

# Books

## Ireland's English Question by Patrick O'Farrell

(Schocken Books; 336 pp.; \$11.50)

## Governing Without Consensus by Richard Rose

(Beacon Press; 567 pp.; \$12.50)

### Dennis Hale

Reading a history of Anglo-Irish relations is a disturbing experience. On the one hand, the troubles in Ulster seem incomprehensible, because other peoples' stupidities always seem greater than our own. After all, this is the twentieth century, isn't it? How can people still be killing each other because of religion? Why can't they go to war over something modern and respectable, like skin color or hair length?

On the other hand, the history of Ireland bears too many uncomfortable resemblances to our own history, especially recent history. It was the violence in Ireland, after all, that prompted Yeats to ask the question that seems so pertinent to our own time and place: "And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?" Religious warfare is no more terrible on the face of it than race war, and the impression which Patrick O'Farrell's book left with me is that history is in the process of repeating itself once again. The Irish problem looks a lot like the race problem, with about 300 more years of ugliness stirred in.

O'Farrell's argument is that the conflict between Britain and Ireland (and now between Protestant Ulster and the Catholic minority) was a conflict of cultures, a fact which England was never able to grasp. England is not a religious nation,

and hasn't been since Cromwell. England's proudest achievement was the creation of a secular society where business stood far ahead of religion as an object of human energy, a society where religious difference was "tolerated" for the sake of industrial harmony. English men and women who could not abide this reversal of God's priorities came to America, but those who stayed behind found society quite congenial enough.

"There is no religion in England," Montesquieu wrote in the 1730's. "If anyone mentions religion people begin to laugh." England's true religion was her economic system and the Empire that grew from it. She really *was* a "nation of shopkeepers," and could not see how such a description could possibly be considered insulting.

For just that reason England could never understand why Ireland clung so stubbornly to her Catholicism, which the English saw as one more example of Ireland's "backwardness." During the famine of the 1840's, Protestants offered food to Catholics in exchange for their promise to convert, and were astonished to find that many Catholics actually preferred to die.

Others left their homes for America rather than face the choice of starving or converting, and many more simply died. The population of Ire-

land fell from 8½ million to 5 million in ten years, while England stood by, hesitant to intervene in the Irish economy out of respect for the sacred abstractions of liberal economics.

We have inherited many things from the English, and one of them is this blind faith in the dogmas of industrial progress. And like the English, we find it hard to understand any aspirations which stand outside the dogma. We build ugly housing projects for the poor and cannot understand why they are not grateful. We ridicule a man's nationality, and then cannot understand when he joins some bizarre nationalist sect. We make a religion out of consuming, and then are surprised when people steal T.V. sets from a ghetto store. We say that in the name of progress it is acceptable that the air and water become diseased, and then wonder why so many children don't want to grow up.

The furious energy of the various liberation movements in the country, even in their most exotic manifestations, speaks to a need which liberal America was never taught to understand. How could it? Americans had learned (as Tocqueville predicted they would learn) that material progress is the only significant reality. Beyond the full dinner pail lies the province of crackpots and fanatics who have no place in society. So, too, the English persisted in their belief that they could "civilize" the Irish if only they could persuade them to give up this "superstition" called Catholicism. The greatest boon a man could ask was to be an ordinary British citizen, and anyone who resisted such a gift was clearly most in need of it.

Above all, what Farrell's book suggests is how utterly helpless liberalism is when faced with the anger of people who don't want to be governed by liberals. The violence in Northern Ireland is the direct and inevitable result of England's mad dream of making Ireland a liberal Protestant state. And the irony is that where they almost succeeded—among their colonists in Ulster—they are

now faced with one of the most illiberal peoples in the whole Western world.

Richard Rose's book is disturbing in a slightly different way. Its lesson is that there is no solution to the Ulster crisis. Ulster is not a community and not a nation, and cannot go on pretending to be one. When asked to describe their nationality, 76% of the Catholics say they are Irish, whereas 39% of the Protestants say they are British, 32% say they are Ulster, and only 20% say they are Irish. When asked what they liked about the other side's church, 68% of the Catholics and 56% of the Protestants couldn't think of a single thing.

Bernadette Devlin is correct to say that religion is "irrelevant" to the "real" problems of the North Irish. But her obvious good sense is beside the point. When the British created a colony in Ulster and vowed to defend it to the end, they created a politically unreal state whose citizens developed an unreal mentality. The Ulster Protestants cling to the seventeenth century (their slogan is "Remember 1690") because that was the last time their nation made any sense politically. Ever since they have clung to the past, and in doing so have made of the Catholic minority in Ulster an implacable enemy. Neither will the Catholics ever be content to remain under the care of the Ulster government, whose hostility to them has been amply demonstrated.

The one ray of hope in the Ulster crisis is that it makes America's problems seem small in comparison. The race problem is terrible, but one can still imagine solutions to it, even if few of these solutions are compatible with liberal political theory. And as hostile as most whites still are to blacks, they would probably not try to overthrow the government if these solutions were attempted. Whites and blacks are still willing to occupy the same country. Farrell and Rose are not sure that even this much can be said of Ulster.

Will we always be able to say it of this country?

## Man and Socialism in Cuba: The Great Debate edited by Bertram Silverman

(Atheneum; 382 pp.; \$12.50)

## Cuba: Socialism and Development by Rene Dumont

(Grove Press; 240 pp.; \$7.50)

### Miguel A. Bretos

One of the Cuban Revolution's fascinating characteristics, at least during the first half of the sixties, was its leadership's willingness to face and debate some of the fundamental philosophical and tactical problems posed by Cuba's forced march towards socialism. The Revolution made its cataclysmic entrance into the stage of Cuban history as a profoundly dynamic, though scarcely cohesive, complex of latent frustrations and vague yet powerful yearnings for a better, freer Cuba. What was essentially a political movement against the supremely unpopular, corrupt usurper regime of Fulgencio Batista almost overnight became a question mark as large as Cuba itself.

In falling, the Batista government brought down with it important segments of the old order. The consequent social vacuum opened a whole new range of tantalizing alternatives for the future of Cuba. Yet, the new Revolutionary government most conspicuously lacked an ideological common denominator, a more or less concrete perception of aspirations and goals and the means whereby they might be implemented. Was the Revolution to pursue a social democratic course as the government assembled under President Manuel Urrutia strongly suggested? Would the Revolution, on the other hand, become increasingly radicalized? Questions such as these, largely moot in 1959, became increasingly relevant as divisiveness ensued between Fidel Castro and some former supporters.

Some recent commentators on the Revolution have seen something of a

continuum, of a logical sequence, between pre-Castro Cuba and the Revolution's eventual socialist course. For others, the Revolution embraced socialism as an alternative, almost as an afterthought. In this latter perspective, the events of the period 1959 to 1961 take on added importance: the hostility of the United States towards the Castro regime, the rising influence of certain members of Castro's inner group such as "Che" Guevara and Raul Castro, the mirage of socialist prowess exemplified by the Soviet Union's space feats of the early sixties. Whatever the reasons, deterministic or circumstantial, by 1962 Castro's regime was deeply committed to carry on a "socialist" revolution.

And what conspicuous consumption there was of this thing called socialism! The new power elite of Cuba gave itself with *élan* to the task of unraveling the mysteries of the new panacea. While for most of the Eastern Europeans flocking to Cuba in droves from 1961 onwards, socialism might have been something of a fact of life, a catechism learned in school and taken for granted, for the new Cuban revolutionaries it soon became an exciting, open idea. Young men and women, who, scarcely a few years before, would have been hard put to tell the difference between the Marxes—Groucho and Karl—devoured abstruse Marxist texts and talked about dialectics and Marxist surplus theory.

Cuban socialism, however, still had to resolve fundamental questions after the initial honeymoon period