

## Will you come up to Limerick?

The Crucible of Nixon in 1970.

*Crucible: A dramatic historical moment in which some kind of structure took form that determines future structures and actions-structuration.*

Author, year p..

*How is Marxist-Leninist theory to be linked with the practice of the Chinese revolution? To use a common expression, it is by 'shooting the arrow at the target.' As the arrow is to the target, so is Marxism-Leninism to the Chinese Revolution. Some comrades however are 'shooting without a target,' shooting at random, and such people are liable to harm the revolution.*

MAO from The Red Book, 'Rectify the Party's Style of Work' (February 1, 1942).

*The Hippies will do nothing until they are politicised.'* Jean Luc Goddard in response to the question, 'Do you believe the hippies could be a force to purge Capitalism as the red Guards purged Soviet Communism?'

Jean Luc Goddard talks to Herminie Demoriane. International Times. September 6th, 1968.

Limerick City has hosted five US presidents. Kennedy in 1963, Nixon in 1970, Reagan in 1984, Clinton in 1996, and Obama in 2012. The most overlooked, and contentious, of these visits remains the 1970 visit of the 37th US President, Richard Nixon. Historically, in terms of reception and significance, it is the antithesis of what was accorded to the 1963 visit of Kennedy in regards to how the legacy of the occasion remains. A radio documentary on this visit broadcast on October 2nd 2010 is titled *The Forgotten Visit* (RTÉ, 2010).

**Figure 32**

President Nixon in Shannon Airport, Ireland. Display photograph installed in Shannon Airport 2016.



In the space of a decade a template of an image-building visit by the American head of state to a nation seemingly on the cusp of modernism should have been as it

was intended. The visit was designed around functions to provide a series of simple photo opportunities to celebrate the president's Irish roots, as well as shaping them into political currency on his return. What is not prominently featured in the legacy of this visit is the incident of protest led by Limerick Youth. This incident hosted by Limerick (and mirrored in Dublin) remains overshadowed in the collective narrative of a constructed tradition. The myth by which an American president seeks their roots and to bond with an ancient culture unfettered by the complexities of international politics is engrained with the modern Irish State. This simplistic narrative remains bound up with the economics of tourism and foreign investment. It is a narrative of control, one in which subservience to that agenda is expected and any deviation from the script is seen as un-Irish. Yet, in 1970 a Limerick group, in solidarity with international youth, directly countered this subservience. Their protest was one that stood against imperialist war mongering and the anti-generational agenda then perpetrated by President Nixon.

The significance of this act of protest by Limerick Youth in attempting to question both the imperialism of American foreign acts and the subservience of the 'new' Ireland to American policy in this regard remains understated. On the occasion of the visit they sought to portray Nixon as a head of state acting as an imperial power and not in any sense a reborn Irishman baptized by complacent Irish authorities. In a series of brief, committed, and physical acts on the streets of Limerick on the day of his visit, Limerick Youth sought to represent their generation as part of an international cadre of generational protestors.

By October 1970, two years into his presidency, Nixon was en route to Paris to broker an exit strategy for the US in Vietnam. This was a war he had pledged to 'end with honor'; an intention that proved unfeasible. Instead, he came to represent for the counterculture a warmonger who was intent on pursuing a regressive strategy of bombing the Vietnamese into submission. In prolonging the war he became a universal figure of hate with protesting youth worldwide.

American youth-led protests multiplied after President Nixon intensified bombing areas of Vietnam and Cambodia in 1970. Domestic resistance to these acts by radical groups such as the Yippies intensified. Yippies adopted shock tactics drawing attention to what was being 'democratically' vented on the Vietnamese in their name as American citizens. A month before the Limerick visit, the Yippee leader Jerry Rubin told students at Kent State University in Ohio that the first part of the Yippee programme is to kill your parents, 'Until you are not prepared to kill your parents, you're not ready to change this country' (Lynsky, 2010 p.214).

In 1968, American social anxiety facilitated the militarisation of domestic police forces by the passing of the Safe Streets Act, which increased FBI funding for police training at its academy. This was to include riot control (McKnight, 1998).<sup>55</sup>

Nixon stopped off for a three day visit to Ireland at the behest of an Irish businessman, as all involved agreed that it would be good PR to shore up the Irish-American vote (Nixon had previously visited in 1966). The design of this was important. On reflection it was thought that if Nixon had previously emphasised any type of Irish roots previously

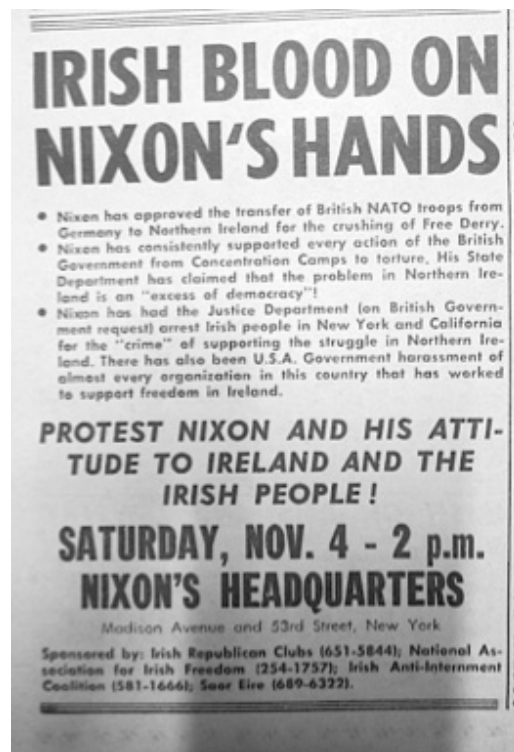
55 "Militarizing the Police: Officer Jon Burge, Torture, and War in the 'Urban Jungle'" by Julilly Kohler-Hausmann which appears in Stephen Hartnett's edited volume *Challenging the Prison Industrial Complex*. "Urban areas had long been constructed as foreign, racialized spaces; once they were in open revolt, their struggles with state authority were easily interpreted with the same rhetorical devices used for insurgent populations abroad. Thus, it is not surprising that over time,

more and more voices called for the state to use the same tools and techniques employed overseas to subdue allegedly dangerous spaces. And so, by the mid-to-late 1960s, domestic law enforcement agencies had begun to interpret the conditions in inner cities as wars and had begun to turn for answers to military training, technology, and terminology (p. 48)." <http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/2011/12/28/jon-burge-torture-and-the-militarization-of-the-police/>

for the 1960 election he would not have lost to John F. Kennedy.<sup>56</sup> That, and the fact of his narrow win in 1968, had created what commentators describe as the roots of his paranoia in achieving and keeping power. The itinerary for the 3rd to the 5th October visit took in Kilfrush House in Limerick, Limerick City, Timahoe in North Kildare, Kildare town, and Dublin city (Frank, 2014). Nixon's Mother, Hannah Millhouse's ancestor, Thomas Millhouse of Timahoe, Kildare emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1729. The Millhouse's were Quakers.<sup>57</sup>

**Figure 33**

Ad in an Irish-American paper, 1971. Republican clubs in New York protest.



[56 John F. Kennedy's great grandfather, Thomas Fitzgerald, emigrated to the US from Bruff, Co. Limerick in 1852. He took with him the family Bible, which was used for the swearing into office of JFK in 1961.](#)

[57 An invitation was made to Nixon by the Northern Premier Captain Terence O'Neill to visit the ground where his paternal ancestors had originated but this was not taken up.](#)

After arriving in 1970, the visiting party was provided with the de rigueur Irish-isms of an 'Irish Cabaret.' This occurred in Kilfrush House, Limerick which was owned by the businessman, John A. Mulcahy. An official photograph (unpublished) from the night shows President Nixon surrounded by a costumed ensemble of dancers and singers, as well as a strangely nervous looking representative of the Irish State, the Taoiseach, Mr. Jack Lynch. The American party also featured Henry Kissinger who was part of the diplomatic team for the Vietnam talks. In 1971, Kissinger negotiated rapprochement with the People's Republic of China before the relations between the US and China were formalised in 1972.<sup>58</sup>

As well as stewarding the endgame of the Vietnam War and Watergate, President Nixon's legacy includes presiding over the atrocity of the Californian Kent State killings. On May 4th, 1970 four students in a crowd protesting against the Vietnam War were

[58 In 2013, declassified tapes from the Lyndon B. Johnson Library showed that a diplomatic end to the Vietnam War was viable in 1968 but Nixon, as a then presidential candidate, convinced the South Vietnamese delegates that they would get a better deal under his presidency. The delegates withdrew and](#)

[the war continued until the Paris Peace Accord was signed in 1973. Nixon was re-elected by a landslide in 1972 with himself and Kissinger jointly named that years' 'Men of the Year' by Time Magazine, before resigning in disgrace in 1974.](#)

killed by state troops in an act instigated by the then governor Ronald Reagan. The protesting youth on the campus of Kent and particularly Berkeley were detested by Reagan who had fought with the educational Establishment on issues politicised by the youth since 1966. He exploited the initial discontent Americans felt with protesting youth at the beginning of the Vietnam War and castigated the youth as outsiders. He relentlessly criticised the faculty as being permissive and supportive of protesting Berkeley students. By 1970 he had no hesitation in using the Californian National Guard. Three weeks before the Kent state deaths Reagan remarked of the hubris, 'If it takes a bloodbath, then let's get it over with' (year p.).

In 1971, English and Irish youths were able to read the unedited manifesto of the radical American group the Weathermen. In an issue of the *International Times*, the Weathermen advocated armed force to reply to Nixon's acts against the youth of Kent and State and others. It said:

the hearts of our people are in a good place. Over the past months, freaks and hippies and a lot of people in the movement have begun to dig in for the long winter. Kent and Augusta and Jackson brought to all of us a coming of age, a seriousness about how hard it will be to fight in America and how long it will take us to win. We are all beginning to figure out what Cubans meant when they told us about the need for new men and women (Weathermen, 1971).

As President Nixon's motorcade made its way through Limerick City, 4000 of its citizens lined the route to see him. They included a group of leftist protestors whose placards attempted to draw attention to American foreign policy. The *Limerick Leader* reports that a young man lunged at the presidential motorcade on Sarsfield Bridge and another was spotted on William Street waving a suspicious object before running from the Gardaí. Near Arthurs Quay, another group unfurled the Starry Plough, the flag of Irish socialism. Again the Gardaí gave chase. As the protest gained momentum Alderman Stevie Coughlan weighed in. Coughlan was a well-known anti-Communist and was reported as tearing up a protestor's placards as well as struggling with a Councillor Quinn who declared that it was a democratic country and he was entitled to speak. Pat O'Mahoney, who was part of the protest, describes a youth hurling a copy of the Maoist *Red Book* at the open-topped motorcade and actually hitting President Nixon with it as he travelled over Sarsfield Bridge. Another version recounted by a member of the crowd that day has a youth breaking towards the motorcade before being rendered unconscious by a Garda 'who used a knuckle to the lad's head' (O'Connor and O'Shaughnessy, 2014).

The *Red Book* was a potent anti-imperialist symbol for many European 1968 youth. In the introduction to *Mao's Little Red Book*, (2014) Alexander C. Cook described it as a 'spiritual atom bomb' (p.). Almost a billion copies were produced in official and unofficial print runs between 1961 and 1971. For nervous western establishments the presence of a revolutionary tract in such numbers worldwide literally evoked a 'red tide.' The book was originally produced for the Red Army and came in a distinctive red waterproof

cover symbolically hinting at a functionality associated with combat. If such a physical incident of protest by a 'red' Limerick Youth had literally connected with a head of a Western State and the volatile metaphor had made the international news, it would have been highly symbolic worldwide in the context of Nixon and the Vietnam peace accord (Gray, year p.).

The protesting youths active in the city on that day were part of an international youth anti-imperialist movement united in the belief that no country had the right to intervene in the affairs of another whose leader had been democratically elected, even if that leader was a communist. By 1974 there was no general agreement within the counterculture regarding strategy to counter American involvement in Vietnam.<sup>59</sup>

Nixon was a ruthless politician who detested the platforms created by radical questioning posed by the youth. He encouraged the perception that such questioning was an extension of a communist threat to a corporation sanctioned American way of life. He stood for what he called the 'good people,' the white middle-class who increasingly felt threatened by civil rights, protestors, intellectuals, and all who formed the liberal elite who practiced the participatory democracy of what is known as the 'New Left'. Appealing to the good people and at the same time castigating the Left, he spoke when elected in 1968 of the 'ugly harvest' that had been reaped from a succession of government aid programmes for the inner city poor that he deemed had been failures. This polarising language was reported worldwide and portrayed Nixon as the face of imperialist capitalism for international youth.<sup>60</sup>

Early in his career he was associated with strong anti-communist rhetoric effectively deployed for electoral purposes. One 1946 campaign leaflet (anonymously attributed to his team) mentioned the 'subversive Jews and communists who intended to "destroy Christian America and our form of government"' (Source). The concept of an almighty Christian based leadership was paramount to Nixon and his administration.

By the sixties, evolving ethos of the counterculture as manifested in the media began to suggest an internal threat to the authorities and this preyed constantly on Nixon's mind. He wholly distrusted the citizen-based counterculture and any attempt by those outside the Establishment to reclaim the concept of freedom and peace for their generation. Establishment descriptors increasingly portrayed the protestors as outsiders who threatened post-war stability. In a 1965 summary of the Watts riots by the Los Angeles Chief of Police Daryl Gates, he described the streets of America as 'a foreign' country.

Highlighting the paranoia associated with the end of his presidency, the author Francis Wheen quotes Nixon in 1971 as saying, 'One day we will get them, we'll get them on the ground where we want them and we'll stick our heels in, step on them hard and twist, crush them, show them no mercy' (year p.). Nixon regarded the core values that surrounded the notion of freedom as the property of a centralised collation owned by, what his predecessor President Lyndon B. Johnson described as, the military industrial complex. As a threat of domestic conflict became apparent it was obvious that Nixon wanted to secure the cornerstones of managed freedom and for this it became necessary to portray non-conformist youth as alien, threatening, and in need

59 See *The Counterculture of the 1960s in the United States: An "Alternative Consciousness"?* Melisa Kediri. Masters thesis Année universités 2011-2012 Post – War American Politics and Culture. Chapter 1 p9

60 See *The Nixon Memorial* By Jeff Shesol. The New York Times. August 6 2014. Shesol observes that Nixon's legacy is embedded in contemporary American Republican policy particular in its distrust of intellectual elites.

of discipline. Force could be applied after the youth became demonised as 'the other.' If needed they could be eradicated for the greater good.

In the end, the impact of protesting youth did register. Before the end of the Vietnam War, Ricardo Lombardi of the Italy Vietnam Committee stated in the International Times that, 'Nixon has been driven out of his mind by the resistance of a small people against the military might of a powerful nation and by the rebellion of the American Youth' (Lombardi, 1972 p.).

The general assault on sacred values by the alternative culture of the sixties provoked a reassertion of 'exaggerated versions of conservative ideals.' History confirms that Nixon did indeed preside over the end of the utopian phase in which the counterculture sought to assert itself as a generational voice for democracy. The reclaimed the necessity of citizen protest that contested the notion that protest organised by the youth was never part of their post-war democratic progress. It reclaimed the concept of protest for the youth and resisted its portrayal by the Establishment as an aberration, personified by a generation of post-war educated, white middle-class citizens known as the baby boomers. To the conservative Establishment any act of non-conformity expressed politically by the 'New Left' became an aberration of democracy. Those that participated in such protests were not only class traitors but represented the enemy within.

We call ourselves radicals, but the truth was... we were almost the only loyal opposition in the country. We joined a few Senators... in questioning the assumptions behind the United States' intervention in Vietnam. But our questions, which outraged so many of our elders, usually fell well inside the framework of America's global interests. Most of us still wanted to help run the country, not to become revolutionaries... (Cowan, 1967 p.)

Interviewed at the time of his visit, Nixon told the Limerick Leader that Ireland was 'his favourite place in the world for a break' (year p.). He was officially welcomed to the city by Councillor James D. Liddy who spoke:

On behalf of the citizens of Limerick, as well as on my own behalf, I want to extend to His Excellency, President Richard Nixon, a very warm and a very cordial welcome to the city of Limerick. I think he has, by dropping off here to say hello to us, paid a very great honour indeed and we are certainly very indebted to him and we hope he will have a very happy stay in this country. Thank you.

Nixon responded:

Mr. Mayor, I want to say that it is a very great privilege for me to visit, on my trip to Ireland, and come first to Limerick. This is the first city in Ireland I am visiting. Having heard of Limerick all my life, and recalling in the 18th century when the famous Irish Brigade was fighting all over the world, the song was, Will You Come Up To Limerick? and here I am. I am glad to be here, and I am glad I came. Thank you very much (Nixon, 1970 p.)

Descriptions of the youth protest on the day briefly featured in the *Limerick Leader's* coverage. There are no reports of any of the protesting youth being charged with public disturbance. In Dublin similar protests greeted Nixon but were better organised and more intense. The Dublin youth featured street theatre and created a mock trial complete with a burning effigy of Nixon. This time a group of determined protestors waited for the motorcade (with some clandestinely dressed as American tourists) and managed to score a direct hit with eggs that splattered the windscreen. One of those protestors, the noted Irish activist Mairin de Burca, recalls the ease of which they were able to register their act was in no small way facilitated by the local Gardai on the route, 'We had heard that the Secret Service had thrown themselves about so much that the Gardai had said: "Stuff this, let them look after their own president" type of thing' (Irish Examiner, 2010).

By 1970 Nixon's reputation as an imperialist figure of hate was in place. Reviewing Nixon's legacy 40 years after his resignation, Jeffery Frank in the New York Times quotes C. L. Sulzberger, a former Times correspondent, who canvassed opinion on Nixon a decade after his resignation. He says, 'To my surprise, despite the passage of time since the Watergate scandal, the fevered detestation seemed to continue unabated... This anger was, I found, astonishingly personal... It was the same kind of personal hatred that survivors of Hitler and Stalin in Germany and Russia felt toward their persecutors,' he wrote, adding, 'I cannot explain this extraordinarily venomous sentiment, this blind rage that focused its attention entirely on one man and displayed not the faintest sign of forgiveness.' Frank points to a generational rationale for this hatred and remarks that it was only when the generation who grew up protesting the Nixon era began to die out that this somewhat abated. He quotes Bill Clinton at Nixon's funeral in April, 1994, 'May the day of judging President Nixon on anything less than his entire life and career come to a close' (Frank, 2014 p.).

This opportunity for a symbolic indictment embodied in the throwing of the Red Book was never to feature in any Irish visit by an American president again. By the time of George W. Bush's visit to Dromoland Castle in 2004, the Irish government temporarily ceded many sovereign powers regarding security to the Americans. On the occasion of Bush's visit space in Limerick Jail was reserved for anyone considered to be a threat to the president. In 2004, Limerick was an ad hoc base for many protesting youth where the subject was now the war in Iraq. Security policy by this time would have been informed by Ronald Regan's 1984 visit. Regan's Tipperary homecoming was in direct contrast to the reception he received in Dublin. By 2004 it would have been a given that any location to be visited by an American president could present potential danger. The management of security was now amalgamated with public image as the media focused on the now contentious and potentially flawed narrative of the returning son and the native soil.<sup>61</sup>

Even by 1974, the narrative that began with JFK extolling the American leader as 'the Irish Cousin, the vibrant leader of the anti-communists and Catholic Irish all over the world, the embodiment of all that was good, protector of the downtrodden, was never to return' had ended. Frances Condell, who was Mayor of Limerick at the time of Kennedy's

61 An exhibition of photographs on the Reagan Dublin protests taken by Rose Comiskey was held in The Culture Box, Temple Bar, Dublin in July 2014. This is the first time that the

subject of the American president has been exhibited as a standalone subject of protest as distinct from the sacred returning son (*The Irish Independent*, July 15th 2014 p.19).

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visit, reflected on the seemingly necessary task it was seen to be to undertake a firming up of the bond between Ireland and the Land of the Free. In that respect, these visits became important platforms and eventually became brand trade-offs between the two nations. 'Sometimes we got the impression that the Americans were – they didn't care very much about us and that perhaps we weren't as forward in many aspects of life as you of America. And sometimes we felt that perhaps they, you know, their appreciation was given to us with their tongues in their cheeks' (Condell, year p.). The youth who obeyed their parents to pay tribute to Kennedy in 1963 were the direct opposite of those who set the agenda for his counterpart in 2004 (Shannon, year).

A list of the pre-security checks that were in place for the George W. Bush visit in 2004 indicates how a relationship between Ireland and America, that began as a type of united brotherhood, was changed by citizen protest to the extent that Ireland was willing to temporally cede sovereignty. The American-managed visit of 2004 insisted on the presence of a cordon around Shannon Airport, a controlled fly zone, dictated road works and snipers. But most contentiously, there was security vetting. The cordon was enforced before the visit and extended to residential areas and industrial units in Shannon effectively placing Irish citizens under American authority for the duration of the visit. Passes were issued based on security vetting only after where PPS numbers were sought from all who lived in the area. There were repercussions for citizens drawn into this zone. One example involved an Irish youth who regularly worked as a contractor for a branch of a multinational American company based in Shannon. He had once visited Palestine in a personal capacity as an anti-imperialist protestor. As the American processed the staff that worked in Shannon, the youth was told by his Irish managers that he did not have the required security clearance for the duration of the Presidential visit. He was told not to come to work until after Bush left the country. No explanation for this order was given. On his return he was told his services would not be required in future by the company (O'Connor, 2013). One of Nixon's last acts before resigning was ending the relationship between gold and the dollar. This created conditions for floating exchange rates worldwide. It is a key moment when international capital assented itself for the guarantor nation states. (*The Guardian*, 2014).<sup>62</sup>

**Figure 34**

Shop in Nicholas Street 2014.

Photo Paul Tarpey.

