

The Irish Free State and British Imperialism

BY

"GERHARD"



COVER: De Valera accompanied by Fianna Fail deputies on their way to attempt to take their seats in the Free State Parliament, July, 1927.

THE CORK WORKERS' CLUB

INTRODUCTION

This booklet describes conditions under the Cosgrave government in the 1920's and early 1930's, conditions which led to its defeat and the rise to power of the De Valera led government in 1932. The Cosgrave decade of rule, was marked by civil war, economic crisis, high unemployment and repressive legislation. With its proscription of republican and working class organisations in late 1931, its jails full with political prisoners and its all too apparent subservience to British Imperialism, the opposition of the broad masses of the Irish people grew more intense. Repression intensified; resistance and the undying hatred of British Imperialism again rose to the surface. This hatred was directed against both the British Imperialists and their open agents, the higher strata of the Irish bourgeoisie and landlords, who had joined the British Imperialists in the exploitation of the Irish people. Under such conditions De Valera succeeded in mobilising the workers and small farmers with national slogans. He promised to abolish the oath of allegiance to the British King, suspend the annual payment on land annuities to the British treasury, to release political prisoners and lift the ban on proscribed organisations.

With De Valera in power, the author of this booklet outlines the tasks for Irish communists and the communists of the oppressor state — Britain.

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The sequel to the land annuities conflict between the Irish Free State and Britain, had the British Government at first impose penal tariffs on imports from Ireland. The De Valera government retaliated by putting prohibitive tariffs on British imports. It was finally settled by payment to Britain of a lump sum of £10,000,000 and a trade agreement favourable to Britain.

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THE OATH AND LAND ANNUITIES

The new Irish government led by De Valera announces the abolition of the oath of allegiance to the King of England and states that it will no longer pay the three million pounds annual payment on land annuities to the English treasury. The oath of allegiance to the English king is the mere legal form of the actual sovereignty which the British imperialists have imposed on Ireland by their bayonets. The yearly payments of the land annuities date back to the time when Ireland was parcelled out among the English feudal landowners, to whom the Irish peasants were compelled to pay rent as tenants. Later, the land was reluctantly returned to them. But they were forced to continue this stupendous yearly tribute, which was guaranteed to the former English land-owners by the government. For the last ten years, the Free State government has wrung this shameful tribute out of the Irish peasants and faithfully paid it over to the English treasury. This sum represents to Ireland, economically and financially weakened, a heavier burden than the reparation payments of Germany, or a relative tax burden on the shoulders of the Irish people ten times as great as the British debt payments to the United States.

De Valera's stand called forth a storm of indignation and threats from the British imperialists. And, as always, when the imperialists of a country campaign to establish or defend some repression, they had the most active co-operation of the English social-fascists. In 1916, after the suppression of the Dublin uprising, Jim Connolly, the revolutionary workers' leader, was shot by order of an English cabinet in which Henderson, the present leader of the Labour Party, sat as minister. Now again, the Secretary for the Dominions in the so-called National government—the MacDonald "socialist" Thomas, began the campaign against Ireland in the English House of Commons. In a voice vibrant with resentment and outraged patriotism he said that allegiance to the king was an inseparable part of the Treaty with Ireland which the British government would never permit Ireland to break.

THE CAMPAIGN OF INTIMIDATION

The imperialist press—*The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, etc., set forth a vicious programme of threats : the treatment of all Irish in England as foreigners ; the discharge of Irish workers from English factories ; the suspension of the dole for Irish workers ; the dismissal of all Irish from the English civil service. These drastic acts of retaliation were to include the Irish living in the British dominions and colonies. With such threats, the British imperialists hoped to drive those Irish living in England and in the Dominions, especially the great mass of the Irish workers, into opposition against the demands of De Valera.

At the same time, the imperialists are mobilising the whole of reactionary Ireland—the bourgeoisie, remittance men, and land-owners. They appeal to their interests and warn them against supporting the demands of De Valera. *The Times*, the “official” organ of the British government, wrote on the 24th of March:

“There is some £150,000,000 of Irish money invested in British securities of one kind or another, and by virtue of an agreement made by Mr. Cosgrave’s Government with Great Britain, Free State rentiers are relieved from the payment of double income tax. In practice they pay the higher rate which at the moment is the British rate and get a refund on the smaller. If Mr. De Valera repudiates the payment of Land Annuities it is feared that the British Government may withdraw its concessions in respect of income tax, in which event a very serious financial crisis would arise.”

Added to the campaign of intimidation by which the British imperialists hope to organise those Irish living in England or other parts of the Empire against the De Valera demands, there is also the attempt to turn the Irish farmers, especially the wealthy ones, against the new government. The *Irish Times*, a paper representing the interests of the English and Irish capitalists, wrote the following on March 24th:

“If and when Mr. De Valera compels Britain to defend her rights under the treaty the question will be not what Britain can do, but what there is that she cannot do. A prosperous Free State is unthinkable without the elements of British co-operation and goodwill. By a few strokes of the pen the British Government could put ruinous tariffs on the Free State’s exports to her only market.”

England is the most important market for Ireland’s farm and dairy products, such as cattle, butter, milk, etc. The threat of a

high protective tariff against the importation of Irish farm products aims at making all the farmers, especially the big ones, who depend on this market, active on the counter-revolutionary front in the defence of British interests. The paper “forgets,” however, to make it clear that Ireland is, in its turn, one of the best markets of British industry. Ireland stands fifth on the list of Britain’s customers.

THE EMPIRE CONFERENCE

The reason for the threatening language of the British government and the British press, the announcement of such a formidable array of repressive measures against Ireland, is the following : The British imperialists are striving for the formation of an economically united empire as a way out of the crisis. They are preparing for the Empire conference to be held in June, at which agreements will be made with the Dominions on the steps necessary for the fulfilment of this aim. In India, these preparations are being made with blood and iron, through a system of emergency measures, through a rule that can only be compared with the rule of the Tsars in old Russia. With the Dominions, however, the British imperialists must bargain.

The nearer the Ottawa Conference approaches the more concerned the British imperialists are becoming over its possible results. Baldwin on the 4th of April directed the following veiled warning at the Dominions:

“If we in England cannot build an economic union with our own flesh and blood in the Dominions, then it may well be that we will be driven back to Europe.”

In other words, if the Canadian, Australian, and South African bourgeoisie do not allow the entrance of our industrial products at reasonable rates, then we will, in turn, be forced to exclude their agricultural products and make agreements with the European agricultural nations who will be glad to accept our industrial wares in exchange for their agricultural products. The recent abolition of free trade and the introduction of tariffs by the British government, has left the question of duties on wheat, meat, wool, and other products, which the Dominions export chiefly to England, still open. This is in order to use it as a weapon at the Ottawa Conference.

When, just a few months before the convocation of the Ottawa Conference, puny little Ireland dares to defy the British imperialists and nullifies Treaties without the agreement of Great Britain under its very nose, the prestige of the British representatives at the Ottawa Conference, no less than the very authority of the British govern-

ment in the Colonies and Dominions, is weakened. Therefore the threatening language and projected reprisals of the British imperialists against Ireland, are *also a threat against all the growing anti-empire tendencies in the Dominions, and above all against the national revolutionary liberation movements in the Colonies.* The battle of the British imperialists against the "one-sided breaking of agreements," is the battle of British imperialism against those tendencies in the Empire which wish to break away from British bondage.

The conservative *Sunday Times* of the 10th of April writes:

"This is not merely a question between the Irish Free State and Great Britain; it is a question between the Irish Free State and all the members of the Empire equally. Members of the Empire are free and equal : the bonds that unite them are self-imposed. Correspondingly, the intention of any one member to tamper with them touches all the others concerned, and the constitutional effect of such action must be judged accordingly . . . The rights of one party to make fundamental alterations on its own initiative to a treaty signed between two parties can never be admitted."

HATRED FOR BRITISH IMPERIALISM STILL LIVES IN THE BROAD IRISH MASSES

The violent outburst of the British imperialists against the demands of De Valera, was not implicitly directed against these demands (for an agreement is probably possible), but against the tendencies they symbolise. The British imperialists thought they had solved the Irish problem. But on the sixteenth anniversary of the Dublin uprising, the Irish Republican Army marched through the city accompanied by tens of thousands of sympathisers. And from these masses came the shout "separation from England."

The British imperialists understand the significance of this. They understand that hatred for British imperialism still lives in the broad Irish masses, and that it is growing more intense in the last few years with the deepening of the economic and social crisis. The British imperialists understand that the Irish masses are ever ready to "stab them in the back." This represents a very real danger at the time of a possible world war. Ireland, the western outpost of Europe, is of the greatest strategic importance because of its proximity to the British Isles. In all the historic English wars—in the wars with Spain, France, and in the World War against Germany—England's enemies have always tried to use Ireland as their base of invasion. And the Irish nation has always seized upon

the moment when English imperialism was hard pressed, to renew its fight for independence. It is no wonder that the British imperialists, with the increasing probability of a new world war and their intervention in Soviet Russia, view the national movement of the broad Irish masses with rage and hatred.

In the year 1921, after the century-long heroic uprisings of the Irish people, conducted with a force and tenacity as to occasion Engels once to say, "Give me 200,000 Irish, and I'll shatter the entire British Empire," the British imperialists were forced to give Ireland the status of a Dominion. A series of factors forced England to do this. England fought the World War under the slogan of "free the nations" together with the American imperialists, in whose country millions of Irish lived. After the war, these Irish Americans demanded the freeing of Ireland.

BRITISH CONCESSIONS TO THE IRISH BOURGEOISIE

The difficult position of the British imperialists after the war—the growing wave of discontent of the English working class—the revolutionary independence movements in the colonies and the national revolutionary movement unbroken by the most fearful terror and the bloody suppression of the Dublin revolt in 1916—made it advisable for the English capitalists to buy off the Irish bourgeoisie with important concessions. In the English-Irish agreements of 1921, Ireland received the same status as the other Dominions in the Empire. The chief concessions of British imperialism to the Irish bourgeoisie were the right of customs and taxation, the right to organise an independent army which must not exceed, however, the proportion of Irish population to that of England. The coastal defence, however, remained in the hands of the English Government. In case of war, the Irish Free State was forced to place its harbours and lighthouses at the disposal of the British government. This meant that the Irish "Free State" is practically forced to take part in every English war.

The concessions which were won by the Irish bourgeoisie through this agreement came to them through the heroic struggles of the workers, farmers, intellectuals and common people against the British imperialists. The Irish bourgeoisie betrayed the complete liberation of Ireland from the yoke of British Imperialism for these concessions. They agreed to the division of Ireland through the separation of the most industrially developed six northern counties, which remained under the overlordship of England with a separate Parliament and civil and military apparatus. In this way the British imperialists secured themselves a permanent military foothold in

the island.

In repayment for these concessions, the Free State obligated itself to pay the dismissed English officials pensions amounting to two million pounds yearly. It further declared itself willing to pay back the British loans, as well as the yearly instalments for the return of the land. This plan was accepted in the Dail in 1922 by a vote of 67 against 57. Lord Birkenhead declared at that time in the British Parliament, in a speech defending the agreement with Ireland:

"The Free State Government hopes in a short time to be strong enough to suppress any groups that may seek to rebel against it. *And I would much rather see the Free State have that job than us. I have no doubt that she will soon be strong enough to successfully do so, and that will be, if nothing else, a saving of English lives.*"

The right wing of the Irish Revolutionary Party (Sinn Fein)—Collins, Griffith, Cosgrave, etc.—accepted this agreement after De Valera, the leader of the Republican opposition, withdrew from the conference. What Lord Birkenhead so confidently prophesied now came about. The former revolutionists, who were now building the national government, undertook the task of helping the British imperialists to "save English lives." They initiated a bloody campaign of repression against the Irish Republican Party which was still continuing the fight for a united, independent Ireland. Innumerable leading Irish Republicans were shot down with the help of English guns and officers, by the new Irish Free State Government, and the republican movement crushed with blood and fire.

In 1923 De Valera capitulated. He asked his followers to stop fighting and bury their arms. Only a small group still remained true to the old ideals and traditions of Sinn Fein. The great majority of Sinn Fein split over the question of participating in parliament, and, with De Valera as their leader, built the Fianna Fail Party. Only a small group of Republicans still kept the now outlawed I.R.A. alive. But they lost the connection with the broad masses through inability to reorganise the struggle on a new basis as a mass struggle.

The De Valera group became a loyal parliamentary opposition to the Free State Party, whose interests now went hand in hand with British finance and trade, and the allied interests of the Irish bourgeoisie and land-owners. The newly-won concessions of the Irish bourgeoisie made them the partners of the English capitalists in the exploitation of the Irish workers and peasants. The ten Irish banks of the Free State are closely allied with the English-

controlled Ulster banks. The transportation and commercial system is financed by British and Irish capital. The land reforms, which removed the large British land-owners, have only opened the way for the capitalist exploitation of the Irish farmers, for the replacement of English land-owners by English banks, and the creation of a class of rich farmers.

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND MARTIAL LAW

The 1932 elections, which ended with the victory of the De Valera party, found Ireland in the throes of the severest economic crisis. The agrarian reforms had removed the English land-owners, but not the frightful misery of the broad Irish masses in the villages. Seventy per cent. of the Irish peasants possess less than 30 acres each, and have collectively only twenty-three per cent. of the land. Out of 560 thousand farm-owners, only 90 thousand possess more than 50 acres, and collectively only 11 out of 19 million acres. The yearly land tribute amounts to three million pounds, to which must be added one and a half million in leasehold rents of those peasants who could not buy, or receive outright ownership to the land.

When we realise that it is the poor peasants who own the worst land, then we can imagine what insupportable burdens these tributes represent. These burdens became even more oppressive during the world crisis, when the price of cattle and farm products dropped tremendously, while the price of industrial products were still artificially maintained by tariff manipulation. A further factor in the deepening of the misery of the Irish peasants was the terrible crisis in America. Great numbers of poor Irish peasants depend almost entirely upon the sums which their more adventurous relatives sent them from America. The widespread and long-lasting unemployment in America has practically dried up this source of income. In addition to this, the international character of the crisis has stopped the "traditional form" of Irish export—the production of emigrants. In the latter half of 1931, 467 people left the Irish Free State for America, as against 8,468 for the same period of the preceding year. At the same time, 1,080 returned. A capitalist paper makes the following comment on the situation: "Since the Norman invasion, there has never been such a situation—more immigrants than emigrants."

The widespread unemployment in the towns, the dwarfed industries hit by the crisis, offer the wretched Irish peasants no escape. The number of evictions is continually growing as their land and possessions are being sold up for the non-payment of debts and

taxes, at the same time that the Free State Government is assisting the rich farmer class by reducing its taxes, extending credits, and establishing capitalistic co-operative associations. It is an interesting fact that 76 per cent. of all the milk that the dairy companies buy for exportation comes from the farms of the rich farmers. The hopeless situation of the 140 thousand land-labourers grows unspeakably worse daily. As usual, the wealthy farmers and land-owners, in seeking to escape losses incurred in the crisis, throw the entire burden upon them.

The development of the strike movement in the Free State according to *official* figures is as follows:—

Year	No. of strikes	No. of strikers	Strike days lost
1928	52	2,190	54,292
1929	53	4,533	101,397
1930	83	3,410	77,417
1931	60	5,431	310,199

Irish industry is also hard hit by the crisis. In Belfast practically the entire ship-building industry is at a standstill. The linen industry employs less than 50 per cent. of its former workers. In Northern Ireland, the most industrialised part of the country, there are more than 100 thousand people unemployed in a total population of 1¼ million.

There are no accurate statistics of the number unemployed in the Free State. The government has carefully avoided the publication of precise statistics. The number of unemployed in Southern Ireland is estimated at from 90 to 100 thousand, of whom, however, only 23 thousand are registered and receive doles. The wages of the Irish workers were heavily cut during last year, while the cost of living, because of duties on shoes, clothes, tobacco, sugar, etc., remained relatively high. The cost of living index is 15 per cent. higher than in England.

The crisis has crippled Ireland, already enfeebled by imperialist exploitation, but it has also rapidly strengthened the proletarianising process of the petty bourgeois strata and intellectual elements, for whom there is no work or means of existence. The unbearable pressure on the broadest masses in this situation of economic crisis is increasing their discontent. The remnants of the old Sinn Fein, the I.R.A., who have not forsaken the fight for the free Irish Republic, gained influence over the masses—especially over the poor peasants and farm labourers, and also over the petty bourgeoisie and in-

dustrial workers in the cities. The terrorist activities against the agents of the government, the police, spies, and tax collectors, began again.

The Cosgrave Government answered these growing revolutionary activities by declaring permanent martial law. All nationalistic and revolutionary organisations, such as the Irish Republican Army, the Saor Eire, and the Irish Workers' League (the Irish Communist group), were forbidden. Under the banner of the fight against Communism, with the moral support of the high catholic clergy, the revolutionary republican organisations were declared dissolved. Martial law and emergency decrees were established, and the military and the police sought to reinstate the old reign of terror. Partisans of the Irish Republican Army were forced with torture and threats of death to reveal the hidden arsenals of the organisation. Prisoners were brutally beaten. But the Cosgrave suppression could not intimidate the growing mass activity. It merely served to strengthen it.

DE VALERA SWAYS THE MASSES

The Irish bourgeois had two alternatives — to establish an open fascist dictatorship and continue a bitter fight of extermination against the revolutionary and republican organisations and risk arousing colossal mass struggles, or to dissolve parliament and allow the De Valera national reformist party, with their growing influence over the broad masses, to act as a safety valve, for a time, by taking over the reins of government. The Irish bourgeoisie chose the second alternative. Parliament was dissolved, and the election was held with the following results : De Valera's party received 566,000 votes and 70 seats ; the government party 449,000 votes and 56 seats ; the Labour Party (the social-fascist agents of the British imperialists), 98,000 votes and seven seats. Parliamentarily the De Valera Government is dependent on the votes of the Labour Party.

The broad masses of Irish labourers and the petty bourgeoisie in town and country voted for De Valera, who campaigned under slogan of abolishing the oath of allegiance and suspending the yearly land payments. The Labour Party lost both votes and seats, the Communist group (Irish Workers' League), who ran two candidates in Dublin, got 1,100 votes. What chiefly characterised this campaign was that the De Valera Fianna Fail party successfully swayed the masses with its nationalistic platform against England.

Under the pressure of the crisis, the old undying hatred of the broad masses rose to the surface. The national demands had not yet lost their mobilising power. This hatred was directed against the British imperialists and their open agents, the higher strata of the

Irish Bourgeoisie and landlords, who have been granted the privilege of joining the British imperialists in their exploitation of the Irish masses, and who, with the help of British guns, succeeded in doing what the British imperialists themselves could never do, crushing the national revolutionary movement. The entire truth of what Lenin said at the time of the heroic Dublin uprising in 1916 reveals itself:

"Every crisis unmasks the superficial—discards the outer husk—throws all that has outlived its necessity aside—and uncovers the deepest inner springs and forces."

The national reformist De Valera party was in a position to mobilise the broadest masses with national slogans directed against the British imperialists. The Party's demands are not essentially national-revolutionary in their nature, and the method it uses to obtain them—the forces on which it depends—will never create the prerequisites for the wide iron front of the toiling masses, who alone can fight to the bitter end against the British Empire for their national demands.

De Valera demands the repeal of two points of the 1921 agreement; the revocation of the oath of allegiance, and the suspension of the annual land annuity payments. Lloyd George explained to the Irish delegates in 1921 that if they would not subscribe to the article which contained these points, "you will have a war on your hands immediately." Only open agents of the British imperialists, like the leader of the Free State party, Cosgrave—or the Irish and English social-fascists—can deny the incontestable right of the Irish nation to "one-sidedly" abolish the oath of allegiance. *But the abolition of this oath can only be a step towards the real battle for the complete freedom and independence of Ireland, or the completion of the reconciliation of the De Valera party with the British imperialists on the basis of a few concessions.*

CYNICAL AGENTS OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

The British imperialists are using a threatening tone against De Valera's intention to abolish the oath, but at the same time they are prepared to offer several compromises if necessary. A compromise which would strengthen the British imperialists at home is being propagated by the English and Irish social-fascists. William Norton, the leader of the Irish postal workers, and also a chief and faction leader of the Labour Party, declared in the *Weiner Arbeiter Zeitung*, the organ of the Austrian social democrats:—

"I consider the entire issue a formal one. The *incontestable fact* is that Ireland will still remain a part of the British Empire even

if the oath of allegiance is done away with. *It is the actuality, not the form, that matters.* What if De Valera decides to fight for the complete severance of Ireland from England? He has not the people's consent for this, since this possibility was not an issue in the election. If this problem presents itself to us at some other time, then we shall see. *It is certain that at present the world political situation does not warrant such a step.*"

This cynical agent of the British imperialists, under the pressure of mass opinion, fears to declare himself openly against the abolition of the oath. He is even willing to grant its abolishment as long as the real issue—continuance of Ireland in the British Empire—is safeguarded. A somewhat similar position was taken by the English "left" labourites. Maxton declared in the House of Commons that "Ireland is a free nation, of course within the British Empire, but nevertheless a free nation," which is exactly like saying to a man in prison: "You are a free man, of course inside of a prison, but nevertheless a free man." By tentatively agreeing that the oath of allegiance might be removed on condition that Ireland remains in the British Empire, the English social-fascists attempt to block the national revolutionary struggle, offering themselves as mediators. This is exactly the same diplomacy which the leaders of the Labour Party and the I.L.P. use in regard to the Indian problem. They suggest to the British imperialists that the Indian bourgeois and land owners be given such concessions as will make them the watchdogs of British interests in India, to keep the broad masses under control, ensuring the exploitation of India through the active co-operation of the Indian bourgeoisie.

In the *Daily Express*, the organ of the imperialist newspaper king, Beaverbrook—who, by the way, once escaped by accident an attempt made on his life in Ireland—an article by an eminent Irish jurist, one of the adherents of the Treaty of 1921, as he styles himself, was published. This jurist proposes to the British imperialists, instead of the whip, the tactic of concessions to Fianna Fail and De Valera. He writes:—

"For the first time since the days of Parnell, or some might even say, for the last three hundred years, the British Government has to deal with an Irish leader 'who can deliver the goods.' In other words, De Valera has the support of even the extremists in any agreement he might make. And that is something that neither Redmond or Cosgrave could boast. England has nothing to lose and everything to gain. England will have Ireland's friendship in war and peace—the closest trade relations with her best customer—and instead of forced loyalty, the king of Great

Britain might well be greeted with enthusiasm in the streets of Dublin, and be fittingly received by De Valera himself."

The tactics of the British imperialists and their open agents in England and Ireland are clear. They threaten De Valera and his party, to hold them in check ; and yet they offer De Valera concessions at the same time, to allow him to save his face as a mass leader and disorganise the national movement still more than Cosgrave and Collins could. Is there any greater cynicism than the expression of this Irish jurist—"De Valera is the man who can deliver the goods." But it must be said that the cynical expression of this eminent Irish jurist can be tagged on to a statement De Valera made to the Irish Senate:

"The British Government must realise that there can be no real freedom in Ireland as long as the free and unhampered representation of the people in Parliament is made impossible by the oath of allegiance."

Through the removal of the oath, De Valera wishes to attract the remnants of the old Sinn Fein, and the leaders of the Republican Army (who have the real sympathies of the broad masses), to participate in parliament, which was rejected by them up till now because of the necessity for taking the oath. And even more explicitly does De Valera make it clear that once the oath is removed there will no longer be the necessity for a republican movement and its irregular army, which can then be incorporated in the Free State. Through these remarks it is clear that for De Valera the abolition of the oath *is not the starting point* in the battle for the independence of Ireland from the yoke of British imperialism, but only an attempt to conciliate and render harmless those elements of the old Sinn Fein groups within the frame of British imperialism who remain true to the old traditions, and through them to get the broad masses under control.

THE SOCIAL-REACTIONARY CHARACTER OF DE VALERA

The abolition of the annual three millions has undoubtedly great significance for impoverished Southern Ireland. But De Valera explains at the same time as he informs the British imperialists of the necessity of abolishing this tribute, that the Irish peasants must continue to pay these taxes, which are the outcome of their right to the soil. They will revert to the Free State Government. Thus, instead of removing a part of the unbearable burdens from the shoulders of the poor peasantry by the complete suspension of payments, the national reformist De Valera shows his true social-reactionary character by merely transferring the money from the English treasury to the coffers of the Irish bourgeoisie.

De Valera's social-reactionary policy actually means an attempt to prevent the national revolutionary fight for freedom. The real fight against the mighty British imperialists and their agents can only come through the mobilising of the broad, despoiled masses for the complete removal of all the crushing taxation and for the solution of the vital land hunger as a step towards national and social freedom. De Valera not only defends the fearful situation of the Irish village of to-day and the cruel behaviour of the Irish bourgeoisie towards the poor peasantry, he defends not only the bourgeois agrarian reforms which do not guarantee the great mass of Irish peasants even a miserable beggarly existence, but countenances the continuance of a form of taxation which can be traced back to the days of English feudal over-lordship. There is only one difference : the Irish tax-collector and deputy who formerly dispossessed the peasants from their land and homes in the name of the English State, will now do exactly the same for his new masters, the Irish bourgeois. The peasants who had hoped to hear that they were freed at least of this burden of taxation, once the tribute was ended, hear instead, from the Minister of Land and Fisheries, the demands of the Free State Government for the tax.

The same social-reactionary policy of De Valera and his party extends to the working class. In the question of the dole and its extension to agricultural workers—in the fight against wage cuts—the creation of new work schemes—the reduction of rents and the abolition of the slums etc.—in all these issues the policy of De Valera is no different from that of Cosgrave, the policy of the bankers, the wealthy farmers, and the trusts. This policy of De Valera makes it easy for the Irish Labour Party to preach its platform of submission to British imperialism, under the pretence of the defence of social demands.

These social reactionary tactics of De Valera have even more dangerous effects in Northern Ireland, where 42 per cent. of the industrial workers are to be found. There, the bourgeoisie and social fascists, through the use of religious differences (protestant and catholic), partly drive certain of the workers to actively participate in the struggle against a free united Ireland and prevent them from organising a revolutionary fight for their country's freedom. But the terrific crisis has hit the workers of Northern Ireland harder than others, and has undermined the position of the Labour aristocracy, the chief support of the bourgeoisie and the social fascist in the struggle against the Irish national revolutionary movement. Until the mass of the workers of Northern Ireland are drawn into the fight for a free independent Ireland—until the influence of

the bourgeoisie, the Labour Party, and the protestant clergy is destroyed—until then, the solid front of all the Irish workers and peasants, irrespective of religious faith, is impossible. Precisely because De Valera combines his national demands against British imperialism with a reactionary internal policy—precisely because in reality he is the spokesman of the Irish bourgeoisie, and not the representative of the great majority of the people, the workers and peasants—he, De Valera and his party, are unfit to be the leaders in such a bitter struggle for the social and national liberation of Ireland from the yoke of British imperialism.

De Valera has released all the republicans and revolutionaries imprisoned by Cosgrave. He has removed the ban on republican and revolutionary organisations. But he does not think of removing the “force apparatus” of the open agents of British imperialism in Ireland. The army is under the very same officers whose hands are already covered with the blood of thousands of Irish revolutionists—the same which was created with the help of British arms and British money and officers. The police, the secret service, the prisons, the courts, are all in the hands of those officers and officials who were the tools of Cosgrave in the suppression of the revolutionary movement. The workers’ strikes—the farmers’ movements—were suppressed by these same men, in the defence of British capital and the Irish bourgeoisie. De Valera has formed a new government, but the entire counter-revolutionary governing apparatus is intact, and is his means of government. There can be no real struggle against English imperialism without the destruction of the apparatus of force which has served the Irish bourgeoisie to enforce the Anglo-Irish Treaty against the overwhelming mass of the Irish people.

THE TASK OF THE IRISH COMMUNISTS

In this situation the Irish Workers’ League, the group of Irish Communists, has a tremendous task. The last elections have shown that the influence of the Irish Workers’ League over the masses is as yet relatively slight, and its organisations still weak. But precisely the present situation gives it the opportunity to strengthen its influence and to form a real mass Communist Party. The Irish Workers’ League will only be able to do this, however, when it stands before the workers as an independent force—as the independent leader of the working masses of Ireland, with its basis in the toiling masses, in their fight for social and national freedom. The Irish Workers’ League cannot in the present situation avoid taking a concrete stand on the immediate demands of De Valera.

It would be wrong to take a negative position in regard to

the De Valera demands, on the premise that the national grievances divert the class struggle for the moment, etc., that Ireland’s freedom can only be won after the Irish revolution. No, the Irish Communists must understand that the national grievances of the broad Irish masses are closely connected with their social demands, and they must stand out as the champions of both their national and social demands.

If the Irish Communists do not take this position, they will remain completely isolated from the Irish working class, who believe to-day that De Valera and his party are the real leaders in the struggle for Irish independence. The Irish Communists will remain isolated from the active worker and peasant elements, who are still under the leadership of the Republican Army. The Irish Communists must also join the fight for the abolition of the oath of allegiance and the land annuities without hesitation or vacillation. They must explain that they will support every one of De Valera’s measures which is even only one step forward in the fight against British imperialism.

Does that mean they must follow in the train of De Valera, Fianna Fail, or the Republicans? Assuredly not. That, too, would mean a substitution of the policy of isolation for that of liquidation of the Irish Communists, as well as the liquidation of the fight for Irish Freedom, which none but the Communists can lead. The Irish Communists must expose to the masses every vacillation of De Valera, not because his policies divert from the class war, not because they are purely nationalistic, but because they are insufficient, incapable of accomplishing the liberation of Ireland. That is the point to explain.

The Irish Communists do not stand only for the abolition of the oath of allegiance, but for the complete breaking away of Ireland from the British Empire, the creation of a united independent Ireland. The Irish Communists not only stand for the abolition of the annual payments, but for the freeing of the poor Irish peasantry from every vestige of feudal taxation. The Irish Communists call upon the peasants to refuse to pay them. The Irish Communists demand the immediate cessation of these oppressive taxes, the cessation of pensions to former English officers, the removal of those officers from the army and police, the removal of the civil officials who have oppressed the Irish people in the interests of British imperialism.

In so far as the Irish Communists unite the national demands with the class demands of the worker and toiling peasant masses, they will mobilise them around the following demands: the ex-

tension of unemployment insurance to all the workers and farm labourers—the improvement of social insurance—the prevention of wage-cuts—increased wages—the starting of new work schemes by taxation of the Irish propertied classes—the freeing of poor peasants from taxation and mortgages—the division of large estates among landless peasants, etc.

The Irish Communists must prove that the social reactionary policies of De Valera support that class which, with the aid of British imperialism, has held Ireland to bondage. It is the same class that has made its peace with the British imperialists, so as to be able to exploit the Irish working masses with the aid of British capital. The Irish Communists must convince the masses that the workers of northern Ireland must be drawn into the common fight of all the Irish workers against their exploiters.

To the extent that the Communists expose the inconsistencies and half-measures of the De Valera and Republican Parties, on the national issues and unmask their Social-fascist policies—it will gather the factory workers and poor peasants, all the broadest masses—in the battle against the social and national reactionary policies of De Valera, by sharpest struggle also against the social and national reactionary policy of the leaders of the Labour Party.

Through such a policy the Irish Communists will help the broad masses to understand step by step on the basis of their own experience of the vacillations and treachery of De Valera and Fianna Fail, and their absolute impotence in even lessening the burden of the masses in this crisis. In this way, the Irish Communists can convince them that the battle for social and national freedom can only be led by the Irish worker in alliance with the toiling peasants, under the leadership of a Communist Party. The Irish Communists will prove to the workers and toiling peasants on the basis of this struggle that only by removing the rule of the Irish money-bags, who have sold their country's interests to England, and through the establishment of an Irish Workers' and Peasants' Republic, can national and social freedom be achieved. Through such resolute tactics, the Irish Communists will gather the best elements of the Irish Republicans who have remained true to the traditions of Connolly and Sinn Fein, to the camp of the revolution.

The vague, vacillating, "classless" republicanism of De Valera and the leaders of the Republican Army, has mobilised a great part of the masses by national demands. But it is clear, that either De Valera or the Republican leaders will make their peace with the British imperialists (if they accept certain tempting concessions), in which case they will only repeat what Griffith, Collins and

Cosgrave did in 1921. They will go over to the camp of the open agents of British imperialism in Ireland. They have only one other recourse. They may actually attempt to defy the British imperialists. Their present demands could conceivably be a preliminary to such a move. In that case, they will have to stake their hopes on the mobilisation of the widest masses. De Valera's stand on the social problems proves that he shrinks from this step, which would endanger the interests of the Irish property classes, which are the limits of his social policy.

Since De Valera and the Republicans depend on the broad masses they may try to manoeuvre between the two extremes, might even split, or even return to parliamentary opposition rather than lose the following of the masses. But the growing tenseness of the situation will inevitably distinguish the true from the hypocritical friends of the Irish people in their struggle for freedom. In Republican circles, also, the first doubts on the politics of Fianna Fail are finding expression. The Republican, Peadar O'Donnell, writes in *An Phoblacht*—the Republican organ—warningly against De Valera. "*The oath of allegiance and the land tax must not become the screen behind which the enemy interests in Ireland can gather new strength.*" The Irish Communists have the tremendous task and the most favourable circumstances for gathering the working masses, who are seeking a way out of the national and social crisis, around the banner of Communism.

THE TASK OF THE BRITISH COMMUNISTS

Precisely at this time, when the imperialist war in China has begun, and when the extension of this conflict into an attack on the Soviet Union is feverishly prepared, it is imperative that the English and Irish Communists take the admonition of Lenin to heart. In his article on the Irish rebellion of 1916, he warned all revolutionaries:

"One cannot deal seriously with the very serious problem of war without utilising the least discernible weakness of our enemies—without utilising every possibility—especially because it was impossible to know beforehand at what particular moment and with what degree of strength, here or there, one or another powder magazine will explode. We would really be a sorry band of revolutionists if we did not, during the great proletarian battle for Socialism, understand enough to utilise every movement of a nation against any isolated grievances, which are brought about by imperialism, in the interests of a broader intensification and spread of the crisis."

Not only the Irish, but also the British Communists should take

this admonition to heart, the more so since the *Daily Worker*, the organ of the English Communists, took a tactically incorrect position in the conflict between De Valera and the British imperialists. The British Communist Party, *as the only revolutionary party in England*, naturally called upon the masses clearly to fight the British imperialist and Social-fascist threats. It also led the fight for the Irish right to self-determination with the right of separation.

But the *Daily Worker* made the mistake of devoting too large a part of its campaign to the unmasking of De Valera. At a time when the British imperialists and Social-fascists were waging a vituperous campaign against the De Valera demands, this stand could easily confuse many workers. Also, the Irish enemies of Communism could much too easily confuse the masses by saying that the English Communists did not support the demands of De Valera against the imperialists of their country. This tactically wrong stand, which was corrected in the April 10th issue of the *Daily Worker*, might have made easier the deception of the Irish workers in Ireland and England.

The task of the British Communists is before all else—the battle against British imperialism—the unmasking of the Social-fascists—and the defence of the “isolated complaints of the Irish people” called forth by the imperialists. Precisely the British Communist Party, the Party of those workers whose imperialist bosses rule Ireland, must avoid lecturing Irish workers like a school teacher. De Valera and Fianna Fail may not want things, in a situation where the widest masses stand behind De Valera’s demands against England, to go too far—but the more they try to draw the battle away from the masses into the legal chambers, the more the deepening of the crisis is creating a situation where the “small” demands may father a conflict that will dangerously exceed the bounds intended by those who first raised them.

The British imperialists, as their tactics in India, Cyprus, Malta, in New South Wales and Newfoundland (where they recently sent a warship) show—grow daily more brutal and aggressive in combating all those tendencies (however weakly they are put forward by the official representatives) which infringe the prison house laws of the British Empire.

It is within the realm of possibility that the present conflict between De Valera and the British Government may develop into a movement of greater consequences than either conflicting party imagined. The job of the British Communist Party is clear cut. It must expose the treacherous “manoeuvre” of the Labour

Party and I.L.P. It must mobilise as many as possible of the British working class into a fighting opposition to the British acts of aggression on the Irish nation, and through this establish a united front of the English and Irish workers.

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