

## **In the Shadow of Gunmen: The Wolfe Tone Society, 1963-1969**

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In Ireland, radical political forces clashed with traditionalists and conservatives throughout the sixties and seventies, as accepted, rigid conformist approaches to society came under increased, and aggressive, scrutiny. It was a period of uncertainty, militarism and social upheaval that pushed the IRA back into the public domain. Irish republicanism, long recognised for its strong anti-establishment agenda, became a beacon for radical militants, who hoped it could lead the way in a burgeoning social war. Republicanism however had many flaws; not least the fact that it remained rooted in a cult of blood sacrifice and was largely defined by the introverted social agenda of its rural base. The scene was set for confrontation and schism, as mobilised, educated and radicalised young people flocked to Sinn Féin demanding tangible societal change, social liberalisation and the pursuit of progressive and modernising political programmes, while a familiar sight in Irish political history, the spectre of armed apolitical gunmen, loomed large in the shadows. The Wolfe Tone Society (WTS) emerged into this environment, in 1964, pushing the merits of an advanced republican ideology on a largely conservative population. Sinn Féin, the republican movements accepted political wing, was moribund in this period, having lost political relevance, potency and direction in the years following the collapse of the IRA Border Campaign of 1956-1962. There was an appetite for change in the republican organisation and most hoped the WTS could breathe life into an ailing, failing, poorly developed political structure. The IRA did not need a political wing, other than as a mouthpiece during times of conflict, so the decision to work toward political advancement was greeted with scepticism

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by many of its members. The WTS attracted a range of academic minds, many of whom were radicalised in Britain during the 1950's, and their motivation for moving toward the republican platform subsequently became the subject of a great deal of paranoia. Many republicans claimed the WTS was a communist organisation, whose membership calculatedly infiltrated Irish republicanism, so as to change its focus away from militarism, and toward a radical platform of their creation. This was a popular narrative in the early seventies, when Provisional Sinn Féin, and its military wing, the Provisional IRA, were trying to portray its opponents as communist spies, but in hindsight, knowing what we know now about the inner workings of republican movement, this appears somewhat weak and it falls apart on inspection, revealing overt failures to address contradictory information. Over the last four years, while researching Cathal Goulding, the former leader of the IRA, later leader of the Official IRA and lifelong republican militarist, many incorrect assumptions about the WTS came to light, some perhaps more revelatory than others. In order to clarify some of these points, I will look at the origins of the WTS, examine the way it developed, address claims made about its membership and discuss the place it held in the wider republican movement. The WTS operated with an autonomy that was unheard of in Irish republican history, but it remained a republican creation, created by a leadership that craved change in a surprisingly passionate way. Although its members were eager to point out its independence, it acted undeniably under the ever watchful eye of apolitical militarists and republican gunmen.

### ***Politics and Persuasion***

Cathal Goulding assumed control of the IRA, in 1963 and sought to 'establish his objectives, explain them to the movement, persuade the movement to accept them, bring them to the people, explain them and then show the people, by political and agitationary

activities that they were sincere.’<sup>2</sup> He looked to the movement’s left-wing past, particularly the actions of his childhood hero, Frank Ryan, for inspiration, as he wanted to create enthusiasm for political advancement; something that he felt was sadly missing in this period. The Wolfe Tone Committee was set up to capitalise on the Wolfe Tone Bicentenary, and its popularity was viewed encouragingly by the IRA leadership, who were hopeful that it could provide unexplored avenues for future advancement. The Sinn Fein Ard Chomhairle approved its establishment on the ‘23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1963, and among its original members were Martin Shannon, the editor of the *United Irishman*, Uinseann MacEoin...and Cathal MacLiam.’<sup>3</sup> The minutes of many of these early meetings reveal Gouldings role in this movement, and his obvious enthusiasm for its potential. He informed all present that he was ‘expecting a letter from Martín O’Cadhain, regarding a Trinity College Dublin exhibition...inquiring from St.Vincent’s GAA club about the possibility of a game to raise funds, and seeing the manager of Shelbourne Park about the possibility of having a benefit night there.’<sup>4</sup> Goulding realised the movement’s success largely depended on the ability of the republican movement to stay out of its affairs, and he seemed surprisingly comfortable with that situation. In May, 1963, the Committee recorded that ‘12,000 copies’ of its paper, the ‘Wolfe Tone Today’ were ‘printed and sold in Belfast,’ and that Jack Bennett, who was writing for the *Northern Irish Press*, and wrote for the *Sunday Press*, as Claude Gordon, was responsible for its production, in Northern Ireland. It was clear the paper was gaining notoriety, which pleased Goulding and the leadership. Bennett noted that the paper would be ‘complimentary to the Dublin directory’s Tone booklet and designed as a propaganda sheet.’<sup>5</sup> The movement sought to generate international interest, as the purpose of the Committee was to highlight Goulding’s progressive leadership, particularly in Irish America. Goulding told

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<sup>2</sup> *This Week*, 31/07/1970, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Treacy, *The IRA, 1956-1959: Rethinking the Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 64.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 24/04/1963.

<sup>5</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, *Minutes of weekend convention*, 25/05/1963 & 26/05/1963.

the group that ‘Toronto would take 50 copies of the paper and the book, while New York would also take some, which seemingly pleased those present, as it signified a small, but welcome step toward the type of wide ranging, multicultural and international engagement they were seeking.’<sup>6</sup>

In 1964, buoyed up by the success of the Wolfe Tone Committee, the republican movement set up the WTS, which would be ‘composed of young, republican-minded Irishmen of various persuasions.’<sup>7</sup> The leadership, particularly Goulding, were eager to take a back seat in the organisation and to let it develop autonomously and organically, something that was unheard of in Irish republicanism, up to this point. Having spoken with Cathal MacLiam, one of the Society’s leaders, about the role that he believed the WTS fulfilled, he noted that it was set up as a ‘bridge,’ which would unite the Republican movement, the Labour Party, people with left-wing interests and Communist far left elements.<sup>8</sup> MacLiam said the WTS ‘tried to make republicans out of Labour and socialists out of republicans,’ which perhaps best highlighted why many were suspicious of its agenda, even at this early stage.<sup>9</sup> It was a period of reinvention in the republican movement, and the WTS hoped to push the boundaries of political engagement. Importantly, the prospect of engaging with normal everyday republicans was viewed as a bonus, rather than a target, so it was evident they were looking to appeal to ‘a different type of people than would have attended republican events.’<sup>10</sup> This was an important insight into the approach the WTS adopted from the start. Goulding showed up regularly in this period, and was ‘not a mute member of the group,’<sup>11</sup> as Anthony Coughlan, who joined the WTS in 1964 noted. The Chief of Staff ‘was not the type of man who sat silently during the political discussions...he engaged with the

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<sup>6</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, *Minutes of weekend convention*, 25/05/1963 & 26/05/1963.

<sup>7</sup> *United Irishman*, November, 1964.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Cathal MacLiam, August, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Anthony Coughlan, January, 2012.

society, and made his opinions well known,' but Coughlan was eager to point out that his opinions were treated the same as the other members.<sup>12</sup> This was a point Roy Johnston confirmed. He said Goulding 'was not running the show, even at this early stage,' and the minutes, records and testimonies of these men confirmed that point.<sup>13</sup>

In January, 1964, Johnston drafted the WTS constitution, something that set off alarm bells in many republican circles, as he was a known communist sympathiser and a former member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). His name turns up in many police records throughout this period, where his associations, friendships and comrades were scrutinised with some vigour. Johnston spoke about the need to 'work within the 26 county framework,' while warning that 'immediate participation in national level, 26 county politics would split the movement.'<sup>14</sup> Importantly, he did not design the constitution alone, went to great lengths to avoid adopting a Communist Party agenda and remained faithful to the republican ideals at the heart of the WTS, which largely avoided pigeonholed political positions. He approached Sean Cronin, the former Chief of Staff, when drafting the document, so the connection with the republican movement, particularly participants of past failed struggles, was present in the society. Cronin replied to Johnston's letter, encouraging him to develop 'a small group, embracing Catholics and Protestants, which could do something about the economic and political problems facing the country.'<sup>15</sup> This desire to be inclusive, while consciously avoiding political language that hindered previous republican initiatives, allowed the movement to retain a relaxed, engaging tone that was largely absent from other republican writings. Although Cronin's intervention was small, his approval was welcomed by Goulding and his movement, who recognised that continuity and tradition remained important aspects of their membership's outlook.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Anthony Coughlan, January, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Roy Johnston, February, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, *Immediate Policy*, 14/01/1964.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, Letter from Sean Cronin to Roy Johnston, 02/06/1964.

It was clear many republicans did not trust the WTS, given its connections with former members of the CPGB, but the insulated, elitist nature of the organisation meant that it was largely unfazed by these hostilities, as they rarely engaged with those that opposed them. Although many former members rejected the idea that it was elitist, the records and minutes of the organisation say otherwise. In Cork, where republicanism was a pervasive feature in the town's psyche, the WTS struggled to move beyond an aggressive, sectarian strand of republican thinking that the leadership feared dominated the entire Cork republican movement. The organisation's records are littered with accounts of visits to Cork, where people's limited, destructive nationalistic outlook worried the leadership, as they feared their organisation could not be sustained in such an environment. They reported that, while the numbers attending were 'most satisfactory...matters would be delayed if local leaders did not advance to the position held by the Dublin leadership.'<sup>16</sup> The report went on to warn of 'distressing signs of sectarian attitudes,' some that were seemingly beyond the reach of their platform, before speaking openly about the 'retarded political thinking in Cork.'<sup>17</sup> Many of the groups observations were subjective, and open to a great deal of challenge, particularly by Corks republican membership, but are worthy of note as they speak volumes about the mindset of the educated WTS leadership. They wanted an influential, academic and educated membership, not republicans seeking to join an organisation they believed was part of their movement's strategy to grow support. Many of those who attended their meetings, such as John O'Shea, the director of the Everyman Palace, a theatre that continues to operate in the city, were noted as being 'respected in theatrical and teaching circles and a key man to gain control of Corks Secondary Teachers Association.'<sup>18</sup> Others, such as 'Annie O'Sullivan, the founder of the Markiewicz Society in University College Cork, and a member of the Cork

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<sup>16</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, *Report on Cork Trip*, n.d.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Dóchas executive,’ were noted for the fact they travelled in ‘Labour Party circles.’<sup>19</sup> While these descriptions were not unwarranted, they reveal an instrumental streak in the way they categorised potential members. They were divided by use, rather than interest in the movement, or eagerness to play a role. They wanted ‘people who were engaged, actively, in fields such as trade unionism, civil liberties, Irish language, student organisations, economics and science.’<sup>20</sup> Members or supporters of established republican movements were last on the list.

The group’s belief that others needed to ‘advance to their position’ meant many traditional republicans were reluctant to support the organisation, regardless of how they viewed the merits of its politicising objective. It is important, in the interest of context, to note that the Goulding politicising initiative, while being popular in many places, particularly in inner Dublin and parts of Cork City, was not gathering the type of support he wanted, and was increasingly isolating large elements of the movement’s support base. The *United Irishman*, the official organ of the republican movement, while claiming a ‘circulation of thirty thousand,’ was only selling a few thousand, as Treacy noted and was forced to fire its editor, Tony Meade, in 1967.<sup>21</sup> Meade was popular within Goulding’s circle, given his progressive views of the republican movement, so his departure was difficult for his comrades to accept. Meade was, as he confided to Desmond Greaves, in 1966, ‘sick and tired’ of the traditions of the IRA, which placed his political outlook at the heart of those seeking to modernise the movement, but ensured others were deeply distrustful of his approach.<sup>22</sup> His departure marked a turning point in the organisation, as the internal dissent

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, *Report on trip to Cork*, n.d

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *United Irishman*, February, 1967; Matt Treacy, *The IRA, 1956- 69: Rethinking the Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 120.

<sup>22</sup> Roy Johnston, (2014) <<http://www.rjtechne.org/>> (accessed 19 September 2013).

was no longer private, forcing Goulding to publically admit there was a crisis in the movement and that his pursuit of political advancement was one of the main issues.

### ***The Sinn Féin perspective***

By late 1964, and early 1965, the WTS was focused on the ‘economic resistance movement’ and the Sinn Féin perspective was heavily prevalent in many documents.<sup>23</sup> It moved from addressing the ‘presence of British troops in the six counties,’ to looking at the economic damage connections to the British economy were bringing to the state.<sup>24</sup> It was active across the community, pushing its inclusive republicanism into the heart of the establishment. It was involved in many campaigns, such as ‘save the Gaiety,’ which continued to raise the movement’s profile on a national level.<sup>25</sup> Eoin O’Murchú, who was born and reared in Britain, but radicalised in a left wing republican offshoot called the Connolly Association, and later joined the IRA, viewed the WTS as the ideological arm of a new academic, but militarily capable movement that aimed to encompass all aspects of the republican platform. He said their platform was to push aggressively for revolutionary change, and that the republican movement was ‘providing the muscle for the unions...and the WTS was part of the larger plan for action.’<sup>26</sup> Ruairí O’Bradaigh, the former President of Sinn Féin, ex republican prisoner and former Provisional IRA Chief of Staff, disputed that there was a plan to ‘take over Sinn Féin,’ or that ‘the WTS was being considered as a replacement’ for old republican ideals, but it seems the truth was that there were many in the WTS, and in the wider Goulding movement that believed the Society could offer the type of educated, engaged and reasoned leadership that was needed to develop viable, long term

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<sup>23</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, *Tuairisc*, August, 1965, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, *Tuairisc*, August, 1965, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Eoin O’Murchú, September, 2012.



republican political positions. Sinn Féin, as the official mouthpiece of the IRA, did not hold the same appeal for them, regardless of its historical position at the heart of the republican agenda.

Goulding was attending far less meetings at this point, and his involvement with the WTS seemed to become increasingly removed. Anthony Coughlan said that Goulding was ‘engaging in the internal debates and generating ideas,’ and that he continued to make time to attend some WTS meetings and to help out with its programmes, in any way he could.<sup>27</sup> However, it was clear that Gouldings republican agenda, which was coming under increased scrutiny by his opponents, who were mobilising supporters to resist any attempt by the leadership to enter the political realm, was occupying most of his time. As a result, the WTS was operating entirely on its own volition, attracting unlikely allies of the republican agenda and pushing for academic mobilisation and engagement.

In 1965, Goulding publically called on republicans to accept ‘recommendation number 9,’ which called for Sinn Féin to remove its abstention policy and enter the Irish political scene. He asked members ‘not to regard those who favour it as traitors...or those who oppose it as stupid or traditionalist.’<sup>28</sup> Gouldings politicising, modernising agenda was out in the open, much to the dismay of a large portion of the membership, who refused to support moves to abandon its traditional position and enter the body politic. The WTS was not a feature in his agenda, but it was clear the existence of a politically engaged republican movement was having a knock on affect. The lines in the sand were drawn, and Goulding and the WTS were increasingly viewed as two sides of the same coin. Johnston, who was labelled ‘a Moscow oriented Marxist’ by the future Chief of Staff of the Provisional IRA, Sean MacStiofáin, remained a divisive, polarising figure that traditional republicans were eager to

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Anthony Coughlan, January, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

remove from the organisation. Goulding acted forcefully to resist this burgeoning discontent, putting his reputation and leadership on the line in the process, but most realised that his platform was dividing the organisation and that schism, confrontation and violence were increasingly likely, if he did not change paths and remain faithful to the traditional intransigent position.

The WTS committee for democratic elections contacted the Campaign for Social Justice, in Dungannon, in 1965, so as to form a broad common platform with all similarly minded organisations in the north.<sup>29</sup> This was the type of progressive thinking Goulding wanted the WTS to pioneer, as its educated, well-connected membership gave this initiative an acceptability, which Sinn Féin could not. Richard English, who has written extensively on Northern Ireland, referred to the WTS' attempts to reach out to Northern Irish civil rights supporters as 'Frankenstein intellectuals, who helped create a monster out of their control.'<sup>30</sup> This 'monster' was the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, which Greaves, Coughlan and others sought to encourage, in 1966, but his representation of their involvement in its creation lacked adequate engagement with the reality of their role. The WTC publication, *Tuairisc*, called for a campaign of nationalist mobilisation in a piece called 'our ideas,'<sup>31</sup> in 1966, something that was later used to highlight its agenda, but importantly it was not alone in doing this, and it was not on the ground overtly calling for militarism in any shape or form, so context is important when attempting to rationalise, justify or even explain the reason WTS members were vocally castigating those in power in Northern Ireland. English's subsequent, perhaps somewhat sweeping, observations about the WTS were later referenced in many works, as they assigned blame for the birth of the Provisional IRA to external sources, an analysis that suits modern Unionist revisionists who feel comfortable believing

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<sup>29</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67, 12/10/1965.

<sup>30</sup> Richard English, *Armed Struggle* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 93.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfe Tone Society Records, 1963-67; *Tuairisc*, August, 1966; Treacy, *The IRA*, 105.

terrorism was not a by-product of a succession of sectarian governments in Northern Ireland. English's analysis overtly misrepresents the nature of the Northern Irish state, prior to the outbreak of the Troubles, in 1969, and excuses Unionism for actions that forced Nationalist residents onto the streets in protest.

It should be noted, so as to give context to these charges, that the mass of the nationalist people were not involved in the IRA, the WTS or any offshoot of the republican movement. The crowds that assembled in pursuit of civil rights were there of their own volition, not under external instruction. As Bob Purdie noted:

Members of the 'Campaign for Social Justice, Northern Irish Labour Party, Communist Party of Northern Ireland, Belfast Wolfe Tone Society, Republican clubs and private individuals worked together because they had developed a personal commitment to the association, not because they were directed by an outside agenda.'<sup>32</sup>

This is an important observation, as English was eager to quote Purdie's observations throughout his analysis, but in a way that often misrepresented the crux of his arguments. The WTS disavowed all types of violent protest, or irresponsible adventures, so they presented no danger to the state, regardless of subsequent protestations.<sup>33</sup> Greaves, who was particularly close with Coughlan, MacLiam and Johnston, having been involved in the Connolly Association in London with the men, has many diary entries that reiterate his belief that aggressive republican minded people should be avoided. In February, 1967, he noted that the 'Campaign for Democracy in Ulster wanted to send 8 delegates to a conference,' but that he told them he would 'not accept any of that gang as delegates,' as he believed their support for militancy jeopardised the credibility of the movement.<sup>34</sup> Claiming the WTS played a role in the civil rights movement is not without merit however, as they did encourage many of its

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<sup>32</sup> Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Street* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), 155.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.iol.ie/~rjtechno/century130703/1960s/rj64.htm>

<sup>34</sup> Desmond Greaves Journal, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1967.

early actors to organise, but it is important not to ignore the reality of their role, or misrepresent its overt limitations, as such analysis distorts the truth of their involvement and allows misconceptions about the nature of Unionist controlled Northern Ireland to go unchallenged.

The WTS was autonomous of the republican movement, so it did not speak for the wider republican movement. Its association with the IRA was practically non-existent; arguably more so than any northern Nationalist political organisation, which perhaps best highlighted the way it sought to develop and grow in an independent way. By 1965, Garrett Fitzgerald, who later became Taoiseach (Prime Minister) was speaking at WTS lectures and Michael O’Leary, the future leader of the Labour Party, and former housemate of Coughlan’s, often attended WTS events and was listed as a guest speaker on programmes for some WTS conferences. The level of acceptability and respectability that surrounded the movement was unusual for republican groups, so English’s attempts to conveniently pigeon hole its members was misguided. The WTS rehabilitated left-wing republicanism, allowing Goulding to claim that his agenda was gaining support in the most unlikely of places. It did not enter the political world however, and its members’ political ambitions were not a feature of the records, which documented lively, debate filled gatherings of academics, openly discussing ways to promote social cohesion in Northern Ireland and advance a liberal, progressive understanding of Irish republicanism.

### ***Communist infiltration***

Greaves’ involvement became a beacon for anti-Goulding, anti-progressive forces, who voiced resentment for the WTS, its membership and its inclusive, modernising republican agenda through the guise of challenging his intentions. His connection to the IRA

Chief of Staff fuelled a burgeoning paranoia about Goulding's intentions, which was later used to discredit the merits of political advancement and make sweeping observations about the WTS. Treacy's work on the period provoked much debate on the close associations that existed between radical forces in Ireland, but also implied that Greaves orchestrated a far left infiltration of the republican movement, so as to take it over and dilute the nationalism that lay at the heart of its platform. He pushed a narrative that claimed there was a 'kind of organised, quasi-conspiratorial attempt in the late 1960's to align the republican movement with communist movements in Ireland and Great Britain,' and he placed Coughlan, Johnston, Macliam and Greaves at the centre of this strategy, supposedly working to make republicans, and republicanism, more suited for this endeavour.<sup>35</sup> Treacy put the WTS at the heart of this annexation strategy and refused to allow contradictory testimonies, the protestation of the men involved, or the actions of the men at the time contradict his analysis. Greaves' journal overtly challenged that analysis, repeatedly highlighting Coughlan and Johnston's independent political journey, but strangely these were dismissed, side-lined and marginalised, although the reason for that decision was not given. Provisional Sinn Féin adopted a similar position in the early seventies, when it discredited Goulding, Official Sinn Féin and those pursuing politicising solutions. Its publication, *Republican News*, claimed in February 1970 that Johnston, Coughlan and their comrades were red agents, who consciously infiltrated the republican struggle. It said 'gradually into executive posts, both in the IRA and Sinn Féin, the red agents infiltrated...young men and girls were brainwashed.'<sup>36</sup> The use of child imagery was an emotive and deliberate attempt to evoke fear in the hearts of traditional republicans, which indicates the calculated nature of its design. Portraying the WTS leadership, particularly those associated with Goulding, as communists was not enough to irreparably damage the legacy of Goulding's platform, but claiming they were acting under

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<sup>35</sup> Correspondence between the author and Anthony Coughlan, May, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> *Republican News*, February, 1970.

the guidance of an external body, so as to destroy traditional republican values, was a powerful tool that traditional republicans used repeatedly throughout that period.

It is clear Johnston and Coughlan influenced republican positions, as Johnston later joined the IRA, and Coughlan's involvement in campaigns, such as the Free Trade, the 1965 Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement, the civil rights issue in Northern Ireland and opposition to EEC membership meant he regularly interacted with Sinn Féin. However, claiming these men were orchestrating a plan to deliberately alter the republican movement, working under the instruction of Desmond Greaves, or operating from a somewhat sinister position was misleading. Greaves was happy his former comrades were 'becoming personally acceptable to republicans,' but he did not portray their involvement in a contrived or calculated way.<sup>37</sup> Although Coughlan rejects the idea, Greaves comes across as a father figure to these men, all of whom were a lot younger than he was, and it was evident he found great comfort in the 'company of his friends.' He 'was a botanist...and a scientist to his fingers,' as Cathal Macliam noted, who was eager to highlight the warm, learned and engaged way Greaves viewed the world. Greaves 'did not encourage anyone to do anything' and, when Macliam joined the Communist Party of Great Britain, in 1955, he 'did so of his own accord, as Greaves would never have asked...he was not the type to push an issue.'<sup>38</sup> Importantly, when Greaves and Goulding met, on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1964, he was impressed by his demeanour and youthful appearance and said Goulding 'struck him as a shrewd experienced revolutionary, but one that lacked political knowledge or a grasp of the social revolution.'<sup>39</sup> While discussing the Connolly Associations in Britain, Goulding told Greaves that 'he and his colleagues were thinking in broader political terms' than their predecessors, and that

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<sup>37</sup> Desmond Greaves Journal, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Cathal Macliam, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Desmond Greaves Journal, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1964.

movement's like the WTS were a step in the right direction.<sup>40</sup> Greaves introduced Goulding to his cousin, Cathal Macliam, as they had never met, and the men re-established family ties and reminisced until late in the evening. On the surface this was a normal, social gathering, but the way it was portrayed implies otherwise.

Treacy claimed the men 'discussed how best to outmanoeuvre those in the Clann, who were frustrating attempts to allow the (Connolly) Association and the Communist Party place members within it,' although that was clearly his interpretation, as the diary entries he quoted were not written in such a manner.<sup>41</sup> In fact, there was no evidence this meeting was anything other than a social event, as Coughlan, Johnston and Macliam verified. Coughlan noted, when asked about Treacy's observations that he was 'talking nonsense' and that 'Goulding's meetings with Greaves were always social occasions, invariably initiated by Goulding rather than by Greaves.'<sup>42</sup> There are many other instances of these accounts being used out of context, and on each occasion the testimonies of the men there have also been ignored. Greaves believed republicans were united by their 'allegiance to the gun,' as he noted in his personal journal, so he could never trust their political ambitions. When Johnston joined the IRA, in 1965, Greaves was furious and the men never spoke again. Coughlan noted that he was asked to join the IRA, in 1969, but refused as he felt it was a 'petit bourgeois organisation that was loyal to the gun.' When reflecting on the period, as a whole, Coughlan also noted that he believed attempts to politicise republicanism were misguided, and that the 'Labour movement' would have made a more suitable bedfellow.<sup>43</sup>

By 1969, as the republican movement was heading toward violent schism, the WTS was trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to avoid getting dragged into an increasingly dangerous

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Matt Treacy, *The Communist Party of Ireland* (Dublin: Brocaire books, 2012), 305 .

<sup>42</sup> Correspondence between Anthony Coughlan and the author, February, 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Correspondence between Anthony Coughlan and the author, May, 2014.

environment. Its support was starting to decline and, while it remained active until 1979, its connection with Goulding made it toxic, in certain circles. Macliam noted that ‘things changed after the split. The movement was divided and though we often met up as a group, with people like Ruairi O’Bradaigh still turning up from time to time at events, things were different.’<sup>44</sup> This dynamic intensified as violence flared in Northern Ireland and some of its members faced increased police scrutiny. Macliam noted that ‘the Special Branch were everywhere for a finish.’ He said that ‘one night, when they having a meeting, someone threw a cigarette out a window and they heard a loud yelp from outside.’ When they went over to see who was there, they saw a policeman running away. It appears he ‘left his notebook behind,’ however and the men were able to see the detailed list the Special Branch was keeping on the leadership. It appears the police often listened at his window, in the hope that someone would divulge useful information.<sup>45</sup> The WTS was not a military movement, and refused to condone aggressive republican actions, but in the eyes of Ulster Unionists, the Gardaí and certain sections of the Irish establishment it remained a product of the IRA, and under the watchful eye of gunmen.

The WTS was the first movement of its type in Ireland, as radical academics, republicans, middle class businessmen, trade union leaders, journalists and elements from across Irish society came together under a non-sectarian, inclusive banner to pursue moderate republican initiatives. It avoided the negative, political agendas that consistently divided people, focusing instead on a broader understanding of Wolfe Tone, Protestant participation and reconciliation. The orchestrated, calculated and deliberate way it expanded influence was watched closely by the IRA, particularly the Chief of Staff, Cathal Goulding, who regularly attended meetings, vocally supported WTS initiatives and encouraged its members to push

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Cathal MacLiam, 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



boundaries. He hoped to reach Unionists, Loyalists and those traditionally opposed to republican initiatives. Their success, although limited, was a revelation to Goulding, which altered his understanding of Irish republicanism, arguably in a far more acute way than has ever been addressed. The WTS shed light on a reservoir of untapped potential, which Goulding and Official Sinn Féin later utilised, when it walked away from violence, removed its aggressive republicanism, infiltrated the national TV station, the Irish Trade Union movement, embraced loyalist gunmen in the name of peace and developed a wide, complex and radical interpretation of Irish republicanism. It did all this while working tirelessly to expand their political organisation on both sides of the border, and capitalise on the appetite for tangible change that existed. The WTS was responsible for a paradigm shift in republican thinking, and throughout its existence it was eagerly surveilled by a generation of gunmen, but it remained autonomous and a powerful voice for change, regardless of the way others subsequently tried to skewer that reality. It was not a political puppet and claims to the contrary, while elevating the political evolution of Provisional Sinn Féin militarists, eager to create a historical narrative that belies the reality of their violent past, should not be accepted as fact. The credibility of future historical research depends on it.

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