

European Socialism: A Blind Alley or a Long and Winding Road?



Reflections on the Trajectory of History

Helena Sheehan

This is the text of the keynote speech I gave at the "Socialism at the Crossroads" conference at University College Galway in 1991. It was later given at a seminar sponsored by the trade union Manufacturing Science Finance (now Amicus) in Dublin and published by MSF in 1992 along with a response by Proinsias De Rossa TD, then leader of Democratic Left.

We stand at a most dramatic crossroads in the history of the socialist movement. The question we face, let me put it most starkly, is whether or not to go on with it. Voices come at us from all sides, from east and west, from right and once-left, telling us that there is no point in it. Voices come, not only from outside the socialist movement, but from those who until now have stood with us within it, telling us that we have come to the end of the road, telling us that either we bury our heads in the sand or we must walk now along a different road, the road we have resolutely rejected until now, the road of capitalism triumphant over all possible alternatives.

Has this great movement in human history really come to an end, this movement for which brave and brilliant men and women have given their sweat, their blood, their tears, their lives, this movement for which we have spent our own lives reading, thinking, hoping, arguing, meeting, marching? Is it all over now? Has the red flag fallen? I asked in my Attic Press pamphlet. Shall we never again stand, with our heads held high and our hearts full and our fists clenched, and sing the strains of The Internationale? Shall we resign ourselves to the hegemony of White House press conferences, European monetary and political union, Fianna Fail or Fine Gael, Euro-Disney, Coca-Cola, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, postmodernism, popes and patriarchs, tsarist paraphernalia, new age matriarchal theology, reparenting the wounded child within or letting loose the wild man within or making the world deal with the post-menopausal witch within? Is this all that is left for us, for history?

Is it now the end of history, in the sense that all of the great battles of ideas have been settled, in the sense that liberal democracy, the free market, the

preferred names for the capitalism of our time, has won and so, on this level, there is nothing left to be said?

Has socialism been a blind alley, from which it is now necessary to retreat in shame and in disarray? Was it all an illusion? You, no doubt have heard the joke: socialism is the longest, most painful, most inefficient path between capitalism and capitalism, they say and we wince.

Or has it been a detour, a wrong turn, a divergence from the correct path, which is now clear for us to travel?

Or has it been a part of the journey, part of a necessary process, as necessary as our youth is to our maturity, down a long and winding road, a road that stretches much further back and much further forward through far more complicated twists and turns than most people can see at the moment?

We need to take a long view. It is a complex history, as I have reason to know, having set out to make this history my own for many years now, along the way writing a massive book and many articles dealing with certain aspects of it. Here I need to be severely selective, dealing only with certain aspects of this complexity, no doubt not dealing with matters for which I could be faulted, but striving to convey something of the overall shape of it, the trajectory of it, trying not to lose sight of the road for the potholes.

This raises complex historiographical problems. I tend to go for sweeping synthesis as well as detailed research, which is difficult enough to achieve in long form, but in short form, it may seem to be looking for trouble, especially as I propose to outline what may be a controversial interpretation of this history. Here I cannot emphasise the detailed research that has gone into it. Instead I strive for an expression of synthesis, for philosophy of history, for reflection on the trajectory of history, rather than a run through of the details of that history.

Now I know that grand narratives are 'out', but I do not accept the postmodernist prohibition on this. Nor do I accept the label of being pre-post-modernist and not being in touch with the times. I believe that we have to be bold and to move out ahead of this and to engage in the process of constructing grand narratives on the other side of the postmodernist critique. On this post-post-modernist terrain, we can gather together as much of the history of our times as it is possible for us to grasp and to synthesise it to the best of our ability from one day to the next. It is an open-ended, fallible, corrigible, forever unfinished process, but it is not nothing and it is vastly superior to a lazy pluralism or a decadent postmodernism.

I know that, such is the fragmentation and complexity of contemporary life, few can see history as anything other than a fortuitous succession of events, with no real rhyme or reason, as only the play of the contingent and unforeseen, as only one emergency following upon another, as only arbitrary decisions and discoveries of great men (rarely women), in respect of which there can be no generalisations.

I believe, however, that history has a storyline, a plot, a rhythm, a pattern, in which seemingly disconnected, haphazard and independent events are interconnected and rooted in a larger process. I do not believe that it is a predetermined pattern or a closed process, in which everything that happens is inevitable, but I do believe that there is a determinate dynamic of development. It is an open process, in which there is real adventure, real risk and real surprise. Although

the precise shape of it is only discernable post factum, I believe that there is a shape to it and that it is discernable, even if discerning it is no easy task.

It seemed easier in the days when history was simpler. Also it seemed easier in the days when history seemed to be going our way, when we could feel the wind at our backs. Now, in these days when the storms rage around us, blowing so many of our fellow travellers off their feet, in these days when history seems to be rebuffing us, when it seems so resistant to our touch, so disdainful of our desires, it only adds to our difficulty and distress to struggle with the meaning of events in this sort of world-historical way.

What went wrong? we ask now in these days of our defeat. This great movement in human history has failed to fulfill the expectations that it engendered. Why? Mistakes were made, it is said and it is true, on one level, but on a deeper level, mistake, I think, is too crude a notion. So is betrayal. So is corruption. So is meglomania. It will not do to lay it all on the door of Stalin and a succession of crude thugs, opportunist careerists and corrupt hacks, who highjacked the movement.

We admittedly have reason to be contemptuous and bitter at the sight of communist apparatchiks turning born-again free-marketeers or whinging for sympathy when caught out in their cowardice and insincerity (like our recently departed Soviet ambassador), revealing what so many members of the CPSU and other parties in power have really been about all along. I have seen so many of them so close up and know so many twists and turns of this story, but it does not constitute sufficient explanation.

It will not do to say that socialism, like Christianity, has never been tried, to say that what has unfolded before our eyes had nothing to do with socialism. Socialism, like Christianity, has been tried. These are not Platonic pure forms, but human ideas embodied in human movements unfolding in the complex bloody messy process that is human history. It is not all or nothing.

What was done was done in the name of socialism and it encompassed the efforts of honest men and women who believed in it and worked for it and who did achieve much that deserves to be called socialism. It was not nothing. We need to defend the socialism of the past, in these days of unprecedented slander of it, even as we take a severely critical view of it.

It was a radical shift in productive relations, a radical social transformation. It was imperfect, glaringly, screamingly, tragically so. It came to embrace elements utterly alien to its original impulses. What most got to me in the worst days of my coming to terms with it (in the late 70s), was how those who most believed in it suffered at the hands of it, how the best met their deaths at the hands of the worst, in the name of their own ideals pronounced by those who knew nothing of them. It was socialist in some respects, but not in others. It was not something utterly other. It was not nothing. In fact, not so long ago, it still looked very powerful.

But now it has collapsed, like a house of cards, they say. Not only Eastern European governments, most recently and most dramatically, but western movements we have seen going down over a longer period. Trotskyists and social democrats and independent leftists have rightly expressed bitterness at being tarred with the same brush and being made to bear the blame for the crimes of communists. I heard Willy Brandt at a conference I attended address this most poignantly. But our western movements have been under sustained assault under the impact of the

rise of the new right in the last decade and we know that there are other reasons for the decline of the left in the west.

So here we are, witnessing the restoration of capitalism in the east, there is no doubt about it, and an absence of any clearly articulated or organised opposition to it in the west. How could this have happened?

The socialist movement evolved through the deepest rhythms of history. It emerged in response to the deepest needs of our species. It was the voice of labour coming up from the depths to the point where it could become conscious and articulate itself and organise itself against the growing gap between those who worked and those who parasited on their labour.

The socialist movement evolved in the way that it did, making the divergent choices that it made, branching off in the divergent directions that it did, through tensions in the socialist movement itself, rooted in the exigencies of the historical process itself. There is a kind of inevitability in the trajectory it has followed. It is not that there were no choices. At certain crucial stages in the movement, there were alternative paths, but there were strong historical reasons why certain paths were taken and not others, that cannot be put down to either fortuitous circumstance or gratuitous will.

A central argument I wish to outline is that many of the problems, many of the tragedies, of the socialism of the past, were rooted in the gap between socialism as an advanced form of society and the conditions of underdevelopment in which all experiments in socialism played themselves out. The original idea of socialism was of a social order to be built on the other side of advanced capitalism. It was to build on what was achieved by capitalism, not only its economic productivity, but its political culture of parliamentary democracy, its complex civil society, its free press, etc. (relative but real). The idea was not to negate or bypass all this, but to build upon it, the opposite of what happened. So much that has happened has been rooted in this basic contradiction.

The idea was that the working class, through its position in the productive process and its growing political strength, would come to power in a democratic process. Just how it would do so was by no means clear and, as the movement developed, there were alternative, even contradictory, answers advanced and divergent paths taken.

In the days of the 1st International (1864-1876), the fault lines opened between marxism and anarchism. The question was not the one-party state, but whether any kind of state was compatible with socialism.

Within the 2nd International (1889-1914), which was Marxist, the revisionist controversy raised the questions of evolutionary vs. revolutionary roads to socialism, of voluntarist vs. determinist philosophies of history. It expressed the tension between means and ends, between empiricist pluralism and totalising system building, between ethical and scientific justification, between open parliamentarist and conspiratorial underground political cultures. Then all such debates were overpowered by the conflagration of war, which split the movement along other lines altogether, the interests of their own nation states vs. those of the international working class.

After the war, the movement split again on yet other lines: for or against the October Revolution, the bolshevik / menshevik split internationalised. Virtually every European socialist party split into communist and social democratic parties. They lined up either within the 3rd International (1919-1943), the

Comintern, or the 2nd International mark 2, now the Socialist International (1920-), to which the Labour Party is affiliated. In between was the short-lived 2nd and a half International (1921-1923) of the Austro-Marxists, who sought a 3rd way between "terrorist Moscow and impotent Bern". There was also a 4th International, the first one was that of the Dutch council communists. Then there was the trotskyist 4th International, which split into various 4th Internationals and various committees to reconstruct the 4th International.

However, the major divergence was between the communist and social democratic paths, notwithstanding intermediate positions and internal debates within each. For or against the October Revolution was the choice posed to the socialist movement. If for it, the task, as formulated by the rigid 21 conditions of the Comintern, was to extend it to one's own country. The two paths were set out: revolutionary insurrection, leading to a dramatic collapse of capitalism and triumph of socialism, or parliamentarist reform, building socialism by degrees within the structures of capitalism.

Was the October Revolution a mistake? is a question which rose to prominence among Soviet intellectuals in the recent glasnost years. An increasing number of them answered yes, coming to agree with the rest of the world, which had always said so. Even some who had most resolutely answered no in the past ask it again now: Was seizing power without majority support in backward conditions a mistake? Also other questions: In the battle between Bukharinist, Trotskyist or Stalinist positions in the late 1920s, what if a different path had been taken? For example, what if the Soviet Union had continued with the NEP and not embarked upon the forced collectivisation of agriculture and speeded-up industrialisation of the 1st 5 year plan, with all of the inevitable panic and paranoia, leading to the most horrific purges?

Undoubtedly, these choices in these conditions were the source of much tragedy, but real tragedy comes not of simple mistakes, but of complex tensions of real forces. Bolshevism was a blending of an advanced political philosophy formulated out of the developing experience of advanced societies with a conspiratorial culture of years of hunted illegality and conditions of severe underdevelopment. They seized and consolidated power when conditions opened it up to them in ways that power tended to be seized and consolidated in history.

What came of this monumental experiment was the ever more complex tension of these two forces. Somehow I think that this was a tension that had to play itself out on the stage of history.

Could it have succeeded? Well, it did succeed in certain respects and for a certain time. Let us not forget this now. This experiment did bring into being certain features of a socialist society, ie, the expropriation of the expropriators, the social ownership of the means of social production, distribution and exchange, relative equality of opportunity, a shift in the balance of power in the world. To say simply that it didn't work is not true. It did work in its way for many years, years in which many things were better than they were before and than they are now.

Those who lived by their labour lived in a modest security that they have lost now. Various nationalities, at each other's throats before and since, lived together in peace and constructive endeavour. The existence of a socialist bloc gave force to various 3rd world liberation movements and to left movements in the west, which shaped the development of capitalism itself. I doubt that social democracy would ever have achieved what it did without the presence of a force to

the left of it. Certainly the existence of the USSR was a constraint on what the USA could do in the world. Look at the world with that gone now.

On the other side, there were the consequences of underdevelopment playing themselves out in a situation in which this experiment was from beginning to end under siege, ie, not only economic backwardness, but the refusal to submit to multi-party elections, the ban on opposition parties, the suppression of free speech, indeed mass murder, all the horrors of the one-party state.

It was a terrible crisis in my own life when, having rejected the cold war version of these terrors, I had to come to terms with them again from inside the socialist movement and to do so in the days before glasnost made it respectable within sections of the communist movement with which I was involved at the time. I left the Communist Party over this in 1980. I joined the Labour Party a year later.

I nevertheless continued to locate myself within the tradition of reformed communism, although an active member of a social democratic party. After Gorbachev came to power and all through the upheavals of 1989, I still found it possible to hope that the promises of glasnost and perestroika would be fulfilled, to believe that the time had come for socialism with a human face, socialism with a fresh and truthful voice, socialism with democracy, socialism with economic efficiency, socialism with a flourishing civil society.

But by 1990, it became clear that this was not on, not for this period of history. It became painfully clear that what we were witnessing was the restoration of capitalism and not the renewal of socialism. As socialists, we had built our world view on a vision of history as moving, in however complicated a way, in the direction of capitalism to socialism. It has been shocking and deeply disorienting to behold the opposite happening before our eyes on such a massive and unmistakable scale. On the face of it, we seemed to have no categories for dealing with a transition from socialism to capitalism. But we must and they must be our own categories, not the cliches of the wire service orthodoxy bombarding us from our tv screens.

Now a crucial question we must ask is: Must societies of premature socialism return to capitalism in order for there to be any chance of eventually achieving mature socialism? In the period of perestroika, I thought not. But now it seems so. The pressure of an increasingly integrated global capitalism upon any sphere outside its hegemony, I believe, has been the major force bringing the downfall of the socialist bloc. It seems that capitalism must fully develop on a global scale before socialism can truly come into its own.

Capitalism has proved to be a far more formidable and adaptable system with far more life left in it than previous generations of socialists, including our own, could possibly have imagined. If and when socialism come into its own, it will have to be on a global scale.

The socialism in one country debate, or even the socialism in one bloc debate, has been settled now and not in the way I once hoped. However, for a time it was possible to argue the other way. It did exist for a time.

What are we to make of it now? Was it a false dawn of a new day that has not yet come? Or will it disappear without trace? How many times have we heard in recent times voices from Eastern Europe speaking of scrapping 74, 51, 46 years of history and starting again at zero?

There will be no starting again at zero. This vast experiment in human history has cut too deeply into the psyche, too deeply into the rhythms of history, to disappear without trace.

In a novel brought forth by this social order, even acclaimed in the west, this is given expression. From Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T*:

"What we brought into the world can never be driven out of it."

The narrator recalls the idealism of the early years of the GDR:

"She joined in our discussions, those glorious rambling nocturnal discussions about the paradise on whose doorstep we were sure we stood, hungry and wearing our wooden shoes. The idea of perfection had taken hold of our minds..."

"Make a wry face if you like, but all the same: one must, once in a lifetime, when the time was right, have believed in the impossible..."

Then she traces the painful transformation:

"But she also lost the capacity to live in a state of rapture. The vehement overplayed words, the waving banners, the deafening songs, the hands clapping rhythms over our heads. She felt how words begin to change when they aren't being tossed about by belief and ineptitude and excessive zeal, but by calculation, craftiness and the urge to adapt and conform. Our words, not even false ones - how easy it would be if they were !"

"The new man ... it wasn't easy to see people behind the gigantic placards they carried around ... who'd call them to mind today if they'd really stayed outside and hadn't infiltrated among us by many and devious roads ... the frightful beaming heroes ... we had adopted their standard and began, in distress and terror, to compare ourselves to them ... it seemed worth any sacrifice, even the sacrifice achieved by self-extinction."

The reckless perfectionism of the communist movement was a wonderous and terrible thing. It had devastating consequences, all the more poignant when we justify it by its best and not by its worst, by those who believed in it and worked honourably for it, by those who ended up doing the worst of things for the best of reasons. As Bertolt Brecht put it:

You who will emerge from the flood
In which we have gone under
Think,
When you speak of our failures,
Also of the dark times
Which you have escaped.

For we went, changing countries more often than our shoes,
Through the wars of the classes, despairing
When there was only injustice and no rebellion.

And yet we know:
Hatred, even of baseness,
Distorts the features.
Anger, even against injustice,
Makes the voice grow hoarse. Oh, we

Who wished to lay the foundations of human kindness
Could not ourselves be kind.

But you, when the time comes at last
When man is helper to man
Think of us
With forbearance.

Brecht *To Those Born Later*

The communist movement was too perfectionist, too adventurist, too maximalist, too coercive, too willing to sacrifice means to ends. And yet there has been something in it that I would not like to see disappear without trace. Our species would not have achieved the possible without attempting the impossible.

Social democrats by contrast have not dared as much as communists, but their achievements, while not invulnerable, are nevertheless more secure. The communist movement as such is finished. The social democratic movement will survive. But should we be content to see all left traditions collapse into it? Reformed and renamed communist parties are applying to join the Socialist International after all.

I believe that the same critical standards that are being applied to the communist movement should be applied to the social democratic tradition. Social democracy has been on higher ground in its willingness to struggle for power in multi-party elections and in attention to the task of transforming capitalism from within. However, it has perhaps erred on the other side from the communists. It has been too unadventurous, too minimalist, too eclectic, too myopic, too pedestrian, too parliamentarist, too accommodating to capitalism, too willing to sacrifice ends to means. It has not been good enough.

To quote from yet another German thinker, this time from the other side of the communist / social democratic divide. Gunter Grass in *From the Diary of a Snail* gives a most intriguing exploration and credible defense of the psychology of a social democrat. It is a polemic against positions to the left of social democracy, both communist and new left positions. As I have been both new left and communist, and there is still much of both in me, I recognise myself as the target of this polemic and I both hit against it and take it into myself.

Using animal metaphors, as he is prone to do, Grass calls social democracy a snail's journey. He admits that the runaway stallion of the Weltgeist has always been more compelling, but from the point of view of the snail:

"Many overtake me and later fall by the wayside."

To be a social democrat, he says, is nothing to cheer about, nothing to dilate your pupils. It is to resist the temptation to jump, to leapfrog ahead, to mount the heaven-storming ladder. It is to be inconsistent, to expect only partial achievements, to distrust oneself above all. He writes of the dark side of utopia and argues that flights into utopia lead to relapses into melancholy, from euphoria to depression, from exaltation to resignation. The snail mediates. At moments he questions the lack of a utopian dimension in social democracy:

"Even in our dreams we sighted no new land...
Where is the push if nothing pulls ?
Something is always lacking.
What ?

Serviceable foundations, a framework, formulations of goals ...
What should be changed ?
Not everything at once."

He makes a plea for something beyond social democracy as it has been:

"a plea not to shut up in shells, but to let tentacles reach out to the future and move"

In their opposite ways, he argues, both traditions of the left have played into the hands of the right:

"For wherever progress is frustrated by premature aims or utopian flights...
wherever its advances are so slight as to be ludicrous,
the conservative who 'knew it all along' triumphs...
It consolidates the power of the powerful."

It seems truer now than when he wrote it.

It seems sometimes as if history is moving backwards. Leningrad has become St. Petersburg again. Karl-Marx-Stadt has become Chemnitz again. They speak longingly of the Romanovs on Moscow and of the Hapsburgs in Budapest. They cry out in the streets for King Michael in Bucharest, for Alexander in Belgrade, for Simeon in Sofia. The Ustasha flag flies over Zagreb and Dubrovnik. The eagle with the royal crown restored presides over the Sejm in Warsaw. On the Palast der Republik in Berlin, there is a disturbed space where the hammer and compass used to be. Junker aristocrats have returned to reclaim their old estates. Eastern enterprises, built proudly through collective labour, are being sold off at knock-down rip-off prices to western investors, who expect to be thanked for their exploitation and their insults.

In my comings and goings from Eastern Europe these days, I sometimes pass through London. I see their monstrous mounted monarchs set in stone and bronze and unchallenged and looking as if set to stand forever, while all the icons of our movement are being torn down in derision or smashed or smeared with rude graffiti.



How have the ancestors of the Windsors got off so lightly, while Lenin and Tito are judged so severely? I ask. And why do those who rightly express indignation at the possessions of Nikolai and Elena raise no questions about those of Philip and Elizabeth?

It has been for me a time of grief and loss. I know that many on the left have shed no tears and said good riddance. I have shed no tears either for Honecker or Zhivkov or Ceausescu, nor for countless nameless and faceless agents of the Stasi and Securitate. But I have for honest men and women who have had their work taken away and their whole world turned upside down in the massive hostile takeover that has been German unification. I have for Bulgarian peasants, who have shown me orchards they have planted and buildings they have constructed and live in fear of the day this land is handed back to its former owners. I have for Yugoslav partisans, who spent their teenage years carrying guns and sleeping on cold ground, who devoted their adult years to the higher social experiment of self-managing socialism, who have come to retirement age now, to see everything they have built torn apart in a terrifying downward spiral of disintegration.

Standing in the ruins of our overturned utopia, I grieve for them ... and for myself. Something in our lives has died. I miss the GDR. I miss Yugoslavia. I miss the USSR. I am unrepentant for my defense of them. I am proud to have been a part of this movement and I am also proud to have been a difficult and disruptive presence in it. No one can take this from me.

But I / we must move on. The problems which gave rise to the socialist movement have not been solved and we need to find a new way to move forward from our past into our future.

We need a third way is the title of a more recent book from Germany, by Gregor Gysi, leader of the Party of Democratic Socialism. This is precisely what we need.

We need a new third way between the traditions of communism and social democracy, which takes something from each of these older traditions of the left, combines them with insights of the (now old) new left and social movements, to create the basis of a (new) new left. It is the way of democratic socialism.

It is only by constructing this new third way on the left that we can open a new third way for history, a third way between the capitalism we have known until now and the socialism we have known until now.

A third way is not necessarily a via media. Everything in moderation has never been my watchword and it does not stir my blood now. The idea is to forge a vigorous synthesis, drawing from the strengths, the most vital qualities, of these traditions, testing them constantly in the fire of our own experience, to create something new. The idea is to reconstruct, not something watered down, but something better blended and further developed.

These are the days of our defeat, we ought not to pretend otherwise, but defeat is not death. As long as we are living, we need to come up fighting, dust ourselves down, learn from our defeat and, sadder but wiser, struggle to a better conceived victory. Victories do come after bitter and bruising defeats. We need to face the worst, but to hope and work for the best. The motto of Gramsci should be ours as well: pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will.

A revival in the fortunes of the socialist movement may be a way down the road, but we need to be walking that way now. It will not do to give way to paralysis, to wait passively for the process to play itself out. It is necessary to steel ourselves for the long haul, to see victory as something we win day by day, in the long march through all the institutions of our society, building the new in the shell of the old. It is necessary to consign to the dust our denunciations of reforming capitalism and our dreams of socialist revolution. It is necessary to

see capitalism, not as sin, but as a necessary stage in the evolution of our species, and to see socialism as a further evolution, as a social order constructed out of a long process of transformation of capitalism. We should be oriented to reforming capitalism more and more in the direction of socialism until it eventually becomes socialism.

Capitalism may be triumphant, but how totally and for how long? Its troubles and its tensions are glaringly there for all to see, extended now in a particularly primitive and brutal form into places where socialism once was. Socialist values have penetrated this part of the world in ways that are not so evident now, but will be manifest in the future. Even now there is a formidable left in Eastern Europe, which is going through a crucible and will come out in reduced but refined form: smaller in number, but cleaner, clearer and more committed in nature.

It may seem as if history is moving backwards, but I think that it is not. I think that history only moves forward, even if in unanticipated, paradoxical, exceedingly complex ways. But it moves forward not in a clear straight line. It zigzags. We struggle up a hill and then fall back. We take ground we cannot hold, at least not then. We retreat and we advance. But we move on.

Like Sisyphus, we push the rock up the mountain, only to see it roll down again. Nevertheless, we take up our burden and continue. Unlike Sisyphus, we live in hope that we gain ground and may even make it to the top of the mountain, even if what we find when we get there is another mountain.

I think that we should relate collectively to the past of the socialist movement as we do personally to our own youth; as a time of naivete, excessive zeal, utopian flight, rash experiment, brash miscalculation, false friends; a time of healthy growth of instincts, which time would temper and further experience refine; a time of glory and terror and tragedy; a time of vulnerability and pain, spared those who dared not venture along such a dangerous road.

We should be proud that we lived it and risked it and grew in wisdom, age and grace from it; proud that we were not among the small and selfish, tending only our own gardens; proud that we were not among the smug and cynical, carping on the sidelines, but contributing nothing. They may point now and say I told you so, but they knew nothing then and they know nothing now. We must live by our own versions of our own past.

We need to look at our history, to gather it up into ourselves, to synthesise it anew, to hold our heads up over it, and not to turn our backs on it. For it took us up from the dark, some of the way along a long and winding road, much longer and much more winding than we could possibly have imagined when we first set out on it, but a road still supremely worth travelling. Our journey is not yet over.

Home page: <http://webpages.dcu.ie/~sheehan/sheehan.htm>

E-mail: helena.sheehan@dcu.ie
