



Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA

By Richard English

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The IRA has been a much richer, more complexly layered, and more protean organization than is frequently recognized. It is also more open to balanced examination now--at the end of its long war in the north of Ireland--than it was even a few years ago.

Richard English's brilliant book offers a detailed history of the IRA, providing invaluable historical depth to our understanding of the modern-day Provisionals, the more militant wing formed in 1969 dedicated to the removal of the British Government from Northern Ireland and the reunification of Ireland. English examines the dramatic events of the Easter Rising in 1916 and the bitter guerrilla war of 1919-21; the partitioning of Ireland in the 1920s and the Irish Civil War of 1922-23. Here, too are the IRA campaigns in Northern Ireland and Britain during the 1930s, 1940, 1950s and 1960s. He shows how the Provisionals were born out of the turbulence generated by the 1960s civil rights movement; examines the escalating violence; the introduction of British troops to the streets of Northern Ireland; the split in the IRA which produced the Provisionals; the introduction of internment in 1971 and the tragedy of Bloody Sunday in 1972. He then examines the struggle over political status, culminating in the Hunger Strikes of the early 1980s and moves on to describe the Provisionals' emergence as a more committed political force throughout that decade, a politicization that made possible the peace process that has developed over the last decade. English offers a dazzling synthesis of the motives, actions and consequences of the IRA. Neither romanticizing the IRA nor condemning them out of hand, this is a balanced, definitive treatment of one of the world's leading revolutionary movements.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Since the signing of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the peace process in Northern Ireland has been in almost perpetual crisis. Unionists have demanded that the IRA destroy all its weapons as a precondition to power sharing. The IRA sees giving in to such a demand as tantamount to admitting defeat. The result has been a frustrating political stalemate. English's balanced and complex account of the IRA, more particularly the Provisional IRA, will help anyone understand the strong feelings and difficult issues behind today's headlines. English (Ernie O'Malley: IRA Intellectual) emphasizes that the IRA has "courageously shifted ground" by accepting the concept of consent (i.e., that the island of Ireland won't be unified without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland), rather than continuing to pursue the violent reunification of Ireland. Indeed, English stresses, the Good Friday Agreement has split the IRA just as the 1922 treaty partitioning Ireland did. The author, a professor of politics at Queen's University in Belfast, makes some controversial assertions, as when he claims that the IRA's post-1969 violence, ostensibly aimed at protecting Catholics, only led to increased anti-Catholic carnage. Even more controversially, English calls into question the whole point of the long IRA war. What English does brilliantly is to describe the IRA's own justifications for its war against Britain, with special attention to the socialism pervading much IRA belief. He has written a provocative and essential book for anyone trying to understand Northern Ireland's tempestuous recent history, providing even better insight into the IRA's ideology than Ed Moloney's recent *A Secret History of the IRA*. Illus., maps not seen by PW.

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From [Booklist](#)

A detached account of the best-known faction of the Irish Republican Army, the so-called Provisionals, this history of the organization tackles the difficult task of appraising it objectively. English generally achieves this goal, partly through semantic means, such as eschewing the word *terrorists* in describing the Provos or their enemies, but mainly through analysis of the IRA's pronouncements and justifications for its adoption of violence. To IRA leaders, the goal was simple: British out, Ireland united. Alas, nothing in Northern Ireland has ever been so simple, as the author frequently notes the contrasting fears of the minority Catholic and majority Protestant communities amid his narration of the appalling killings of the past three decades, now apparently in remission as the negotiating process inches along. For the IRA's role in this, English's work outlines its rationales for violence, the roots and militancy of leaders such as Gerry Adams, and the validity of its arrogating the cause of Irish nationalism. Without discernible bias, English provides a readable history of the modern IRA. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"This an essential book. At a stroke it replaces the many journalistic 'histories' of the IRA, too often flaccid and shoddy."--Roy Foster, *The Times* (London)

"A fluent, fascinating account of the origins, actions and ideologies of that caucus of shadows, the Provisional IRA."--*Observer*

"This vivid, reflective work will likely become the standard introduction to the subject. It also serves as a valuable corrective for anyone who thinks that the difficulties in Northern Ireland are amenable to quick-fix solutions."--*Financial Times*

"With fine detail and a flair for narrative, Richard English chronicles the rise of the IRA from the ashes of the Easter rising to the promise of peace today. Balanced and thoughtful, *Armed Struggle* offers new insight into Ireland's republican movement. And it reminds us, in the author's words, that 'the voices of the victims still deafen.'"--Terry Golway, author of *The Irish in America*

"About Richard English's *Armed Struggle: History of the IRA* there is a kind of passionate objectivity you'll rarely find on this subject. The author works mightily to present two sides of a story that keeps shifting. You might read the book wondering, perhaps, where his sympathies lie, but even if you sneak a look at the last chapter, where he lays out his credentials, you'll come away impressed with his balance and fairness. I am neither scholar nor historian, but this is the one book I recommend for anyone trying to understand the craziness and complexity of the Northern Ireland tragedy."--Frank McCourt, author of *Angela's Ashes*

"What impressed me most was the way Richard English managed to present such an historical and contradictory mess with such clarity and fairness. The book grabbed and held me like a very good novel."--Roddy Doyle, author of *A Star Called Henry*

"Here is the book we have been waiting for--the first full history of the I.R.A. and the best account by far of the twentieth century's longest war. Richard English has read everything--from secret documents to the Long Kesh library --and he has talked to the men who fought the war. He also brings a rare balance of empathy and judgement to a topic that desperately needs both. The result is a superb piece of writing: clear, insightful, and engrossing. If you want to know where the I.R.A. came from and how they think, this is the book to read."--Peter Hart, Chair of Irish Studies, Memorial University and the author of *The IRA and It's Enemies*

"English's balanced and complex account of the IRA, more particularly the Provisional IRA, will help anyone understand the strong feelings and difficult issues behind today's headlines.... The author, a professor of politics at Queen's University in Belfast, makes some controversial assertions, as when he claims that the IRA's post-1969 violence, ostensibly aimed at protecting Catholics, only lead to increased anti-Catholic carnage. Even more controversially, English calls into question the whole point of the long IRA war. What English does brilliantly is to describe the IRA's own justifications for its war against Britain, with special attention to the socialism pervading much of IRA belief. He has written a provocative and essential book for anyone trying to understand Northern Ireland's tempestuous recent history."--*Publishers Weekly*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alberto Benson:

Reading a book tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world can easily share their idea. Publications can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire all their reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the story that share in the books. But also they write about the knowledge about something that you need illustration. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors in this world always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some analysis before they write on their book. One of them is this Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA.

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Typically the book Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA has a lot of knowledge on it. So when you read this book you can get a lot of gain. The book was published by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research just before write this book. This particular book very easy to read you will get the point easily after scanning this book.

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Kelly Breedlove:

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