

# **INSTITUTE FOR BRITISH-IRISH STUDIES**

## **REPORT ON CONFERENCE “THE FUTURE OF REPUBLICANISM: CONFRONTING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY IRELAND” UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN, 7 MAY 2004**

Organised by the Institute as part of its programme of public events, the conference lasted for one full working day in the University Industry Centre. It brought together ten distinguished speakers and attracted an audience of about 90, drawn from the public service, the diplomatic corps, voluntary and other bodies and the academic community (see annex 2 for a list of registered participants). The academic convenor of the event was Dr Iseult Honohan, Department of Politics, UCD.

### **Theme**

The conference addressed the theme of republicanism in the first decade of the twenty-first century—its relevance and implications in a changing world. It moved on from the debate about republicanism and nationalism in Ireland, and invited speakers to confront future policy issues.

Irish republicanism has often been identified too strongly with separatist nationalism. A more muted republican movement in Britain focuses mainly on the power and position of the monarchy. Both have been largely bypassed by the wider civic republican tradition which has influenced the development of the modern European nation-state and, particularly in France, has shaped political practice.

The questions which this conference addressed included the following:

- Has Irish republicanism constituted a specific ideology?
- To what extent has it been part of a wider republican mainstream?
- What has been the practical impact of republican ideas in political practice?
- Are there lessons to be drawn from the experience of French republicanism?

These issues converge on a great practical question: whether republicanism as such has any bearing on immediate political issues in twenty-first century politics—for example, economic and cultural globalisation, the constitutional development and expansion of the European Union, immigration and multiculturalism, the role of religion in politics and society, corruption and political accountability, devolution, regionalisation, and transnational political arrangements.

### **Papers**

The day's proceedings were divided into four sessions, at each of which two or three papers were presented. Presentations were structured to allow some time for discussion, and this was initiated in each case by a pre-designated discussant (see annex 1 for the conference programme). The various presentations took account of a precirculated discussion paper on the conference theme prepared by Dr Iseult Honohan.

Following an introduction to the conference theme by Iseult Honohan, Tom Garvin presented a paper enquiring into continuities and discontinuities in the political and institutional thinking of Irish republicanism over the last two centuries. Irish republicanism, he argued, has been a sort of blanket term for several very different kinds of radical nationalism, some of them democratic, some Whiggish, others overtly communist, fascist or clericalist. Such continuity as

exists takes the form of an insurrectionist and romantic style and a fantasist style of political thinking. A paper by Margaret O'Callaghan continued this theme from a rather different perspective, addressing the issue of the relative invisibility of Irish republican ideas, as illustrated in the extensive works of J.G.A. Pocock on anglophone republicanism, or the recent multi-volume analysis of European republicanism edited by Quentin Skinner and others.

The second session began with an analysis by Jeremy Jennings of republicanism and secularism in the French political tradition. In its long evolution, republican ideology in France has, he argued, been subject to compromise and the tensions that arise from internal incoherence. Certain key features are identifiable: a distinctive conception of the appropriate political institutions grounded upon democracy and the sovereignty of the nation; a commitment to emancipation through a secular education system; a concern for individual rights combined with a desire to further social justice, and a distinctive conception of citizenship. Cécile Laborde followed this with an examination of dominant themes in French republicanism, including central commitments to neutrality as impartiality, to autonomy as non-domination, and to community as civic patriotism. Taking as her starting point the ban on Muslim headscarves in French schools voted by the French parliament on 3 March 2004, she examined the threefold argument put forward by advocates of the ban in the name of *laïcité* (secularism): *laïcité*-as-neutrality, *laïcité*-as-autonomy, and *laïcité*-as-community, arguing that such ideals of *laïcité* need not be jettisoned in favour of either a liberal or a multiculturalist conception of citizenship.

The third session moved to the more political terrain of contemporary Irish politics. John Doyle examined the evolution of Sinn Féin in the context of its recent electoral success. He took the view that while aspects of Sinn Féin policy remain fluid and can lack clarity, the party appears to retain a strong leftist, pro-equality agenda, maintaining its emphasis on the issue of Irish unity and aligning itself with anti-corporate globalisation groupings against right-wing nationalist parties with an anti-immigration platform. Sinn Féin chairperson Mitchel McLaughlin followed with an outline of his party's position: seeking a process of national reconciliation where political divisions based on the constitutional question would be no more, and urging a beginning to practical planning for a United Ireland by means of the publication of a green paper on Irish unity by the Irish government. Sean Farren of the SDLP noted his own party's acceptance of the republican principle, taking the view that the Good Friday agreement was profoundly republican, and that it contained the potential for ultimate Irish unity. Its core principle, he argued, is the republican principle of consent, i.e. sovereignty of the people.

In the fourth and last session, two well-known politicians and commentators debated the nature of contemporary Irish republicanism. Dr Garret FitzGerald argued that what is popularly known as Irish republicanism was only briefly inspired by the classical republican tradition, in its French secularist form. Exploring this theme further, he concluded that classical republicanism, involving the citizens forming an ethical community and helping to shape the common good by wide-ranging deliberation, can exist just as well in a European-type constitutional monarchy as in a country with an elected president as head of state. Martin Mansergh offered a historically informed review of the forms that republicanism has taken in Ireland, both ideal and practical, and examined Fianna Fail's particular representation of republicanism.

## ANNEX 1: CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

### **Session 1, 9h30-11h00: Republican ideas in the Irish tradition**

**Chair: Dr Pauric Travers (President, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra)**

*Introduction*

—Dr Iseult Honohan (Department of Politics, University College Dublin)

*An Irish republican tradition?*

—Professor Tom Garvin (Department of Politics, University College Dublin)

*Reconsidering the Irish republican tradition*

—Dr Margaret O'Callaghan (School of Politics, Queen's University Belfast)

Discussant: Dr Jennifer Todd (Department of Politics, University College Dublin)

### **Session 2, 11h15-12h45: French republican ideology in practice**

**Chair: Professor Linda Cardinal (Canadian Studies, University College Dublin and University of Ottawa)**

*Republicanism, secularism and the French political tradition*

—Professor Jeremy Jennings (Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Birmingham)

*Muslim headscarves in French schools: official v critical republicanism*

—Dr Cécile Laborde (School of Public Policy, University College London)

Discussant: Mr Paul Gillespie (Foreign Editor, *The Irish Times*)

### **Session 3, 14h15-15h45: The future of republican ideas in Ireland—1**

**Chair: Dr Niamh Hardiman (Department of Politics, University College Dublin)**

*Republican policies in political practice*

—Dr John Doyle (School of Law and Government, Dublin City University)

*Sinn Féin's republican ideology today*

—Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, MLA (Chairperson, Sinn Féin)

*The SDLP and the new republicanism*

—Dr Sean Farren, MLA (SDLP)

Discussant: Dr Brian Feeney (St. Mary's University College, Belfast)

### **Session 4, 16h00-17h30: The future of republican ideas in Ireland—2**

**Chair: Mr Noel Dorr (Chair, IBIS; former Secretary General, Department of Foreign Affairs)**

*Fianna Fáil and republicanism in the twenty-first century*

—Senator Dr Martin Mansergh (Member, Seanad Éireann; former advisor to Taoiseach)

*Republicanism in a changing world*

—Dr Garret FitzGerald (Chancellor, National University of Ireland; former Taoiseach)

Discussant: Professor Attracta Ingram (Department of Politics, University College Dublin)

## ANNEX 2: REGISTERED CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

BABIC, Mr Antun—Embassy of Croatia  
BACIK, Prof Ivana—Trinity College Dublin  
BAKER, Mr John—University College Dublin  
BARRY, Dr John—Queen’s University Belfast  
BEAN, Dr Kevin—University of Liverpool  
BRENNAN, Ms Jean—University College Dublin  
BROPHY, Ms Maire—University College Dublin  
BRUGHA, Mr Ruairi—Irish Association  
BRUGHA, Mrs Maire—Irish Association  
CANTWELL, Mr Sean—Dublin  
CARDINAL, Prof Linda—University College Dublin  
CARROLL, Ms Jennifer—University College Dublin  
CAVATORTA, Mr Francesco—University College Dublin  
CLANCY, Ms Paula—TASC  
COAKLEY, Prof John—University College Dublin  
COLLINS, Mr Sean—Drogheda Borough Council  
CONNAUGHTON, Ms Breda—Department of Education  
COYLE, Ms Elaine—University College Dublin  
CULLEN, Ms Mary—Trinity College Dublin  
DE ROSSA, Mr Proinnsias, MEP—European Parliament  
DE RUIJSSCHHER, Ms Jiska—State University Leiden  
DESMOND, Mr Barry—University College Dublin  
DORR, Mr Noel—Chair, Institute of British Irish Studies  
DOYLE, Dr John—Dublin City University  
EAGER, Ms Paula—Dept of An Taoiseach  
FARRELL, Mr Kevin—University College Dublin  
FARREN, Dr Sean—SDLP  
FEALTY, Mr Mick—River Path Associates, Wimborne  
FEENEY, Dr Brian—St Mary’s University College Belfast  
FINLAY, Dr Christopher—Dublin European Institute  
FINLAY, Dr Graham—Trinity College Dublin  
FITZGERALD, Dr Garret—NUI  
GAFFNEY, Dr Phyllis—University College Dublin  
GALLAGHER, Mr Frances—Friendship Without Borders  
GANIEL, Ms Gladys—University College Dublin  
GARVIN, Prof Tom—University College Dublin

GILLEN, Mr Tom—Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Northern Ireland)  
GILLEN, Mr Ultan—Oxford  
GILLESPIE, Mr Paul—Irish Times  
HANLEY, Mr Brian—Dublin  
HARDIMAN, Dr Niamh—University College Dublin  
HARRIS, Ms Clodagh—Democracy Commission  
HAYDEN, Dr Jacqueline—University College Dublin  
HEFFERNAN, Mr John—University College Dublin  
HENEHAN, Mr Damien—University College Dublin  
HONOHAN, Dr Iseult—University College Dublin  
HOWARD, Dr Kevin—University College Dublin  
HURLEY, Mr Leonard—Equality Authority  
INGRAM, Prof Attracta—University College Dublin  
JENNINGS, Prof Jeremy—University of Birmingham  
KENNEDY, Mr Michael—University College Dublin  
KILGALLON, Ms Ann-Marie—University College Dublin  
KUMAR, HE Dr Saurabh—Embassy of India  
LABORDE, Dr Cécile—University College London  
LAFFAN, Prof Brigid—University College Dublin  
LANE, Mr Finbarr—University College Dublin  
LANG, Ms Karin—University College Dublin  
LENIHAN, Ms Ida—Drogheda Community Forum  
LUCEY, Mr Cormac—Dept Justice, Equality, Law Reform  
MACALLISTER, Dr Niall  
MACFLYNN, Mr James—University College Dublin  
MAILLOT, Dr Agnes—Dublin City University  
MANSERGH, Dr Martin—Seanad Eireann  
MCDONAGH, Mr Joe—Military College, Curragh, Kildare  
MCLAUGHLIN, Mr Mitchel—Sinn Fein  
MOLONEY, Ms Hazel—University College Dublin  
MORRISS, Mr Pete—National University of Ireland, Galway  
NÍ CHRÍOCHÁIN, Ms Majella—Dublin City University  
NI LEANNAIN, Ms Sharon—University College Dublin  
Ó CORRAIN, Mr Dáithí—Trinity College Dublin  
O'CALLAGHAN, Dr Margaret—Queen's University Belfast  
O'CONNOR, Mr Tom—Dublin Institute of Technology  
O'DOHERTY, Mr Vincent—British-Irish Association

O'FERRALL, Dr Fergus—Adelaide Hospital Society  
OLUSOJIS, Mr Oyeranmi—University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
O'ROURKE, Ms Brid—University College Dublin  
PORTER, Dr Norman—Southern Cross University, Australia  
PUIRSEAL, Dr Niamh—Trinity College Dublin  
REID, Mr Ken—University of Wales  
REILLY, Mr Patrick—British Embassy  
ROCHET, Ms Karen—Embassy of France  
SAUTER, Mr Martin—Dublin City University  
SCHOEN, Ms Ricki—Independent International Commission on Decommissioning  
SEROT-ALMERAS, Mr Luc—Embassy of France  
STEWART, Mr Terry—Institute of European Affairs  
TAGGART, Mr Seamus—Dublin  
TANNAM, Dr Etain—University College Dublin  
THEILER, Dr Tobias—University College Dublin  
TODD, Dr Jennifer—University College Dublin  
TRAVERS, Dr Pauric—St Patrick's College Drumcondra  
WALDRON, Ms Fionnuala—St Patrick's College Drumcondra