

Redlich, (Mary) Patricia

by Turlough O'Riordan

Redlich, (Mary) Patricia (1940–2011), journalist and psychologist, was born on 1 December 1940 at the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street, Dublin, one of four daughters and a son born to Ben Cribbon, a clerk, and his wife Mary (née Crean). Growing up in the northside Dublin suburb of Donnycarney, she spent a year in a TB sanatorium in her late teens. While studying Freudian psychology in Berlin in the 1960s, she met and married Dieter Redlich, a member of the German Communist Party. After the marriage ended amicably, Redlich returned to Dublin with their adopted son.

Working as a clinical psychologist with the Eastern Health Board (EHB) in Dublin from 1975, she became a shop steward and then branch chair with her trade union, the Association of Scientific, Technical, and Managerial Staffs (ASTMS). She went on to become the union's education officer, and a member of its executive (1975–83). Highlighting how the transitory nature of female labour market participation and the lack of child-care services mitigated against unionisation, she saw these as trade-union issues to be addressed regardless of gender. As secretary of the women's advisory committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) through the early 1980s, she agitated for legal recognition of women as full citizens, availing of labour protections advanced by EU directives as they were transposed into Irish law. Campaigning against the conservative conflation of women, marriage and motherhood embedded in the Irish constitution, she perceived economic equality as paramount, and sought reform of personal taxation to treat women equally. She also campaigned for the provision of contraception and the introduction of divorce, arguing at the 1985 ICTU women's conference that if catholic bishops wished to run the country they should seek election (*Ir. Times*, 16 February 1985).

Highlighting the atomisation of young mothers as Ireland industrialised and urbanised from the late 1960s, Redlich observed how urban migration and settlement in new suburbs resulted in a lack of emotional and social support previously provided by the extended family. Her Thomas Davis lecture on RTÉ radio (December 1975), part of a series celebrating International Women's Year (collected in *Women in Irish society* (1978)), argued that these developments contributed to the social and emotional dislocation of new mothers, inducing increased marital discord and breakdown. Her analysis of the innate conservatism of Irish society drew on the work of Conrad Arensberg (qv) and Solon Kimball (1909–82), and she emphasised the displacement of the patriarchal extended family by the nuclear family. She also decried how second-wave feminism declared war on the male sex.

During the late 1970s, Redlich was a prominent figure in the Ireland–GDR Friendship Society. Her play 'The Rosenbergs', performed (December 1979) by

the Theatre and Cinema Workshop at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, examined the 1953 execution of the alleged Soviet agents Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for espionage in the USA. She opposed attempts by Provisional IRA sympathisers to secure trade-union support for advancing a united Ireland by force, and was active in Official Sinn Féin and the Workers' Party in the 1970s–80s, contributing to the party organ *Women's View*.

From the mid 1980s, Redlich rejected socialism, castigating its failure to demand individual responsibility, and claiming that excessive even-handedness inevitably led to hand-wringing (*Sunday Independent*, 4 September 2011). Regular appearances on RTÉ radio and television (especially, reviewing newspapers on radio on *The Sunday show*), in which she propounded forthright and jargon-free commentary on Irish society, raised her public profile. She often described her own journey from feminism and socialism towards espousing personal responsibility in political and psychological terms. Rejecting the emphasis on guilt imbued by her Freudian training, she embraced the importance of free will professionally and personally, castigating those in self-denial, and humorously criticising individuals who were endemically late for appointments, which she saw as a mild form of narcissism. She co-presented the RTÉ television series *Positively healthy* (1979) and was a researcher on *Talking heads* (1982), produced by Eoghan Harris, which addressed mental health issues.

Commencing her career in print journalism in the early 1980s with *Image* magazine, whose editor Anne Harris (then married to Eoghan) she had met at the school gates, in 1985 Redlich followed Harris to the *Sunday Independent*, where she wrote an occasional column. Around this time she resigned from the EHB and fronted a highly profitable premium-rate phone line offering pre-recorded advice on personal problems. After co-presenting the BBC television health program *An apple a day* (1988), Redlich joined the *Irish Press* in October 1988, writing a popular weekly personal advice column. Its success led to her return to the *Sunday Independent* (May 1989) as an agony aunt and columnist. Recounting her own experience of the menopause in the late 1980s, she criticised its construal as a medical problem by predominantly male medics, and argued that, alongside childbirth and menstruation, these processes were entirely natural. She personally embraced and publicly advocated natural and homeopathic treatments. Her appointment in April 1996 to the RTÉ Authority by Taoiseach John Bruton was indicative of her close ties to the Fine Gael party from the early 1990s. With Eoghan Harris, then a close confidant of Bruton, she provided media training to the party's elected representatives throughout the decade.

Redlich married (1986) Brian Brennan, with whom she lived in Sandycove, Co. Dublin. After they separated, she married Val Rossiter, with whom she relocated in 1999 to Old Parish, Dungarvan, Co Waterford; fond of singing cabaret tunes by Kurt Weil, Redlich sang in choirs there and took up golf. After being diagnosed with cancer, she continued to work as best she could; her last column appeared on 3

July 2011, weeks before her death at home on 31 August 2011. She had planned and organised her own funeral, which took place at The Island Crematorium, Ringaskiddy, Co. Cork, on 2 September 2011.

Decrying consumer culture, considering obesity a result of affluence, and critical of social conformity and the tolerance of low ethical standards in Irish public life, Redlich considered life as a series of challenges to be embraced. Her columns in the *Sunday Independent* were hugely popular with readers, many of whom wrote upon her death to note how her morally rigorous but compassionate approach to psychology helped them to seek counselling.

---

GRO (birth cert.); Patricia Redlich, 'Women and the family' in Margaret MacCurtain and Donnacha Ó Corráin (ed.), *Women in Irish society: the historical dimension* (1978); *Ir. Times*, 8 Dec. 1979; 16 Feb 1985; *Phoenix*, April–June 1996; Bob Quinn, *Maverick: a dissident view of broadcasting today* (2001); Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The lost revolution: the story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (2009); *Sunday Independent*, 4 Sept. 2011