienated many who might have been convinced without rallying even those already sympathetic. Needless to say, the polemic that it opened soon exhausted itself. The only Governmental recognition of the pressure from the womens' movement since then has been a proposal to provide civil dissolution of marriage on grounds almost as broad as those provided by the Catholic Church.

But if Conor Cruise O'Brien's support for one aspect of democratic reform has been somewhat casual, his interest in restricting existing liberties has been active. He has been an enthusiastic defender of the Criminal Law Act and the State of Emergency; indeed he went further in this than the Government as a whole found it possible to do. Although Section 3 of the Act was aimed formally against recruitment to the IRA, it was drafted originally to initiate a crime of "implicit support" for the IRA. Conor Cruise O'Brien defended this plan and, while exempting the constitutional "Republicans" of Fianna Fail, made it plain that he considered that such "implicit support" would include any views that could be held to encourage civil war, - and, specifically, the view that Britain holds Northern Ireland by force of arms. However, the Government as a whole was more prepared to compromise and accepted an amendment that limited the scope of the crimes instituted under Section 3.

Despite this setback, O'Brien's career seems to have reached its zenith. He has an honorary doctorate from Edinburgh University, he is tipped for the Presidency of the Socialist (Social Democratic) International, he has been mentioned as Roy Jenkins' choice as Irish Commissioner to the E.E.C.; and he can see that his great bugbear, the IRA, is becoming increasingly isolated. Yet, outside the council chambers, reality remains. All the "Peace" marches in the world, even backed by censorship, cannot hide the fact that the Northern crisis is more than just the sum total of senseless crimes committed by psychopaths. Nor can the jailing, harassment, intimidation and even hanging of "subversives" hide the fact that the oppression in the 6 Counties is not of Ulster Protestants by 26-County aggression. Events will expose the illusions upheld by Conor Cruise O'Brien. And, with these illusions will go the ragbag of theory, the literary politics, the two-dimensional approach to the truth and the essential elitism that bedeck Irish liberalism.

October 1976.

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"A liberal incurably was what I was. Whatever I might argue, I was more profoundly attached to liberal concepts of freedom - freedom of speech and of the press, academic freedom, independent judgement and independent judges, than I was to the idea of a disciplined party mobilising all the forces of society for the creation of a social order guaranteeing more real freedom for all instead of just for a few. The revolutionary idea both impressed me and struck me as more immediately relevant for most of humanity than were the liberal concepts. But it was the liberal concepts and their long-term importance, though not the name of liberal, that held my allegiance", Conor Cruise O'Brien, Introduction to Writers and Politics, Chatto and Windus, London, 1965, P.XV.

The statement itself, its style and method of analysis, each and all bespeak the man. It pretends a choice between two social forms: capitalism and socialism. But this is revealed only when its specific terms are considered in detail. On the one hand the right of "independent judgement" is expressed in connection with the precise traditional rights of bourgeois democracy - freedom of the press, independent judges etc. and, in this connection, still declared to be a long term ideal. Against this is set "the revolutionary idea of a disciplined party mobilising all the forces of society for the creation of a social order guaranteeing more real freedom for all", a comparatively vague formula for all its length. Two apparent aims that, at face value would not, for the despised Marxist, be inevitably opposed are made so because they are identified with specific class positions arbitrarily and without reference to the historic environment in which the choice is to be made. The man who wrote thus was probably bound to come down on the bourgeois side in this division. What would appear surprising from that passage alone is that anyone should have considered him likely to choose otherwise.

Nonetheless, Conor Cruise O'Brien has been so considered and so considered precisely at the time of his writing the above. Today, this illusion enables him to provide a left cover for the misconceptions that afflict politicians in considering the Irish question, in particular that misconception known as the "Two Nations Theory". Ten years ago, he was held to have established his position on the left as an anti-imperialist because of his activities in U.N.O. and after leaving it. (In Ireland interestingly enough, he was said, too, to be a bona fide anti-partitionist from his early diplomatic career). Even after 1965, for some years his reputation as a progressive grew as a result of his stand against American aggression in Vietnam, though his position, here, was based as much on opposition to the threat to world peace as to the actual national oppression. Exactly the same is true about his opposition to South African apartheid. Today, this accumulated authority makes it difficult for many to understand his present roles as apologist for British imperialism in Ireland, of defender of guerre a l'outrance against all who oppose it and of participant in what is, for today, the most backward 26 County Government ever in precisely those things in which liberals claim to believe.

This confusion is a thing of the left. The right recognises the man of value. In the last year a laudatory study of O'Brien was published by the American Journal of Irish Literature. Its authors, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl and Robert Hogan, declare:

"It is our thesis that O'Brien took successive stances: and to look over them in quick succession is not merely to see activity, but to see progression". "Conor Cruise O'Brien: An appraisal", Journal of Irish Literature Volume III, No. 2., May 1974.

The politics of Young-Bruehl and Hogan may be suggested by two examples. They describe O'Brien's uncle, Thomas Kettle, as being "an Internationalist"

precisely because he "joined the British Army in the (First) World War", (Ibid P. 5). They criticise, too, their subject's role in the Congo from the "Katangan" viewpoint, leaning heavily on the Brookings's Institution's study of the affair.

Even more damaging praise comes from O'Brien's old adversary, Melvin J. Lasky, whose, C.I.A. sponsored magazine Encounter was forced to retract allegations about O'Brien's Katangan career. Fresh from publishing apologiae for the Chile coup, Lasky has written:-

"I have been following Dr. O'Brien's new and substantially revised ideology with the greatest of satisfaction. I cannot judge the merits of individual policies on Ulster-Eire (sic) unity, or the Irish language or contraception: but it does seem to me that he now stands with us or we with him, or perhaps all of us (or almost all of us) together in a spirit of reform, peaceful change and democratic compromise". Irish Times, 20th July, 1974.

Conor Cruise O'Brien has offered no public rebuttal of this. He has no need to do so. Opposition to his politics from the left-Irish or otherwise has not been on the same theoretical level. In general, in Ireland, the immediate necessity of opposing his politics practically has overshadowed the need for theoretical refutation. Such attempts as have been made have tended to conclude that his future role was decided by his grandfather's desertion of Parnell or else more simply, that the man was always a trickster, anyway. Both these explanations magnify that which they seek to diminish.

The fact is that Conor Cruise O'Brien is, as he stated openly, an Irish liberal, a rather more prolific literary specimen than most but, nonetheless, a member of the political clan in its specific Irish branch.

An Irish liberal tends, by definition, to be a futile individual in a pathetic tradition. Of course, today, liberalism proper is a pathetic creed everywhere. However, in Ireland, it never developed seriously at all. Large scale industry was established only in the north-east and then on the basis of the division between Protestant skilled and Catholic unskilled workers. This has affected adversely both Irish Liberalism and Irish Marxism. Inevitably, the fate of these two political currents must be different; the first cannot grow now: the second must do so.

But though Irish liberalism is itself weak, it is situated next to the country which once possessed the strongest Liberal Party ever known. This became its major political support. Irish liberalism's heyday was the period of Gladstone's first ministries. Its local roots tended to remain weak and, if anything, to become still weaker. In turn, reliance on the English connection grew. Most Irish Liberals became Unionists when Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule Bill.

In this way, they sacrificed any real hopes there may have been for the growth of their distinctive principles in Ireland. That they had chosen to deny the democratic right of most of their fellow countrymen to self-determination was no more than a typical liberal betrayal of principles. The trouble was that that reform was the most that British capitalism could afford. To the Irish liberals the strong, secure (and hence, comparatively enlightened) bourgeoisie of Britain had to maintain direct political control of its weaker brethren in Ireland to impose liberal reforms on the latter. But this process was limited and, insofar as it occurred at all (as with the Irish Land Acts), depended as much on Irish turbulence as on British benevolence. On the key liberal issue of secularism any British Government was bound to be on the defensive against the Catholic Church, insofar as it

opposed if at all, since it recognised it as an ally in its task of pacifying Ireland.

This meant that after 1885, Irish liberalism did not so much decline as allow itself to become irrelevant. Most of its upholders bloced with the the Tories in the new Unionist Party and, of these, many allowed themselves to be affected by Protestant sectarianism-Orangeism. The son and namesake of one Liberal Ulsterman, James Craig, founded the House of Commons Orange Lodge, later patronised the (highly illiberal) sectarian gangs that anticipated today's U.D.A. and became, at last, the first Prime Minister in Northern Ireland's "Protestant Parliament". A Catholic liberal contemporary of his remained a critical supporter of the Irish nationalist cause. This was the father of Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Since those days, there has been an apparent revival of Irish liberalism in the nineteen sixties. Although the expectations that this raised are now quite destroyed it did appear that apparent economic expansion north and south of the border, being based on the attraction of foreign industry, dependant on a highly skilled labour force, unhampered by the religious factor might provide a foundation for an Ireland at once united, democratic and capitalist. However, the economic hopes that inspired the political ones have proved illusory when tested by the reality of the role of Catholicism and Orangeism as bulwarks of stability against political and industrial disorder. The revived Irish Liberal Party that was founded in 1967 has disappeared. A real Irish Kulturkampf must await the proletarian revolution.

THE O'BRIEN TRADITION

That then, is the tradition to which Conor Cruise O'Brien belongs. Admittedly, the wing thereof into which he was born is distinct from the main line

which capitulated to Orangeism. His father, Francis Cruise O'Brien, represented a liberal tendency that existed uneasily within that of the Irish national bourgeoisie. This uneasiness was reflected in the struggle that accompanied his wooing of Katherine Sheehy, daughter of a Home Ruler M.P. (significantly, even as told, later, by the couple's son, Conor, much of the heat of the battle was borne by another Sheehy son-in-law, the socialist Francis Sheehy Skeffington). The weakness of his position is reflected, partly, in his small reputation compared to that of Sheehy Skeffington or his other brother-in-law, Thomas Kettle M.P. (the nearest thing to an ideologist in the Irish Parliamentary Party) despite the fact that he survived them by more than a decade. Part of the weakness of his liberalism may have sprung from a certain personal debility that was reflected in his writings. Besides various undistinguished newspaper articles, his published works comprise an introduction to the book, Clerical Influences by the Liberal Unionist historian, W.E.H. Lecky and part authorship in three pamphlets: a study of Danish co-operative societies, an exposure of malnutrition in Dublin during the First World War and a call for dominion status for Ireland after the Easter Rising had posed the issue of the republic. From his son, the reader receives the impression that his most vigorous achievement was the Sheehy courtship. However, it must be added that he had played a progressive role as a student leader in the 1900s and later gave some support to the I.T.G.W.U. in Wexford. What is clear from his son's last book is that it was he, rather than the more distinguished socialist, Francis Skeffington, or the national bourgeois, Thomas Kettle, who was to be the decisive formative influence in Conor's career. He did this the more effectively perhaps precisely because, while he outlived the other two, he died when Conor was 10, too young to begin the normal process of adolescent questioning. Today, Francis Cruise O'Brien's liberalism survives in an ideological bloc

with Irish Social Democracy in which the equally intelligent, and far more vigorous and prolific Conor Cruise O'Brien is a leading light. Its base is as feeble as ever: a junior partner of a junior partner it can only give an ideological left cover to the bourgeoisie to carry out its plans. These do not include major democratic reforms.

This continuity in the politics of father and son can be seen in the latter's actions and also in his book States of Ireland (Hutchinson, London 1972). All O'Brien's other relatives - even Frank and the Republican Socialist, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington - are treated with a certain affectionate irony, but his parents are exempt: his father totally. Francis Cruise O'Brien's politics are presented formally straight but with omissions (conscious or not) that distort them more effectively than the humour in the presentation of his in-laws' political views. Thus, first:-

"The Skeffingtons were agnostics, so was my father. My mother, in the middle as usual, ceased to practise her religion for a while, then resumed it. Politically the Skeffingtons were on the left, militant, though pacifist socialists. My father was active in the agriculture co-operative movement; he was Sir Horace Plunkett's secretary and wrote for AE's Irish Statesman. Here, and increasingly in his social life my father came into contact with Protestants and Unionists much more than the Sheehys did, or even at this time (before 1914 - D.R. O'C.L.) the Skeffingtons. He worked with a Protestant, Guy Lloyd, on an edition of Lecky's Rise of Rationalism in Europe. He understood Protestant fears about Catholic domination in an independent Ireland, because he shared these fears. He was not reassured when Dick (Sheehy) or Mary, or even Tom (Kettle) told him that all shades of opinion would be respected". States of Ireland P. 84.

And later on:-

"(Francis Cruise O'Brien) had been a secretary of Sir Horace Plunkett, had worked for Plunkett's co-operative movement, and his ideal of reconciling Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist, through emphasis on social and economic rather than political and constitutional aims. Plunkett's co-operative creameries had been burned down by the Black and Tans. Plunkett's own house had been burned down by Republican irregulars in the Civil War. The Freemans Journal, the old Irish Party paper, for which my father had also worked, was burned down too. After that, my father worked for the Irish Independent. He, like the Independent, had generally supported the Free State Government as against the policies of its Republican adversaries, but he was increasingly repelled by the pervasive and ostentatious clericalism of both the paper and the government. This gave him some common ground with Hanna, whose character in any case he admired. He could talk with Republicans - one of his close friends had been Rory O'Connor, the leader who triggered off the Civil War and was executed during it. But on the whole, and increasingly, his friends tended to be those with whom he foregathered at the United Arts Club in Dublin, intellectuals, liberals, nationalists, often of Protestant background, people who were increasingly out of sympathy with the new order, not because of any Republican leanings but by repulsion from what they felt to be the oppressive pieties of the Catholic State. R.M. Smyllie, the editor of the Irish Times was a member of this club. So was W.B. Yeats." Ibid pp. 107-108.

These passages are full enough but frank only insofar as they reflect the Conor Cruise O'Brien illusions. These have affected their whole understanding of the Irish revolution. They stem from two sources. One the one hand, Irish liberals did, indeed recognise illiberal and straight clerical influences working with and within the Irish Nationalist Movement and this tended to neutralise their enthusiasm for "Home

Rule" let alone independence. Mixed in with this were the illusions of the co-operators: George Russell (AE) certainly, Francis Cruise O'Brien probably (though not, probably, Sir Horace Plunkett) saw farmer co-operation as a means towards achieving Socialism. Although not mentioned by Conor Cruise O'Brien, there was a clear theoretical course for convergence between the two illusions. A liberal such as Francis could seek to build an alternative economic power structure to the Nationalists' one, he was influenced by Plunkett's criticisms of the Catholic clergy and the economic principles of co-operative dairying involved greater rather than lesser dependence on Britain, which was the chief buyer of its products. These illusions were merely reinforced when the actual War of Independence ended with a net weakening of co-operation, its split along the line of the border and the establishment, south of that line, of an effectively Catholic State.

But to accept this explanation is to accept the formal logic that Irish liberals share with Irish Catholics. The basic criticism of it is that it excludes too much. Other currents besides clericalism existed within the overall Irish Nationalist stream. It remains very doubtful whether any alternative to allowing the Irish their right to self-determination could have secured them any greater civil freedoms than those they have maintained under self-government. Certainly there is no reason to doubt that, if self-government had been achieved by a united self-governing Ireland (let alone a Socialist one - though this would probably be a precondition) the resultant rise of the Protestant percentage of the population from 5% to 20%-25% would have limited any Government's scope for "oppressive pieties". The national struggle of the Irish people was not simply a steady progression ending in a result that could have been achieved anyway but which was tragically won with a maximum of bloodshed. It is, rather, a continuing process which has its heights and its depths, and one in which, so far, the for-

ces necessary for holding the heights have not been sufficient to do so. Even so, from them, it has already been possible to foresee how the struggle must develop for success. One of the future pillars of Irish Catholic education, (and of the two nations dogma) Michael Tierney, wrote when the National struggle was at its zenith, a book prophesying the secular system of education that will be achieved on its triumph. The struggle did not succeed and Tierney abandoned his early ideals but to say that it should never have taken place does not follow. Marxists do not denounce the Bolshevik revolution because of Stalin, there are too many philistines, and indeed liberals of the Conor Cruise O'Brien variety: (see The Suspecting Glimpse, Faber and Faber, London 1972, P. 11) to carry out that task.

The illusions of the co-operators were no truer than those of the liberals, with whom as in the person of Francis Cruise O'Brien they were often identical. Agricultural co-operation as expressed in the communal ownership and running of creameries by their suppliers cannot be a basis for Socialism. In fact, even before 1916, it was developing swiftly into a means by which small capitalists might become, if not big, then, at least, medium, capitalists. Its most effective organisations were those of the medium farmers of the south west who had enough money to survive the early years of struggle. They tended to be hostile to trade unionism both on their farms and in their creameries. Their most distinctive political party was the All for Ireland League, one of whose leading figures was T.M. Healy, a spokesman for the Dublin employers against the Transport Workers Union in 1913 and an extreme clericalist. Although some agreements were made between the leaderships of the co-operative and trade union movements, the members of each had an objective conflict of interest. During the employers' action and after the Civil War, the co-operative creamery suppliers of Munster were to the forefront in strike-breaking.

In the same way Cruise O'Brien's (and Plunkett's) illusions in the prospects of "reconciling Catholic and Protestant, unionist and nationalist through emphasis on social and economic rather than political and constitutional aims" was never really practicable. The Ulster Protestants, in particular, the Protestant labour aristocracy, had and still have "social and economic aims" that are, simply, not immediately reconcilable with those of their Catholic fellows (or, indeed with Socialism itself).

In short the Irish co-operative movement was not hamstrung by the effects of extreme nationalism but by its own contradictions. It would have been so, even had the national revolution not occurred at this time.

Because Francis Cruise O'Brien could not understand these facts, he remained outside, not only the mainstream Parliamentary Nationalist movement of his wife's family, but also the physical force Nationalists and the organisations of the working-class that alone could provide a base for Socialism.

He "sat out" the War of Independence, and, as importantly, he gave critical support to the Treatyite forces in the subsequent Civil War. Though he claimed to be a Socialist, he chose to ignore the fact that these forces and the farmer co-operators were in alliance to end the developing social revolution and establish capitalist law and capitalist order. The inevitable result of the Treatyites' victory was that the victors paid their debts to the Catholic hierarchy that had supported them more effectively than the liberals. At the United Arts Club, Francis Cruise O'Brien bewailed the verification of his forebodings in company with such "liberals" as W.B. Yeats (sic) and R.M. Smylie. It is rather fitting in the circumstances that the sentence after the last paragraph quoted runs "My father died on Christmas Day 1927, when I was 10". (Ibid P. 108).

THE BRITISH CONNECTION

Francis Cruise O'Brien, had been, at least a product of his time and had failed accordingly. His son has no such excuse. He inherited his father's views without giving them so much as his much vaunted "Suspecting Glance". He has built upon and developed them so that his philosophy is a far more imposing affair than was his father's, nonetheless its whole bent is affected decisively by Francis' assumptions.

This is the more important in that, in his preoccupations, Conor concentrates on different fields from Francis. The trouble is that the latter concentrated particularly on a matter that cannot simply be ignored: Francis Cruise O'Brien was something of an economist. His son avoids treating of economic issues as far as possible but thereby, manages only to allow himself to be influenced by the sub-conscious preconceptions that Francis instilled.

These preoccupations are ones natural to an Irish liberal and, if anything, even more natural to a leading figure of the Irish co-operative movement. They were not Marxist, of course, still less Leninist, nor did they bear any resemblance to the ideologies of those third World potentates with whom (and, in Ghana, for one of whom) Conor Cruise O'Brien worked in the late fifties and early sixties. As might be expected of an Irish liberal and of a spokesman of a major Irish supplier to the British market, the elder Cruise O'Brien had an interest in preserving that market and the connection with Britain. Conor has accepted the assumptions of that interest with no apparent query.

This became explicit after he had left Ghana and was beginning to anticipate his role as an Irish politician. In an interview published in the glossy philistine (and now defunct) magazine Scene, he declared:-

"Britain's ties with us are a value to Britain as well as to us" Scene, September 1967.

Elsewhere he eschewed economics (as, for example, in his 1916 anniversary work "The Embers of Easter") until in his last work the spirit of Francis Cruise O'Brien is allowed to roam unchecked:

"The Irish Army, if it attempted open intervention in Northern Ireland, would certainly be defeated (?) with unpredictable but alarming consequences for the Republic (Twenty-Six Counties) The implications of other more covert forms of military, or semi-military, intervention, were also alarming in a more shadowy way. Generally, this path, if followed resolutely, led to, at the least, such a worsening of relations with Britain as might seriously damage the economy of a Republic which lived mainly by trading with Britain". States of Ireland P. 198

"(After the burning of the British embassy), People were afraid of lawless violence "coming down here". They didn't want any kind of war with England, even an economic war from which Ireland would suffer more than England". Ibid P. 289

"The urgent need, felt in both (Irish) states, to refurbish their connections with England equally necessary for both of them" Ibid P.P. 301-302.

These quotations are the most definite expression of Conor Cruise O'Brien's belief in the economic necessity to maintain the existing connection between Britain and Ireland. Even these remarks are vague enough. The political assumptions that flow from his economic ones are more definite and detailed. Thus, in the epilogue to his early and probably still best full length work Parnell and his Party he writes:-

"The achievement of Parnell and his party in converting liberal England to home rule has often been

admired, but it is in some ways less notable than their achievements in converting nationalist Ireland to that same policy of compromise. Whether that policy, backed as it was by a great English party and a great Irish party, and by the combined prestige of Gladstone and Parnell could have succeeded in bringing all Ulster, without serious bloodshed, within the framework of home rule, can obviously never be known. It may be said, however, that no subsequent combination of leaders offered such real grounds for hope of a united and self-governing Ireland or of real and well founded friendship between England and Ireland" Parnell and his Party (O.U.P. 1957) P. 349

This is mild compared to his statement in his introduction to the collection of Radio lectures, The Shaping of Modern Ireland (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960).

"Ireland in the early twentieth century was scarcely oppressed".-Shaping of Modern Ireland PP. 9-10.

And, in his exposure of Yeats' politics ("Passion and Cunning" in In Excited Reverie (A.N. Jeffares & K.G.W. Cross eds., MacMillan, London 1965), he is able to describe as "Shrewd" a remark about Yeats (an old member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, after all!):-

"Why then in the twentieth century, and when the Irish are freed (sic) from their oppressors, the English, does he despise and dislike us increasingly? Because he dislikes the stuffed lion and admires the ranting raving oppressors".- In Excited Reverie P.272

THE TWO NATIONS ILLUSION

It is as much because of his belief in the prime importance of maintaining good relations between capitalist Ireland and imperial Britain as because of a (superficial) realism that O'Brien has become perhaps the most powerful Irish left wing voice in

favour of what is termed the "two nations" view of Irish politics. His adherence to this view which means in practice, granting the Ulster Protestant community complete authority in the six county territory they claim, and relying on the British Army to protect the minority therein, is often presented as a recent development. This is mainly because, as a leading civil servant in the Department of External Affairs, he was placed in charge of a shortlived campaign to mobilise international opinion in support of Irish unity in 1949-1951.

However, there is no reason to doubt his sincerity when he tells Brian Inglis ("In Search of Morality" Listener, 23rd August, 1973) :-

"I never had any belief in the possibility of uniting the country by force and never had any use for this kind of activity. I did for a time believe that some effort of persuasion, whether international or within the country would do something towards this end, but certainly would have been through with that by the Fifties."

The proof of this can be seen in the Introduction to the Shaping of Modern Ireland:

"Any outsider not involved in the politics of either Ireland or the United Kingdom who had studied the history and the electoral map of Ireland from the eighties on would have been conscious of the inherent probability of such an outcome" (i.e. partition) P.3.

Later, he denounces "the absurd and tragic conclusion of the I.R.A. 'war' on occupied Ireland". Ibid P.7.

However, he was not active in pushing his views on partition any further at this time. He had reason not to do so. He was still in the diplomatic service and liked his job there, he didn't want to lose it and thus imperil his work at U.N.O. by speaking

out of line too often on even what was in practice by 1960 a formal national aim.

But there was a more definitely political cause not to get too involved. Up to the mid 1960s calls for recognition of Northern Ireland came from the far, indeed the clerical, right, from people whose Liberalism was dubious to say the least. Such figures as old Michael Tierney, who had for long preferred to forget his days as an advocate for secular education, Ernest Blythe, ex-Minister for Finance, the old Parnellite John J. Horgan and the relatively young Michael Sheehy (apparently no relation of O'Brien) all linked the defence of partition to other things. Tierney and Blythe had been to the forefront in attempts in the 1930s to make the leading opposition party, Fine Gael, openly Fascist. Horgan and Sheehy linked their defence of partition with demands that Ireland enter N.A.T.O. to defend "Christian Civilisation" against the "materialism of Russia". Such views were not Cruise O'Brien's in 1960. Whether he has, since then, won the Partitionists to the left or whether they have won him the other way should appear in the course of this article.

Certainly, as the sixties continued, he became gradually more open in his stance. "The Embers of Easter" declares, on little actual evidence, that the epigones of Easter Week failed because of their "intolerable knowledge that the Republic proclaimed by Pearse and Connolly was not attainable" an "analysis" that is followed through only in the matters of partition and education.

In his collection Conor Cruise O'Brien Introduces Ireland (Andre Deutch, London 1969) he is more explicit than at any time before his last books. In his introduction he admits:-

"Douglas Gageby's fine essay on Northern Ireland flatly rejects the view that the island of Ireland contains two nations, while my own essay on Ireland

in International Affairs implies the acceptance of some kind of "two nations" view." P. 18.

Even so, in his article there is a throwback to his earlier view. He quotes De Valera on partition "The only policy for abolishing partition that I can see is for us, in this part of Ireland, to use such freedom as we can secure to get for the people in this part of Ireland such conditions as will make the people in the other part of Ireland wish to belong to this part" and he comments (half objectively for it is doubtful whether such conditions can be achieved on a 26 County basis - except in the long term as one of the results of the steady decline of British imperialism):-

"Many people will wish that his policy for abolishing partition had been honoured in practice as well as in theory." Ibid P. 121.

For the rest his analysis is a foreshadowing of the extraordinary mixture of sensitivity and obtuseness that mark his last work:-

"The point about partition was not that it was 'an artificial creation' as maintained by the imbecilities of (his own - D.R.O'C.L.) anti-partition propaganda. The point about it was precisely that its roots lay deep in Irish history, and in that area of history which was the reason why Ireland felt differently from 'the other dominions.' The Irish - those who were not of British settler stock - had been a conquered people and the separate existence of Northern Ireland is proof and symbol of the fact that the conquest has never been entirely undone. The conquest of the natives is the fact that Orange Belfast solemnly commemorates every July and what it commemorates is what made the rest of Ireland neutral in 1939." Ibid, P. 122.

This analysis is self-contradictory but less than that in States of Ireland, where it recognised that

there is more wrong with partition than its "symbolism", but where, at the same time, the politics of capitulating to it are defended clearly.

THE MASTERPIECES

Before this can be considered, however, other aspects of Cruise O'Brien's ideology must be examined. His belief in the British connection is, indeed, the result of his ignorance of economic analysis leaving the way open for his father's illusions. But this ignorance not only limits the value of his work, it limits its scope. Only two of his fullscale works are major contributions to the gross knowledge of their subjects. His other attempts tend to collapse into the whimsicality of his own developed political philosophy.

Because of its comparative freedom from this characteristic, O'Brien's masterpiece is Parnell and His Party. This is precisely because of its limited terms of reference, as set in its original Ph.D. thesis. Within these, it succeeds in its aims. It does "restore Parnell to his (very) immediate context" and it describes that context, it is successful in examining "how the Irish Party at Westminster in the eighties was made up, how it developed and what it did" as well as how it was led, though "how it and its leader destroyed each other" is described with less understanding. In fact, the subject matter suits the author precisely because it is the history of an (elected) oligarchy. His failure, here, comes in the Introduction and the Epilogue where he fails to relate this oligarchy to the people who, in the last resort, made it what it was.

The same limitations explain the success of his other major fullscale book, Camus (Fontana, January 1970). O'Brien can explain this individual writer's relationship to the colon community and that community's relationship to the colonised nation precisely

because these relationships (of Camus, the Pieds Noirs and the Algerians) were as much political, social and cultural as economic. As a result Camus could be even better than Parnell were it not for its extreme brevity particularly in the matter of its subject's polemic with Sartre. This is the more interesting in that O'Brien has described the two leading protagonists therein as important influences on him (in his interview with Inglis op. cit.) It maybe that the challenge of Sartre's dialectical approach (as distinct from his integrity) was too much.

Apart from these there are only assorted pamphlets on U.N.O. and the article on Yeats already quoted. After Parnell this latter will probably stand as his best work on Ireland. Written at the zenith of his radical reputation, it caused a howl of hostility from the Anglo-Irish literati, aghast at his daring to treat their one indisputable international figure (Joyce was, of course never really "theirs") as someone to be analysed with reference (however brief) to objective circumstances.

In fact, the real criticism to be made of "Passion and Cunning" has been made, after nine years, by O'Brien's conservative hagiographers:-

" O'Brien certainly does make a case for the importance of politics to this particular writer, Yeats, but he less successfully demonstrates that Yeats enriched, enlarged, or even significantly impinged upon his own political milieu! Indeed, a judicious viewer of Yeats would probably consider him a political dilettante, misled, muddled and even foolish". Young-Bruehl and Hogan, op. cit. P. 21.

Written just before this were his short works on U.N.O. particularly his pamphlet, Conflicting Concepts of the United Nations (1964). This says all of value which would appear in his enormous United Nations Sacred Drama (Hutchinson, London 1968). It succeeds where the latter fails precisely because it

remains in the United Nations and does not move into the broader world where economic relationships play a decisive part. He sets himself to expose the U.S.A.'s dominance of U.N.O. and does so. When he tries to explain the significance of it, in the later work, he retreats into the fantasy worlds of Huizinga and the ethologists.

THE LIBERAL RAMPANT

Cruise O'Brien's limitations are not simply negative. Since much of his writing - particularly his last three books - as well as his contemporary public career involved him stepping outside the oligarchic chamber and the poetic consciousness, he has had to try to understand the world. His choice of tools in this task is conditioned by his limitations. On the one hand, he genuinely, if with restraint, rejects Marxism - that analytic method that has at its centre those material, economic relationships on which O'Brien is so markedly feeble. At the same time, he attempts to develop a rival method that is tailored to his own experience: an expansion outward from his limited knowledge.

ANTI-MARXISM

Of these two sides of his overall epistemology, O'Brien's opposition to Marxism appears most decisively both in his earliest and in his latest writings. Perhaps his very first one was made in a review of the Critical Essays, of his co-mentor, Orwell:-

"A generation that came to maturity at a time when it was quite clear that no millenium was at hand is inclined to feel surprised at the odd and even reactionary activities of these disillusioned leftists whose disappointment leads them to advocate a religious attitude without God (Koestler) or a revival of pre 1914 morality (Orwell). Mr Orwell seems to have believed in the Earthly Paradise as thoroughly

as ever Koestler did but at some time in the fairly recent past under the stress of disappointment he began half unconsciously to put that Golden Age in the past, as the ancients used to do and not any longer in the future. The Saturnian reign of Edward VII: not the future Socialist Commonwealth became his mental refuge from the world of Stalin, Miss Blandish and Salvador Dali. The trouble with this type of private myth is that it leads to a peevish and sterile negativism, with which Mr Orwell is increasingly threatened.

"And yet he knows better and, talking of Koestler, he has lucidly condemned what is now his own position. 'Perhaps some degree of suffering is ineradicable from human life, perhaps the choice before man is always a choice of evils, perhaps even the aim of Socialism is not to make the world perfect but to make it better?'

"Perhaps we could do without the perhaps" - "Raffles, Stalin and George Orwell", The Bell, May 1946.

This is, in itself a mild formulation of Cruise O'Brien's position on Marxism, though it is reinforced by his insistence, elsewhere in the article on describing the thinking of his own generation as "post Marxist".

In his essay on Leon Bloy in his collection Maria Cross (Chatto and Windus, London, 1952) he is more explicit:-

"Christopher Caudwell, most subtle of Marxist critics, defined religion as 'a reality but a fantastic reality'. He would certainly have claimed that Bloy was expressing in fantastic terms and so evading, the realities with which Marx grappled scientifically. Such an antithesis would be rather too neat, it is a question, for example, whether the Earthly Paradise is any more 'fantastic' or less 'scientific'

than the classless society." Maria Cross, P. 217.

Twenty years later, in his statement of his present political philosophy, Cruise O'Brien revives the charge:-

"Our understanding of history has been transformed by Marx and transformed for right as well as for left, as Gramsci so well notes, but it seems useless to tinker now with Marxism as a system in order to make it fit the world it failed to predict (sic). Nor do any of the post Marxian, sub-Trotskyite, or semi-anarchist schools on the 'new left' seem more promising. Indeed they seem in general much less so. As with so many other writers, Marx's defects are far easier to imitate than his qualities.....

"His system being one not merely of analysis, but of legitimation, exhortation and mobilization..... required a chiliastic goal..... Marx was a fighter who had no use for insights which, however true they might be, might get in the way of winning the fight". The Suspecting Glance, Faber and Faber, London, 1972. P.P. 88-90.

For O'Brien, Marxism is inadequate because its forecasts as he regards them did not prove accurate enough soon enough, precisely because it is distorted by its necessary "chiliastic" goal. This viewpoint flows necessarily from his resolute evasion of economics. He cannot appreciate the basic Marxist argument that the classless stateless society must come, because material, economic and technological development renders any alternative irrational. Although he fears the worst irrationalities, nuclear war or prolonged reactionary caste rule, he has no hope for the rational alternatives to them. For him, politics must be "always a choice of evils".

This essential pessimism (not without its own counterbalancing over-optimism, as will be shown) is buttres-

sed by two further criticisms of Marxism. O'Brien tends to equate Marxism with economic determinism as when, in his (and his wife's) Concise History of Ireland (Thames and Hudson, London, 1972) he describes the nineteenth century's Unionist Party's policy of "redress of economic grievances" as being pursued "on the rather Marxist assumption that Irish nationalism would thereby become extinguished" (P. 128). In States of Ireland he describes that, in one Belfast factory "Reality here stood classic Marxist theory on its head: the 'false consciousness' fabricated here was class consciousness..... The real conflict..... was that between Protestants and Catholics" P. 307. For O'Brien Marxism is (economic) mechanical materialism: dialectics are to be ignored.

And, proceeding logically from his scepticism and his own idea of Marxism, he exaggerates the significance of psychological forces: most especially Nationalism. In his book United Nations, Sacred Drama he slaps down protest that that "Class War, rather than race war is primary" (P. 288) by pointing out that, at U.N.O. :-

"There is no stauncher upholder of the 'principle of national sovereignty' than the Soviet Union". Ibid, P. 290.

In his last work , he is even more explicit:-

"Most history is tribal history, written that is to say in terms generated by, and acceptable to a given tribe or nation, or a group within such a tribe or nation.

"That Marxist history is only an apparent exception to this is shown by Marx's correspondence, and the development of Marxism itself, and therefore of Marxist history, into a number of national schools." States of Ireland. op. cit. P. 16.

For all the references to Caudwell, Gramsci and to

Marx himself, O'Brien's criticism of their theory is well represented by the above quotations. It is not devastating.

For, quite apart from his capacity, he has not done much homework. In his Introduction to his edition of Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution (Pelican Classics, London 1968 PP. 9-10, footnotes) though he includes quotations from Marx, he betrays himself:-

"Marx in his earlier years applied the lessons of the French Revolution too schematically, as in his writing for Rheinische Zeitung and The Civil War in France (sic). But in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in chastened (sic) and deliberate language he gives an extraordinary sense of how, and in what ambiguous shapes, the great Revolution weighs on his own time." Ibid. P. 10 Footnote 1.

The same casualness flaws O'Brien's attack on the Marxist, James Connolly, in States of Ireland. Ten pages (89-99) are devoted to this task, Connolly is quoted copiously, but, with one exception, all the quotes come from his two later historical pamphlets and his polemic against the Revisionist, Walker. This ignores, perhaps inevitably, Connolly's admittedly short but definitive analysis of the continuing basis for urban Orangeism:-

"At one time in the industrial world of Great Britain and Ireland the skilled labourer looked down with contempt upon the unskilled and bitterly resented his attempt to get his children taught any of the skilled trades: the feeling of the Orangemen of Ireland towards the Catholics is but a glorified representation on a big stage of the same passions inspired by the same unworthy motives." Forward, 2 August, 1914.

Without this (again, basically economic) key, O'Brien can summarise Connolly's understanding of religious divisions among the workers of Belfast as being, only:-

- "1. Belfast employers are exceptionally skilled in using religious catch-cries
2. Protestant workers are exceptionally lacking in spirit" States of Ireland, P. 95.

The problem is left on the psychological plane. There it can be assumed to require different methods of solving it to those prescribed by reality. How essential this illusion is to the argument of States of Ireland will be shown.

"LITERARY POLITICS"

Against Marxism, Conor Cruise O'Brien presents his full ideology. Basically it is an empirical one that is not formulated fully until The Suspecting Glance, but certain aspects can be discerned earlier as they have been for this essay. Already he has been revealed as lacking interest (and understanding) of economics and hence, on the one hand, denying their central importance in human (and, indeed political) life, on the other hand, allowing himself to be guided by his father's (economics based) preconceptions and justifying this position with a formal, but often decisive, scepticism about political ends. This is a sufficient base for a liberal, but Conor Cruise O'Brien is intelligent enough to feel the inadequacy of liberalism and to develop on top of it a superstructure that is aimed at supplementing its deficiencies, but which only adds to them.

Much - too much - of his writing on world politics depends on his expertise in the sphere of literature, particularly the French classics which he attempts to relate to politics in isolation from other matters. That this develops further his negative traits is inevitable.

For the trouble with attempting to develop a political theory from the consciousness of writers whose primary considerations may not be political at all is that such a theory is all too often inclined to

whimsy and to over-valuation of the irrational. Divorced from its social base (which, yet again, includes the nature of the economic environment, class forces, etc.) literature is a product of psychology. In trying to erect theoretical barriers against what he sees as the inadequacy of Dialectical Materialism, Conor Cruise O'Brien himself raises an irrational spirit that he claims to seek to exorcise.

This can be seen in his method as much as in his presuppositions. In Maria Cross he asserts:-

"The writers in question were certainly not picked as a 'representative' cross section of Catholic literature but are simply among the modern Catholic writers who interested me most: the reads I have used in studying their work have no pretension to the uniformity of a questionnaire.

"The only requirement of the scientific spirit to which I have tried to conform is that of respect for the facts. Each essay follows the pattern of what seemed to be important in the imagination of the writers studied, and not subordinate patterns which might have been more convenient for a critical thesis. It is quite possible that the living writers will not, if they read the essays on themselves agree....." Maria Cross, op. cit. Introduction, pp. VII-VIII.

This is not a major weakness in Maria Cross due to its essential form as a collection of unrelated essays (despite attempts at one unifying summary at the end). In Parnell however, the tightness and indeed, the rationality of the main theme force "literary politics" to stick out like a sore thumb when the question is posed (in the Introduction and the Epilogue) as to the relation of Parnell and Party to the Irish and their society:-

"To use again Pareto's useful terms, Parnellism was a system in which the emotional 'residues' of his-

torical tradition and suppressed rebellion could be enlisted in the service of parliamentary 'combinations' of a strictly rational and realistic character. But the drawing force of the 'residues' could be successfully directed in the sense of the 'combinations' only under one condition. This was that THE AMBIGUITY OF THE SYSTEM MUST BE CRYSTALLISED IN TERMS OF PERSONALITY. The leader, in short, had to become a mysterious and awe-inspiring figure". Parnell and his Party, P. 350.

A similar attempt to rationalise the already rational in irrational terms appears in O'Brien's "The People's Victor", Spectator 20th April, 1956 (subsequently republished in Writers and Politics) where a comparison of Victor Hugo and Gladstone (which properly handled might have had some value) is limited to terms of, respectively, literary and oratorical forms and is, as such, intrinsically unsatisfactory. Another example of the O'Brien approach is his utterly distorted respect for the politics of W.B. Yeats. This appears first in "Passion and Cunning", where without any real evidence, he describes the link between Yeatsian politics and Yeatsian poetry as being "Yeats' profound and tragic intuitive - and intelligent - awareness, in his maturity and old age of what the First World War had set loose, of what was already moving towards Hitler and the Second World War." "Passion and Cunning" op. cit. pp. 274-275. In 1972 Yeats is treated in The Suspecting Glance as a political thinker equal to Machiavelli, Burke and Nietzsche. In the same year, his imagery is used to give a certain thematic shape to the O'Briens' joint Concise History of Ireland. This essentially whimsical political approach is seen too in the title of his large scale work, United Nations, Sacred Drama, his use of the imagery of this metaphor throughout and, his backing of it by references to Huizinga's Homo Ludens ("my indebtedness to this seminal work is heavy" P. 316) and the ethologist, Ardrey.

But it is in The Suspecting Glance that the limitations of the O'Brien approach are most evident. Firstly, there is the restrained and apparently reasoned pessimism:-

"The world by the turn of the century is likely to present some terrible aspects. The comfortable countries, assuming that they can keep their hands off one another's throats, will be more comfortable, or at least more affluent, than ever. But the poor world is likely to be drowning in the excess of its own population. A human swirl of self-destructive currents, of which the Nigerian-Biafra war may be a type of forerunner. The advanced world may well be like, and feel like, a closed and guarded palace in a city gripped by the plague." The Suspecting Glance P. 61.

And what is O'Brien's way of avoiding the danger?

"The socialist aspiration is towards the placing of the resources of humanity. It is based on the idea of human brotherhood: it seeks to cultivate the impulses of kinship and of compassion: it rejects the cult of cruelty and of contempt. So far, so good. But this aspiration.....requires perhaps more emphasis on zoology and less of archaic and doctrinaire forms of economics. It requires the sensitive development of social psychology and anthropology. It requires the careful exploration of the interplay of myth, metaphor and ritual forms both in our language and in our institutions and across the two.....

"The study of literature is a social science. It is concerned with the results of the most far-reaching and subtle investigations that have been made into man's mind and passions and his life in society: concerned also with legitimation, myth, metaphor and role, treating of these vital social concepts and illustrating them, in a depth, range and variety unmatched outside great works of art. To this frontier of art and society I would, in conclusion, like

to turn the attention of such students as are both interested in the subject matter of these Eliot lectures and also concerned with our present and impending social, economic and political predicaments." Ibid, P.P. 89-91.

On the whole, Dr. Leavis has made a better case. But both the learned doctors fail to justify their positions, because, by down-grading the economic factor, they downgrade human rationality: the need to keep living. If this is dismissed as "archaic and doctrinaire forms of economics" (and who, anyway, is Conor Cruise O'Brien to decide what economics are and are not "archaic and doctrinaire"?), then with the best will in the world, all research into social psychology and anthropology let alone the sort of zoology with which O'Brien inflicted his readers in the United Nations, Sacred Drama is likely to be futile.

The point is that O'Brien has to believe in his set of disciplines rather than in those provided by economics (let alone those of what he considers "archaic and doctrinaire forms" thereof). What is important about this belief is not just that it develops naturally from his whole literary approach to politics, but that this approach, with the concomitant commitment to the choice of the "lesser evil" results in an essentially naive view of possible political formulae for solving given situations. Since political crises are developed from psychological causes (a Liberal softening of the conservative "original sin") so, for O'Brien, can they be solved by psychiatric means.

Even in Parnell and His Party he ascribed the success of parliamentary democracy in the twenty-six counties thus:-

"The concrete achievements of Parnell and his party, and the example of pledged members, not one of whom broke his pledge". op. cit. P 354.

A few years later, a similar naivety ended his diplomatic career abruptly. Even as related in O'Brien's own words (To Katanga and Back, Hutchinson, London 1962) it is clear that his failure was helped by his essential acceptance of the current pretensions of the United Nations Organisation as opposed to its real power base.

This failure resulted in some of his best work as he tried to understand the Organisation. However, by 1968, he had been able to reconcile his specific search with his overall illusions. United Nations, Sacred Drama insists that U.N.O. will be of lasting value (albeit with some procedural reforms) as a means of keeping the (abstractly conceived idea of) Nationalism at bay.

Similar illusions, more obvious ones because they are already disproved can be seen in other works of this, his "progressive", period, even before his answer to his question on the nature of U.N.O.

Thus, less than a year after leaving Nkrumah's employment, he could produce a glowing welcome to the military putschists who had overthrown his former boss, in "Nkrumah - the Man I knew" Observer 27th February, 1966. This article ignored what are now known (and which might have been expected): the disastrous immediate effects of the putsch on the all African military struggle against colonialism, especially in the then Portuguese empire.

Again, he wrote of the Indo-China War:-

"While Johnson remains in the White House (the American public) cannot be expected to do more than exercise a certain restraint." Introduction to John Gerasi's North Vietnam: a Documentary, P. 28

There was no suggestion that Johnson's successor might, in fact, make matters worse.

And, on his native country, in his essays "The Embers of Easter" and "Ireland in International Affairs" (in Introduces Ireland) he anticipated major changes towards a more genuine form of neutrality in Irish foreign affairs than would be caused by the retirement of his old boss, Frank Aiken, and "the advent of younger men with new initiatives" (Introduces Ireland, P. 134) to the Department of External Affairs. Once again, 3 Ministers have followed Aiken. Despite much activity, policy remains the same.

Overall, there is a class line separating O'Brien's naivety from his scepticism. As much as the conservatives who once denounced and now praise him he believes, in fact if not in open theory, in the efficacy of actions within oligarchies and disbelieves in action outside them. A man who really understood his limitations could not have written of his students in New York:-

"I was disconcerted, and so also were my students, as a result of our meetings of minds.

"I was disconcerted, precisely, by the lack of suspicion in those bright young eyes. They did suspect, of course, and rightly, the President of the United States, the board of General Motors, J. Edgar Hoover and the Trustees of the University. But they did not suspect their own slogans or sages, they suspected one another too little, they suspected their individual selves not at all". The Suspecting Glance P. 10.

Despite the ritual denunciation of the American President and the other establishment figures it is hard, here, to avoid the remark "Tu Quoque" (or "Remember that you too, are mortal") of its author. His remarks do have a certain validity, but his own lack of self-suspicion criticises them practically and more effectively than can be done by textual analysis.

"CHIPPING AWAY AT OBVIOUS LIES"

But all such criticism is incomplete if it ignores the fact that this essentially conservative ideology belonged to one who, while believing it substantially, aroused hopes of his revolutionary potential. His failure to fulfill these is obvious, but why did the said hopes exist at all?

There are several answers. In his periods of open political involvement Conor Cruise O'Brien has tended to align himself with Irish Social Democracy. His career in the Irish delegation to U.N.O. coincided with the last upsurge of Irish neutralism and it ended because of his opposition to imperialist interests in Katanga. He opposed Nkrumah in Ghana, over the issue of academic freedom. Subsequently, he opposed the American establishment over Vietnam (getting a physical hiding thereby) and sued successfully Encounter (and, hence, the C.I.A.).

The list is impressive, but, also, compatible with O'Brien's limitations. His social democracy (as distinct from his liberalism) is vague and unformulated programmatically. The progressivism of his diplomatic career was real, but depended on, on the one hand, the lack of development of Irish compradorian "economic development" policies and, on the other hand, the presence of Frank Aiken rather than Liam Cosgrave as his boss. The Katanga affair was the result of ignorance as much as benevolence on his part. His opposition to Nkrumah ended with his welcoming a pro-imperialist putsch. The fights with the New York police and with Encounter are perhaps his most substantial achievements of this period, but, even there, as with his subsequent participation in a mass anti-apartheid rally after his return to Dublin in 1970, there is a qualification. American aggression in Vietnam and South African apartheid provide causes that may endanger the peace of the world. To oppose them is, therefore, right and proper and, most important, the issues are too far away

to unleash too many irrational prejudices in their opponents. Or, rather, they should be too far away; as has been shown, Conor Cruise O'Brien found some of his allies in his chosen causes distinctly "disconcerting".

But there is a further reason for O'Brien's reputation in the 60's. It can be seen in the already quoted introduction to his collection, Writers and Politics:-

"While it would be hard to refute the theoretical proposition that the averting of a Third World War would be worth a good many lies, it is evident in practice that lies, though they may certainly help to win a war, are unlikely means of averting one". Writers and Politics, P. XIX.

He moves to the particular:-

"The English speaking critic and analyst is or should be led to criticise and analyse the phenomena of his own contemporary culture, which is increasingly dominated by values prevalent in the United States of America. The distortions and misleading facades which he will most often encounter, I use this verb advisedly, are pro-American and anti-communist distortions and facades. He will of course be aware that in the communist world, and in the poor world of Asia and Africa, there are also distortions and facades, usually much more blatant, and therefore less insidious than those prevalent in the West. As far as outside criticism can do something to demolish the mendacities of the communist world and the poor world, that effort is being vigorously made by many writers, and I have not felt any great need to add my amateur efforts to those of the numerous professional critics of communist practice". Ibid. P.P. XXI-XXII.

These statements, allied to O'Brien's undoubtedly courageous stand on (albeit selected) causes, more than anything else in his career gave him a left wing reputation that is still much with him and, thereby, of use both to himself and to his new imperialist

allies. Why did he write it, and how can he reconcile it with some of his more recent acts and statements (such as, for example, his invocation of the name of Trotsky to justify the Irish Labour Party's coalition plans with the bourgeois, ex-Fascist, Fine Gael)? Does he really believe that western imperialist lying stops at Ireland?

One opinion must be denied in answer to this: an opinion peddled by O'Brien's opponents (particularly since his elevation to the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and Government Propaganda) that he is generally insincere. There is absolutely no reason to doubt that his sincerity when he penned the above quotation was as great as his sincerity in lying for the right to persecute Republicans today.

Nonetheless it must be qualified. In the first place, the Conor Cruise O'Brien who wrote it was not in full time politics, but, rather, a political prophet trying to influence the action by independent propaganda. Of the tasks of professional politicians, he had written already:-

"Exponents of the whole truth could not survive in politics anywhere". Parnell and His Party P. 335.

This is far more like the advocate of the "lesser evil" strategy, and it is reinforced rather than diminished by O'Brien's limited - indeed two dimensional - idea of the answer to the question, What is Truth:-

"We can identify lies readily enough, and can reasonably hope that, when we have chipped away at these, what remains will be closer to the indefinable truth". Writers and Politics P. XXI.

Admittedly, today the range of knowledge is probably too broad to allow any one individual to know it all and to pronounce thereon. But simply to "chip away" at obvious lies is not inevitably the

way to expand public consciousness. What may appear to be an obvious lie can turn out, on investigation, to be the one truth in a mass of falsehoods. But even this is but one alternative in many. All that can be said is that any examination of a subject must aim to cover all facets of what is examined without too many preconceived notions. The present author speaks from experience when he says that, if one perseveres, the logical result of this method is a position of dialectical materialism.

By limiting his concept of truth within his overall philosophy, Conor Cruise O'Brien limited, also, his effectiveness as exposé of "pro-American and anti-communist distortions and facades". Apart from his critiques of Encounter (inevitably) and of the informer, Whittaker Chambers, both of which could be said at least to help popularise what the Left had long known*, there is little in Writers and Politics to satisfy the expectations raised by its introduction.

And this was his high point. Before the end of the sixties his limitations - at least as great as those he claimed to have seen in his students - had restored to him a political philosophy in which conditional truth had been replaced as the central theme by selective suspicion. The difference between the new ideology and the pre-Katanga one was that the new one was openly expressed by one who had, if only to a certain extent, earned practically the confidence of the far left, while never deviating from a philosophy that is idealist (in its emphasis on the central importance of ideas outside their social context) and elitist (in its related emphasis on the reason of an elite in stated opposition to the primal urges ascribed to the masses).

* See in particular James P. Cannon's articles in The Militant, 2nd, 9th, 23rd June, 1952, republished in Notebook of an Agitator, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, P.P. 298-309.

O'BRIEN AS A PARTY POLITICIAN

This inherent contradiction is today resolved naturally in favour of O'Brien's basic method. However, the illusions of the former, one might say its "residues" allied to assorted, once ultra left, tendencies within the Irish working class movement have persisted to cloud this fact. He has expressed what many feel a quite understandable mistrust of Republicanism, in doing so he has encouraged it to develop into a phobia against that movement's underdeveloped aims. The practical value of this position, at this time, and, even more of what is offered, implicitly, in its place has to be tested.

Today Conor Cruise O'Brien's return to the Labour Party (he was a member in his student days) can be seen as a desperate move both by a homesick man blacklisted from professional employment in Ireland and by one weary of academic life and seeking action. Equally, it cannot be ignored that the person concerned had been disillusioned both by Kwame Nkrumah's authoritarianism and by his New York students' revolutionary attitudes. In his "Embers of Easter" in 1966 he had denounced the Irish Labour Party as a collection of "Uncle Paythers" and "poltroons". By 1969, he may well have felt safer, as a liberal, with such individuals. But this was not made clear at the time. For many on the Irish left Conor Cruise O'Brien's return to the Irish Labour Party was seen (as, no doubt, it was meant to be seen) a sign that the Party had changed qualitatively and that its hastily prepared "Socialist" hodge-podge of policies were guarantees that the Party meant business. Only a few suspected that O'Brien was preparing, happily, to establish himself as the ideologist of poltroonery.

Since the general election of June 1969, he has held the safe Labour seat in the North-East Dublin constituency. As Party spokesman on External Affairs (in opposition) and, (in Government) as Minister for

Posts and Telegraphs, he has used all his considerable ability to provide a left cover for British imperialism and its Irish collaborators against those fighting the current struggle for national unification. To maintain this connection with Britain, everything has been sacrificed: the "Socialist" policies of Labour in 1969, its specifically democratic policy document on education and its insistence between 1957 and 1970 that it would stand alone, rather than continue in its barren and truly "poltroon" position of junior partner to the compradorian bourgeois party, Fine Gael. All this has been given the blessing, at times, and, surprisingly, crudely explicit, of Conor Cruise O'Brien.

O'BRIENS' HISTORY OF IRELAND

The two books in which he sets down his apologia - almost literally, his "New" and "Old Testaments" - appeared in 1972, the year before Labour's final, decisive, surrender to the compradorians. The earlier one A Concise History of Ireland, (Thames and Hudson, London 1972) which he wrote with his second wife, Maire MacEntee, is to be seen most accurately as a selection of facts for his subsequent States of Ireland. Its final paragraph explains this:-

"At the time of writing, Catholics and Protestants seem as far as ever from being able to work out ways of existing peacefully together in the island which they share, and whose history they inherit. British government in the past did much to shape that history, and the British public of to-day, willy-nilly inherits it. It may be that the beginning of wisdom in this matter for Catholics as well as Protestants, English as well as Irish is to see this history not as a repository or arsenal of grievances and titles to triumph, not as something merely boring which may be tossed aside or shaken off, but as a common inheritance with multiple aspects. The hardest problem is to break the comfortable habit of seeing the inheritance in one accustomed set of as-

pects only, and to try and get used to the light in which the others who also inherit it are accustomed to seeing it. This book has no pretensions to solving that problem: all it claims is to try to make somewhat more widely known some of the results of the work of those historians of Ireland, many of them recent, who have written not to validate competing myths but to find a common historical language in which we today can communicate, with a minimum of recrimination, complacency or boasting. About a past which has moulded us, and also threatens us". A Concise History of Ireland, P.P. 172-173.

The reasoned language ("calm, judicious persuasion" according to Young-Bruehl and Hogan P. 38) covers a less agreeable practice. Thus, the authors' admitted dependence on secondary sources is bound to distort their narrative, since, even today, it is regrettably true that large areas of Irish history have not been covered by any adequate historical work. And, of course, the authors' preconceived assumptions distort still further. There have been few enough Marxist histories of Ireland: only Desmond Greaves' life of Connolly is mentioned in the Bibliography though two limited selections of Connolly's own works are also listed. The history of Ireland since the Treaty is covered by four and a half books (the half being the second half of a set of Thomas Davis Radio lectures covering the period 1916-1926); two of these are by journalist T.P. Coogan. (Amusingly, O'Brien has since denounced Coogan for Republicanism). The useful Thomas Davis Radio lectures are not mentioned at all after 1926.

The same subjectivism applies to the O'Briens' lay out of the work as a whole. Even Young-Bruehl and Hogan have to admit:-

"There are some disproportions of emphasis in the modern chapters, which perhaps arise from O'Brien's own research. Parnell, for example, gets several times as much space as O'Connell and perhaps twice

as much as Wolfe Tone. James Larkin whose impact on modern Ireland was deeply influential, is not mentioned although three pages are given to the 1950s issue of Dr. Noel Browne's mother and child health care scheme." Young-Bruehl and Hogan op. cit. P. 37.

This is true enough and expresses, generally a real and further weakening of the credibility of the History, that is not appreciated by the writers quoted. But one example of those they mention is exaggerated to cover something that is both worse and equally typical of the work criticised. Dr. Browne's mother and child scheme only occupies two pages and would probably occupy less were there not large photographs on each page. On the other hand, the O'Briens' account of it is inaccurate in several points of fact. For example, the Government did not, appeal to the Catholic hierarchy on the Scheme until the latter had spoken out on it.

This carelessness is repeated at more crucial points elsewhere in the work. Thus, on page 61, the plantation of Ulster is ascribed purely to the royal settlement of 1609 onwards in the west, though this would not have been of decisive importance had it not been for the private plantations of the previous decade, on lands cleared by the undertakers in the Elizabethan Irish wars and with more permanent results.

Even less impressive, precisely because there is more of it, is the O'Briens' account of the Independence struggles of 1910 to 1922. The tariff question, a major point at issue between Home Rulers and Sinn Feiners and Republicans is ignored, though space is taken by a reference to the 1913 Dublin lock-out as having been "about which Sean O'Casey later wrote his lyrical play, Red Roses for Me." (P. 134) This characteristic omission of an economic factor enables the authors to assert with all the more conviction that "the Anglo Irish Articles of Agreement of 1921" resembled the substance of the British Gov-

ernment of Ireland Act much more closely than they did the absolute independence proclaimed by Sinn Fein. This was so even as far as 'Southern Ireland' was concerned". P. 150. As the said Government of Ireland Act provided a federal, home rule, relationship for the two parts of a partitioned Ireland within the United Kingdom, the lesson is clear: the Irish should never have deserted Redmond and Cruise O'Brien's home ruler relatives.

But, above all, the Concise History fails because its whole method is wrong in essence. Anglo-Irish relations cannot be understood simply by balancing different historical accounts against each other. History is more than just a collection of tribal myths. At its bottom are solid facts. In some cases, these facts have been exaggerated, in others (as with most of those behind the Unionist/Loyalist tradition), they are realities that the myths have been created to camouflage rather than to embellish, in certain cases, the original fact behind the tradition is both less popular and even more of an objectively rational cause than that which has been publicised. In the end, one set of myths must be found to be based more solidly than the others.

In their treatment of Irish history, the O'Briens' approach leads to a completely sterile attitude. For every tribal myth, they seek to present a rationalisation or a countervailing story. They are so busy presenting accounts, rather than facts, that they never put a distance between themselves and the said myths and facts. Occasionally (as with their account of Protestant caste rule in Eighteenth Century Ireland) their approach is helpful. (Though in this matter, there is a nagging doubt that their success was promoted precisely by their own ignorance of the period and their resultant dependence on their authorities). Overall, the result is simply a series of accidents and mistakes by all parties without any rhyme or reason. This blandness reaches its zenith on pages 168 and 169 when photographs of

Dr. Ian Paisley and Bernadette Devlin are linked only by a short caption, "Two tribal symbols, typifying Ulster's tragic, historic enmities".

Because of the different attitudes to Ireland of the Irish and the British, the Concise History is a sort of propaganda for purely negative opposition to general anti-imperialist action and, in particular, the reunification of Ireland. But it can only be negative: its blandness affects its analysis of Northern Irish society after 1921 to prevent even a foreshadowing of a solution within the Six County unit. To provide the inspiration for the counter-attack on the positions that should have been weakened by the history was the task of its successor: Conor Cruise O'Brien's sole, and most recent work, States of Ireland.

"STATES OF IRELAND"

O'Brien's hagiographers have no doubts about the value of his last book:-

"O'Brien's finest qualities are combined in States of Ireland, which is to date his most mature and impressive book. Although the book is in a sense an interim report on the Ulster crisis, it is a good deal more than such other reports as Barricades in Belfast, Drums and Guns, or the Sunday Times 'Insight' report. (An interesting choice of alternative authorities to say the least - D.R.O'C.L.). The book unites a variety of O'Brien's previous approaches, and he describes it as 'not a history, but an enquiry in the form of a discursive essay'....." Young-Bruehl and Hogan, op. cit., P.P. 38-39.

"O'Brien is fortunate in his personal approach, for his family was intimately engaged in politics and represented a broad spectrum of opinion. His roots are both National(ist - D.R.O'C.L.) and Unionist, revolutionary and parliamentary, Catholic and Protestant, North and South. He is able, then to inves-

tigate with understanding and sympathy the principal conflicting attitudes towards the current crisis. This intimate involvement with his own tribe lends more weight to his opinions than would the 'scientific' detachment of the mere historian. Indeed, his opinions in States of Ireland seem truly detached, fair and convincing". Ibid. P. 39.

"Most of the book, the public history, the personal history, the personal public analysis of events, all point to O'Brien's final attitude to Ulster. For an Irish politician, the attitude is startling, and until recent years would probably have signalled his political death. After over 900 people killed, it might be hoped, however, that the attitude will seem more and more a commonsensical inevitability. O'Brien's position is simply that the traditional Southern conception of unity be given up." Ibid P. 40.

And yet, "O'Brien's view would not solve any major problem except the fighting(!) A minority of Catholics will still live in Ulster. And if violence has proven to many Northerners the necessity for tolerance and co-operation, it has but reinforced in others the old bigotries. Nevertheless, that fact invalidates neither O'Brien's conclusion nor his book. The conception of two Irelands needs to be made, argued and stressed, and for that reason a sane book like States of Ireland is an invaluable public document." Ibid P. 41.

This is as good a defence as the book can get. Inevitably, it ignores too much. For Conor Cruise O'Brien reaches his conclusions in a manner that involves many of the weaknesses already noted. History is treated idealistically, as, in effect, tribal mythology. Further, even more than in the Concise History, there is the old faith in British goodwill ("As security begins to return, the British Government will invest in a massive reconstruction programme, involving major public works projects in the high unemployment (principally Catholic and Western)

areas". P. 299). He, also, unhistorically but quite within the Irish Liberal tradition, ascribes the non-sectarian nature of the original (Saorstát) 26 County constitution to British pressure (P. 111-112).

Besides this, there is a further subjectivism, a reliance on and a reference back to general public apathy as not only a witness but an authority on which (or, in this case, on which not) to act:-

"Even by 1960-61 the official mood in Dublin was one not merely of reaction against the excesses of the chapel-gate collection (of the Anti-Partition Campaign D.R.O'C.L.) period, but one of impatience with the Northern Catholics, and a degree of aversion for them. They had brought, it was felt, most of their troubles on themselves, and it was now up to them to come to terms with reality." Ibid P. 148.

That this quietist and, essentially, ignorant attitude is given philosophical justification in States of Ireland should not obscure the fact that there is a considerably more honourable, motive for the work, although like so much else of O'Brien's political writings it is flawed in execution. It is expressed in the Dedication:-

"To the Derry women who demanded peace, and especially to those women, bereaved by violence, who refused to allow their losses to be exploited for the perpetration of violence". Ibid. P. 6

Already, in United Nations, Sacred Drama O'Brien had written:-

"Certain rituals can be a substitute for violence: others are such powerful medicine that they might lead to violence. It is for this reason, I believe, that Ireland nominally committed to raising the conscience of the world to the injustice of partition has never submitted a resolution on the subject to the United Nations: where it might well have got

strong 'anti-colonialist' support and blown the embers alight again". op. cit. P. 118.

Now, with the embers smouldering away fitfully, he returns to the theme:-

"The subject of this book (is) the relations between Catholics and Protestants and between the two political entities created by those relations (sic)..... We must discuss the conditions of a multiple frontier not just the territorial border, but a very old psychological border area, full of suspicion, reserve, fear, boasting, resentment, Messianic illusions, bad history, rancorous commemorations, and to-day more than ever murderous violence. This is not Ireland, and it is not peculiar to Ireland: such frontiers of tribe, colour, religion, language, culture, scar a great part of the surface of the globe, and have cost millions of lives even in this decade (Israel, Biafra, Bangladesh etc.). Our frontier is exceptionally old, over three and a half centuries and now so disturbed that many of us fear we may be approaching the brink of full-scale civil war". States of Ireland, P. 9.

"(The provisional I.R.A.) were out.....to liberate the six north-eastern counties of Ireland, occupied by British forces against the will of the great majority of the Irish people. Most citizens of the Republic were conditioned to think of such a policy as well-founded and laudable. (Then how was it against their will,? - D.R.O'C.L.). They were not conditioned to think of the Ulster Protestants as an important factor in the question or to see that the Provisionals' policy pointed ultimately to civil war in Ireland between Catholic and Protestant". Ibid P.P. 208-209.

This fear of civil war, a fear crucial to the book can be answered insofar as a phobia can be answered by several complementary points.

In the first place, and in general, it is not necessary to be an Eoin O'Duffy* to recognise that, all too often in human history, any lasting and major beneficial political change has only been affected by wars that in their developments have had at the very least, elements of civil conflict within them. No doubt Cruise O'Brien would argue (as he does argue with reference to the Irish war of Independence) that such changes would take place anyway without such degrading violence, however more evidence needs to be presented before he can be believed. On the other hand, of course it can be said that no change whatsoever is worth violence, or, at least, such violence, but this is a Pacifist argument and the Katanga veteran does not claim to be a pacifist. If a civil war (more correctly, perhaps, a war of national unification, involving such a civil conflict) is necessary to solve permanently the problems of relationships between the communities in Ireland, then to try to avoid it, indeed to make evasion of it the central aim of political endeavour is likely amongst other things to result in what is described metaphorically by Camus in La Peste and quoted, albeit as an awful warning, by O'Brien:-

"The bacillus of the plague can be dormant for years in 'furniture and linen' and may again one day 'waken its rats and send them to die in a happy city'". Ibid P. 303.

And this is just the least of it. By trying to avoid what is an historical inevitability, the O'Briens of this world may find that it can't be avoided in their times and that, indeed their attempts at evasive action only hinder the crisis' final and satisfactory resolution - postponing this to a later date and a later and further conflict. If O'Brien is to

* Fascist founder-president of Fine Gael, the current compradorian coalition ally of O'Brien's Labour Party: described by O'Brien, despite this, as one "who would have made a good Provisional". *ibid* P.303.

prove his point, then, he must prove that there is a viable alternative solution to that of civil war. While he does not actually admit this need, he does, in fact, pose two alternative "scenarios" of future developments.

The "benign" scenario provides for a peaceful transformation of Northern Ireland from formal to real democracy based on a combination of Republican collapse, Loyalist quiescence and an economic revival to be subsidised by Britain. The "malign" scenario anticipates the development of the I.R.A. campaign into sectarian civil war ending in the repartition of Ireland between two highly reactionary states. This choice is, perhaps, as good as many of the arguments against civil war. The objection to it is that it is based on certain incorrect data that invalidate the "benign" scenario and make the "malign" one self-fulfilling.

For the specific argument against O'Brien's fear of civil war is that three of the bases of the "benign" model are defective. Though the British Government has increased its grant to the Northern Ireland economy in the last five years, its present economic difficulties mean that it has lost the ability to cure the economic ills of the region, even if it were not permanently tempted by the probability that a Loyalist takeover would be cheaper. Though O'Brien does not consider this, - revealing, yet again, his lack of "suspicion" about Britain, - the 6 County minority are aware of it and it is a factor in their continuing support for the I.R.A. which is destroying his hope for its defeat. Another factor is that the working class Catholics of Northern Ireland have a clearer understanding of what Loyalism is all about than Conor Cruise O'Brien. In turn, the fact that his illusions in this are illusions, destroy his third assumption - of Loyalist quiescence.

Undoubtedly O'Brien knows more about Ulster Unionism than the average Southern Catholic, this is not to say that his knowledge is exhaustive. On the other

hand, there is his confusion as to the Protestants' fears. His distortion of Connolly's thought has been quoted. He continues his own analysis for to-day, though here, it appears more puzzling because he has actually read Richard Rose's Government Without Consensus and refers to it:-

"Professor Rose's 1968 survey found 'a limited tendency' 13 per cent differential for Protestants to have a higher occupational class than Catholics: the median Protestant, like the median Catholic is a manual worker. (Footnote 5: Proportionately, however, Catholic manual workers are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than Protestant ones). Rose also notes that, in Northern Ireland, there are more poor Protestants than poor Catholics (his italics)" Ibid. P. 134

Despite this nod to the economic factor, O'Brien emphasises:-

"Two things, however, remain important in Northern Protestant eyes about the State with which they share an island.

"The first is the tendency of Southern Protestants to be absorbed in the Catholic State and nation: a tendency expressed in the shift of political allegiance and even more in dwindling Protestant numbers.

"The second is the claim of the Catholic State to jurisdiction also over the Six Counties of Northern Ireland and over its predominantly Protestant population." Ibid, P. 127.

For Conor Cruise O'Brien, the Northern Irish Protestant community is a national entity, albeit with some undemocratic quirks, rather than, as it is, an occupying caste, maintained in the last resort by British inertia vis-a-vis the whole island. He claims that it fears "Catholic power over Protestants" (P. 299) : in fact it fears to lose, literally, Protestant power over Catholics.

This illusion does not only add to the confusion in the benign scenario, it deepens the malignity of the other. Both on page 198 and on page 300 of States of Ireland the defeat of the twenty six county army in a 32 county civil war is stated as an obvious inevitability.

He states categorically, too:-

"our words and habitual assumptions, combined with our silences and evasions, encouraged young men to acts of violence, which then we deplored and disavowed. I had long been aware of this relation, but not of the full terrible potentialities with which it now seemed fraught. It now looked as if the Catholic minority in the North might be impelled as some of them had actually been already impelled in the direction of a hopeless rising, in which they would look for help from the South which would not be effectively forthcoming, and which if it were forthcoming at all even in token form would only speed on the destruction of the outnumbered and outgunned Catholics of Belfast" Ibid, P. 264.

Of course this is a possibility. However, O'Brien has never had much to do with the 26 County Army outside Katanga, and there is evidence that other and better qualified authorities are inclined to disagree. On 2nd February, 1975, the Irish Sunday World published an alleged secret British Army document that regarded the 26 Counties as able to overcome the Unionists within months.

The trouble is that, on the one hand, the illusions of the "benign" scenario, and, on the other hand, the pessimism of the malign one combine to ensure:

1) that the evasion of civil war be a central focus of strategy and 2) that, accordingly, when it does come it will neither be planned nor waged in such a way as to ensure victory for the Twenty Six Counties so 3) that, accordingly the malign scenario will be fulfilled all too accurately.

DEATH OF AN IRISH LIBERAL

The final answer to O'Brien's thesis if not to his fear of Civil War, then to his belief in the possibility of avoiding its worst effects is his political career since 1969. Not only did he demand that British troops be introduced to maintain law and order, a policy that must now be recognised as purely counter-productive but, horrified at the possibility that Ministers in the ruling Government might have been sending guns to the embattled Nationalists in the North-east, he helped stampede the Labour Party into a coalition with the right wing, compradorian Fine Gael in pursuit of "the lesser evil". The programme of 1969 was jettisoned for a hastily jerry-built election platform for a "National Coalition" which won the general election of February, 1973. In this Government, Conor Cruise O'Brien is Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, a surprisingly humble position it would seem until it is remembered that he is responsible for radio and television.

O'Brien had assured audiences that the Coalition was necessary to maintain civil liberty. In practice, its whole drive has been different. Money has been spent like water to raise welfare benefits despite the economic crisis of which the inflationary aspects keep pace with them. (This is surprisingly similar to what the O'Briens in their Concise History describe as the Unionists' "rather Marxist" assumption that agitation could be bought off with economic reforms.) But there have been no moves to expand individual liberties on which, it might be expected, a Minister uninterested in economics but worried about anti-democratic trends might be expected to be firm. Instead the Government is pressing ahead with a Common Law Enforcement Bill that is aimed at enabling it to act even more than at present as the gaoler for British Imperialism. O'Brien's own Broadcasting "Amendment" Bill is a very formal extension of parliamentary vis a vis ministerial control over the broadcasting authority to cover real limits in the

chartered independence of the authority. (Satire is going to be more difficult if the bill is passed). On top of this the handicapped authority is to be made compete with the wealthier and less-handicapped B.B.C. or, rather, was, he was forced to ask the Irish people in a poll which reflected fully the impact that they saw through the formal democracy of his manoeuvre to the effective liquidation of the national television system that lay behind it. Accordingly B.B.C. will not have the second Irish channel. He claims that these moves are necessary to crush the IRA and thwart the malign scenario. Yet it is difficult to see for example, how this need justifies the Government's keeping on the statute book its predecessors' forcible entry act, which O'Brien has denounced as "an anachronistic and futile". (States of Ireland, P. 261). It is possible that the National Coalition will not need the excuse of civil war to abandon democracy.

For a liberal it must be galling to serve in a coercive government. But what ought to be as bad for such must be to serve in a government of this one's pervasive clericalism. The Department of Education is in the charge of a fanatical priests' man, Richard Burke, and the Labour Party's education policy is so much waste paper. The Taoiseach (Premier) Cosgrave made his country an international laughing stock by voting against his own Government's proposal to regularise the law on family planning. On all this Conor Cruise O'Brien has been unusually silent. But is this surprising? In States of Ireland P. 311 he has stated categorically that he will chose "Mother Church" before "Cathleen Ni Houlihan" (or Irish republicanism). Clericalism cannot ultimately stop popular Nationalist pressure but it can be a useful soporific to help the powers that be.

All in all Conor Cruise O'Brien's career is not remarkable or unusual. Here is a liberal who now supports policies of clericalism and coercion: an anti-imperialist who has made the change from poacher to

game-keeper. It is not the treachery of a lost leader - merely the inadequacy of an Irish liberal. His biography merely emphasises the necessity that no future specimens of the breed be given the same trust.

POSTSCRIPT

The main part of this work (above) was written before the publication in The Irish Times (21st - 22nd August 1975) of Conor Cruise O'Brien's "An Unhealthy Intersection." (Originally published in the British Government-financed New Review). Nothing in this last work changes the argument. The relationship between literature and its forms and politics is considered in isolation from the overall context from which his examples are taken. Once again it was probably "that play" of Yeats that sent out "certain men the English shot", and the basis of republicanism is merely the extension of that myth of blood sacrifice. On the other hand, the United Nations' General Assembly is again presented - particularly in relation to the 1956 crisis in Hungary and over Suez - as a theatre for a rival form (comic) of drama, through which the powers can extract themselves from the crises their (to use O'Brien's terms) tragic acting have precipitated.

The trouble is that this thesis stands as a self-exposure of its own inadequacies. For, if "literary politics" was really the viable discipline that O'Brien had portrayed out of office, then it should have been possible for him, in office to develop, or, at least, to expound, comic techniques to counteract the appeal of the blood sacrifice myth. Instead, chastened after two years trying to grapple with the material political issues, however inadequately, Ireland's Minister for Posts and Telegraphs can only end his article asserting that "the influence of literature over politics, in the tragic heroic mode, (is) a contagion to be eradicated where

possible" and, by implication and omission to range himself with the, totally unliterary, policies with which his government and the British are seeking to eradicate it. In other words he tries to have things both ways. If literary politics are really valid, then all repression can do is provide more martyrs for old Ireland - and make the native repressors into more Major Sirrs and Lord Clares. On the other hand, if they are not valid, not only does the same consideration apply, but Conor Cruise O'Brien has been wasting his time - and his followers' time.

It is this pamphlet's hypothesis that the latter is, in fact, the case.

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