

# CLASS STRUGGLE

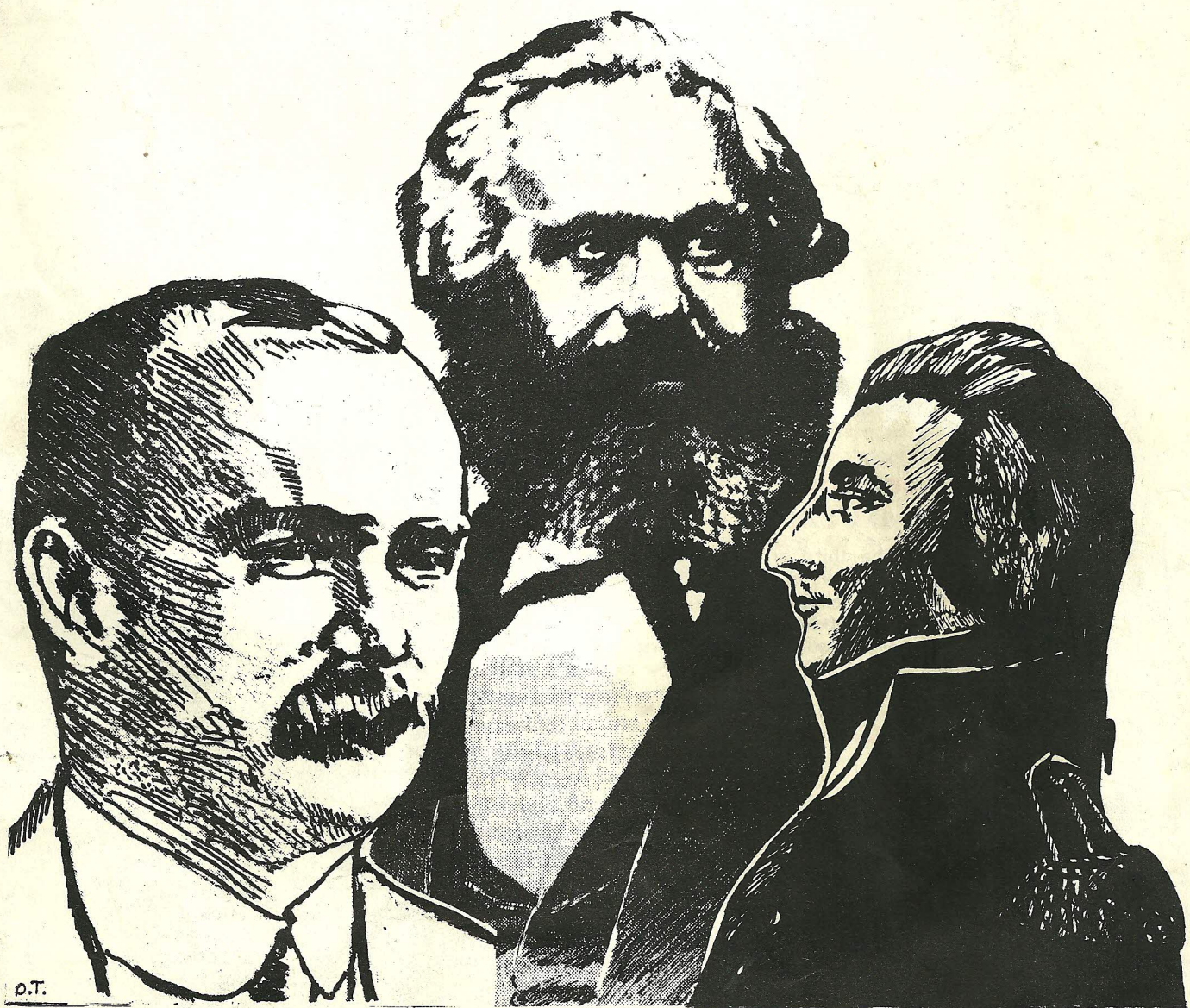
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**DITCHING THE LABOUR PARTY  
~ NO ANSWER FOR THE UNIONS**



**Connolly & Irish History**

**'COMMUNISM' IN IRELAND**



# **Class Struggle No.15**

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## **EDITORIAL**

John Carroll has cynically opened the issue of disaffiliation of unions from the Labour Party in the most undemocratic form imaginable. We argue against his take it or leave it Referendum and pose the need for rank and file organisation to force Labour out of coalition as a key means to open the path of struggle for the working class.

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## **Miners' Defeat & the Tasks Ahead**

As we go to Press the militant miners are looking defeat in the face. In this article we outline the key lessons of this major defeat which has vital repercussions for the whole British working class and the morale of workers internationally. The struggle to rebuild a fighting movement, clearly drawing the lessons of experience, must begin immediately.

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## **CONNOLLY ON IRISH HISTORY**

In the third article in this series we show how Connolly's whole conception of Irish history betrays his populist suppositions. This emerges centrally around his concept of the 'Irish Nation' and is of key significance in accounting for his inability to concretely tackle Irish Nationalism in his own time.

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## **BOOK REVIEW — 'COMMUNISM' IN IRELAND**

Mike Milotte has produced a valuable account of the history of Stalinism in Ireland. His political analysis however suffers from the weaknesses typical of his SWP/SWM co-thinkers. In this article we attempt to highlight the main ones - i.e. the Anti-Imperialist United Front, Connolly's heritage and the nature of Stalinism and the Stalinist States.

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## **RESISTANCE TO PINOCHET MOUNTS**

If the Pinochet Government believed that it could solve the deep economic, social and political crisis wracking Chile then they have been speedily jolted. Far from the intensified repression halting the mass struggles of the working class, the urban poor and students, it has hardened this resistance and made it more determined.

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# ***Stop the ITGWU leaders cop-out UNIONS MUST FORCE LABOUR OUT OF COALITION***

Class collaborators John Carroll, Christy Kirwan and their cronies in the Irish Transport and General Workers Union must be stopped. They have prepared a trapdoor under the ITGWU rank and file in a calculated anti-democratic manoeuvre to take the political heat off themselves as professional brokers between the working class and capitalism. Having for decades cultivated class collaboration by the Labour Party and protected the Party machine from any accountability to the rank and file, they have now told the largest Labour-affiliated body of organised workers:- We can no longer ignore your anger at the Labour Party, so we are allowing you, by referendum-ballot to disaffiliate from Labour, but at the same time we are making sure that you cannot decide on any other political proposals in relation to the Labour Party.

These dyed-in-the-wool lieutenants of the bosses have announced a "referendum" on disaffiliation from Labour, after a "debate" - IN WHICH MEMBERS' RESOLUTIONS ARE NOT PERMITTED - after the Labour leader had rejected their diplomatic appeals and instead committed the Party to full support of the Coalition's so-called "national plan" last autumn. The Coalition promised savage cuts and restrictions in social spending, especially on public sector pay, and because their own role as negotiators was made almost irrelevant in the huge public sector area of employment, trade union officialdom was doubly angry.

The "referendum" is designed as a shrewd get-out for the misleaders of the biggest union to wash their own bureaucratic hands of any responsibility for a political FIGHT to smash the Coalition. But it is not a matter for the ITGWU alone. Disaffiliation by the ITGWU could very quickly lead to the general abandonment by Irish trade unions of any formal commitment to political action.

It is intended to keep the referendum proposal hanging over the party-trade union connection for almost 9 months - the ballot will not be till after the summer Conference - so as to leave the Union leaders and Labour leaders time to size up the likely damage to each other and perhaps reach a mutually acceptable bureaucratic patch-up. That period must be urgently turned to advantage by militant trade unionists, socialists, and all those in Labour who believe in breaking the party from Coalition. It must be used to stop the anti-democratic take-it-or-leave-it referendum and to replace it with genuine workers' democracy in deciding what must be done not just with the Labour Party connection but with Labour's treacherous role in Coalition.

## **POLITICAL BLINDNESS DISASTROUS**

Active concern with the issue of the Party-Union connection is almost NIL among organised workers, just as much as workers' disgust for Labour's role is overwhelming. But while that disgust is healthy, blindness to the vital importance of POLITICAL ACTION by organised workers is a potentially disastrous weakness. It shows in the repeated failure of a highly organised working class to break from giving majority support to the explicitly capitalist parties, not to speak of the failure of the rank and file to call the bureaucracy of unions and Party to account for their political collaboration with the ruling class, an endless record of treachery of which Labour in Coalition with the class enemy is only one expression.

The non-political trade union militancy of Irish workers - syndicalism - in pursuit of sectional claims, despite their often heroic determination, CANNOT ANSWER the desperate problems facing the class as a whole.

## **BUILD A FIGHTING RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT WITH AN ACTION PROGRAMME FOR CLASS-WIDE POLITICAL DEMANDS!**

Militants must be won to build rank-and-file-controlled organisations among trade unionists in the workplaces and industries, and joint action committees with youth, women and oppressed sections in the communities, to fight redundancies, closures, social spending cuts and wage restraint; to win equal pay for women, to fight for the right of divorce and for the secularisation of schools and hospitals; to fight for the abolition of repressive laws and courts and the defence of republican fighters. We say that in all those DIRECT ACTION struggles the fight must be taken up at every point to FORCE Labour out of Coalition.

## **MAKE THE UNION LEADERS FIGHT TO CALL LABOUR TO ACCOUNT!**

We say that, while never waiting for the union leaders to lead, while not holding back from the fight on this basis NOW, the rank and file must at all times DEMAND that the union leaders mobilise to break the Labour Party from coalition, onto the road of open class struggle. We must fight to force the officials to back up with action their rhetoric about the need for Labour to keep an "independent identity". Their sham whine about Labour no longer



representing the unions must be exposed by an open fight to have Labour TDs, councillors and Conferences totally accountable to lay delegates from the unions and constituencies, directly elected and recallable delegates.

#### WHAT IS REALLY AT STAKE

The likelihood of beginning to turn Labour outwards to active class struggle, and more importantly of making the union bureaucrats FORCE them to, is slim indeed. The issue is NOT whether Labour can be reformed into a revolutionary party - we believe it cannot! The issue ultimately is not even whether the Labour Party will survive. The task is to win the advanced workers to fight POLITICALLY. To suggest that workers, by ditching the Labour Party, or worse, by setting out to build another one on an ESSENTIALLY different basis or programme, is to indulge in phantasies. If the best class fighters cannot be won to direct their demands politically at the union bureaucracy in relation to the Labour party, and on that basis to go beyond Labour in struggle, then they will not yet have been broken from the apolitical syndicalism or the populist nationalism that blocks the road to conscious CLASS STRUGGLE.

Whatever the response of the union leaders, this method of attack begins CONCRETELY and immediately to challenge the hypocrisy and cant of the union leaders in relation to Labour. Even though the union leaders resist these demands, militants will have begun to openly confront their mass trade union organisations with the need for a POLITICAL action programme and the need for a fighting party of the working class. To create this outlook through challenging the existing obstacles is vital.

#### 'NEW MASS PARTY' NO ANSWER!

Those who say "sweep aside this present Labour Party of careerist politicians and build a new mass party of the unions" are attempting to blind workers to the reality that corruption and careerism are the symptoms and NOT the essence of what is wrong with Labour. EVERY REFORMIST PARTY tends to reproduce exactly these symptoms, no matter how charismatic its originators may portray themselves. Its degeneration into an anti-democratic machine, unaccountable to the working class, pursuing its own privileges and prestige, INEVITABLY flows from its POLITICS and the actual programme adopted by the leadership in practice. The Irish Labour Party, even at the moments of greatest working class militancy, NEVER went beyond the limits of a BOURGEOIS programme - a commitment to maintain the capitalist state and capitalist "democracy" while CLAIMING to seek "a better life" within it.

Every working class party not decisively broken from this REFORMISM will become a vehicle for bourgeois parliamentary brokerage at the expense of CLASS STRUGGLE. No matter what the "sincerity" of its founders, the leadership of such a party will inevitably assert its own distinct self-interest in common with the union bureaucracy - the preservation of its own perks, privileges and prestige at the expense of the rank and file.

#### REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONALISM

Equally, any working class party that limits its programme to purely NATIONAL perspectives will

be driven into reformist class-collaboration through identifying itself politically with the bourgeois "national interest", "national" stability, and all the "national" institutions of capitalist rule. The only political basis for a genuinely anti-capitalist party of the working class is a conscious REVOLUTIONARY programme that starts out consistently from the INTERNATIONAL standpoint of the working class. Only the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, which has mobilised millions of workers into revolution against capitalism in this century, provides this programmatic basis.

#### THE COMMUNIST ATTITUDE TO LABOUR

The Labour Party is and has always been, on the whole, an obstacle to the open pursuit of class struggle against the capitalist state and imperialism. But its formal creation as a party of the organised working class movement enshrined a very real historical GAIN for workers. Positively, the trade union attachment to Labour gave formal legitimacy to CLASS POLITICS within the trade union movement, a major potential advantage for Irish socialists. Of course that advantage could only become actual progress through a fight for tactics to make the party accountable to the rank and file of workers, to force it outwards into struggle. And insofar as the reformist leaders refused but militants responded, then to that extent these militants would have been broken not only from syndicalism and nationalism but also reformism, and led onto the ROAD OF STRUGGLE for a revolutionary party. Such tactics, spelt out with great precision again and again in the revolutionary communist tradition, have never yet been attempted by the Irish left.

Negatively, the existence of the Labour Party is a gain for workers because it gives VISIBLE form to the all-pervasive but disguised POLITICAL REFORMISM of the trade union movement. In this sense, Labour exists as proof of the bankruptcy of reformism, an object lesson to which communists can point in the fight for a revolutionary alternative.

#### SIMPLE DISAFFILIATION - DANGER OF REACTION

Disaffiliation from Labour, bureaucratically engineered to avoid mobilising against its sell-outs, not only EVADES the immediate obstacles to a political fight back but may squander a significant historic gain. By simply ditching the formal affiliation of the unions to Labour, bourgeois "populist" movements such as Fianna Fail would be enabled to claim legitimacy within the unions and to obstruct the open legitimacy of CLASS politics. That is an outcome ardently desired and worked for by Charles Haughey, as also in Britain by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservatives.

The attempt to impose this referendum in the ITGWU must be resisted. The rank and file must be won to make the bureaucrats fight to call Labour to account! Militants must fight for a democratic SPECIAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE of the Union fully empowered to debate all resolutions of the rank and file members on the political needs of the movement and to initiate ACTION to win them. Only on that basis can we hope to open up the road of political struggle for the working class.



# THE DEFEAT OF THE MINERS & THE TASKS OF SOCIALISTS

THE majority of the National Union of Mine-workers, having heroically stood firm against police tyranny and the overwhelming propaganda offensive of the ruling class in their strike against Thatcher's mass redundancy plans, have withdrawn from the field of battle with heads high, but without their demands. The rightful sense of honour of the rank and file cannot, however, change the disastrous reality. Tragically, no leadership had been created among the rank and file capable of effectively challenging the TUC's and Labour's calculated isolation of the NUM within the British working class. Despite the relentless setbacks encountered month after month by the strikers, this defeat was NEVER at any stage, inevitable.

The "orderly retreat" has broken up the miners' fighting ability nationally - no matter what is claimed for it by the miners' national leadership as a whole, from Emllyn Williams in South Wales to Mick McGahey in Scotland - and including Arthur Scargill who refused to use his casting vote to make the Executive recommend continuing the strike at the decisive conference of March 3rd. The strike thus went down to defeat by the slimmest of majorities at a Conference confronted with leaders who had fought with determination but who were unable or unwilling to face what needed to be done to turn the tide towards victory.

There is every sign that, once off the battlefield, not only will the collective strength of the NUM tragically prove to have been broken nationally in terms of effective opposition to pit closures, but also locally the miners' organisations will be unable to withstand the stepped-up demands of a re-vamped National Coal Board which is determined to make workers pay in every way possible for a major boost in profitability. The aim of the Coal Board is nothing less than to put the mines on an increasingly commercial basis with the perspective of selling them into direct private capitalist ownership.

This defeat is not a momentary or sectional defeat for the miners. In terms of the class struggle in Britain in the whole new period of capitalist instability since the 1960s, it is a STRATEGIC defeat, for the miners AND for the organised working class movement in Britain. The STRONGEST section of the trade union movement, with the greatest confidence in its ability to win in a national confrontation, has lost the battle after a whole year of heroically sacrificing everything that could be sacrificed. Further struggles against the Thatcher-led offensive will certainly arise, but the defeat of the miners decisively reveals the inability of existing trade union methods, even at their most militant, to guarantee any major victories. If new struggles are to be taken up and won, militants will have to fight on a completely new basis. The best class fighters must be won to mobilise the rank and file

around action programmes that link the immediate and partial struggles - through TRANSITIONAL demands and new fighting DEMOCRATIC forms of organisation - to a CLASS-WIDE political, industrial and ideological struggle for WORKERS' POWER and the destruction of capitalism.

Within the wider working class in Britain the impact of the defeat may not yet be FELT sharply as a direct blow, but only because of the FAILURE to directly involve the major sections of the trade union movement in active industrial and political solidarity. That does not, however, change the objective reality of the outcome. The defeat is savage in its direct material implications for the miners and their communities, but the failure to smash the anti-union laws which were at the very heart of Thatcher's victory, means that a major new obstacle to mass action by any section of British and Six-County workers has been solidified. Almost every form of solidarity action can now be ruled illegal, and the capacity of the British state to seize the entire assets of unions in retribution has been effectively demonstrated.

Internationally the outcome of the strike strengthens the bourgeoisie and their agents in the trade union bureaucracy everywhere. In Ireland its effects are direct, and not only 'by example'. The British anti-Union laws, now virtually copperfastened, are applicable to a large section of the Irish trade union movement, in the Six Counties, thanks also to the treacherous passivity of the ICTU leadership ever since James Prior's anti-union Act of 1979.

## THE PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVE

Not just the bourgeois propagandists but every one of their lieutenants in the leadership of the trade unions is now armed with "proof" that direct action by workers, and the whole working class tradition of solidarity action, have been made "obsolete". It will strengthen the poison of the trade union right wing openly arguing for class collaboration and the abandonment of the strike weapon.

What the miners' strike proves, however, is quite the opposite. The working class has witnessed a historic demonstration of its will and capacity to directly challenge the power of the bosses. A whole year of harsh sacrifice and endurance by such a mass section of workers in struggle has reaffirmed the historic role of the proletariat as the gravedigger of the capitalist system. The task facing militants and socialists is to clearly understand who is to blame for squandering such a gigantic sacrifice, to draw the lessons and to hammer out the tactics and strategy around which to build a new fighting leadership and to put the working class on a war footing for the destruction of a social and economic system that has historically exhausted itself of any capacity for progress for humanity.



The IWG organised the collecting of two thousand pounds for striking British miners during the dispute. One regular workplace collection initiated by IWG members will continue to alleviate hardship among sacked miners in the Coventry area. Members of the strike committee were sacked by the Coal Board after being jailed on a trumped-up charge of affray which arose when a large police squad invaded the strike chairman's home on the complaint of a scab that they were making noise. We salute these and all other prisoners of the class war.

### THE TREACHERY OF THE OFFICIAL LEADERSHIP

No class conscious worker witnessing the miners' strike can be in any doubt that responsibility for the defeat rests squarely on the leadership of the British trade union movement as a whole, centrally of the TUC, and of the Labour Party. It is only one more of many proofs, but on a vast new scale, of the inherent nature of trade union officialdom as a distinct self-interested caste of brokers whose own cosy relationship with the capitalist system matters ultimately far more than the objective needs of the working class. It is equally a warning for Irish workers to mobilise independently of their unaccountable leaderships, to force them to fight, but not to be held back when they refuse. It gives a new living relevance to the revolutionary communist slogan - "With the leaders where possible, against them where necessary."

The fact that left officials like Matt Merrigan, the current president of the ICTU, were heard at several miners' benefit events in Ireland openly attacking the British TUC leaders' role in the strike in no way absolves them from their own complicity in the class collaboration of the Irish trade union bureaucracy. Such collaboration can be effectively fought only by complete reliance upon a fighting democratic rank and file movement which must control all its leaders, choose them from the working class ranks, pay them the average industrial wage, hold jobs open for them to return to, subject them to recall when demanded, and to regular election, and compel them to carry out the mandates of conferences of elected and recallable delegates.

Such a movement, however, must break out of the limitations of traditional trade unionism with its reliance on purely sectional and purely economic struggle, with its "political" representatives left free to collude in parliamentary treachery for the sake of their own privileges. Without clear political goals that link the struggles of workers, women, youth, and all oppressed sections, without new and democratic forms of organisation and a decisive commitment to open class struggle, there can be no guarantee of defending the gains of the class, less still of going on to challenge the ruling class for political power.

### A NEW MINORITY MOVEMENT

Such a movement, however, must break out of the limitations of traditional trade unionism with its divisions and its reliance on purely sectional

and purely economic struggle, with its "political" representatives left free to collude in parliamentary treachery for the sake of their own privileges. Without clear political goals that link the struggles of workers, women, youth, and all oppressed sections, without new and democratic forms of organisation and a decisive commitment to open class struggle, there can be no guarantee of defending the gains of the class, less still of advancing them and going on to challenge the rule of the capitalist class.

Facing socialists in Britain - and it has lessons directly for militants in Ireland too - is the task of winning the most militant sections of workers to build permanent organisations of struggle that can mobilise INDEPENDENTLY of all elements of the bureaucracy, around a political action programme of class struggle - a new Minority Movement. Without first focussing on that task, there cannot be built the forces with which to fight to win a working class majority onto the road of struggle for their own class power.

### "BROAD LEFT" REFORMISM

In Britain the fraternal organisation of the IWG, in the pages of its paper 'Workers Power', alone has consistently argued, at every point in the strike, the key action goals and rank and file democratic methods of fighting for them without which victory could not be guaranteed. It has, all along, sharply pointed out the disastrous consequences for the strike of the methods and perspectives of Scargill's 'broad leftism'. This prevented him from, among other things, decisively fighting AGAINST the TUC traitors for the industrial solidarity action of the working class, from dealing decisively with the scabs, from building up the vitally necessary self-defence of pickets against the state forces, and from organising the active rank and file into effective control of the struggle and of the NUM.

Scargill cannot be blamed for the betrayal and defeat of the miners - that shall ever be the infamous achievement of Murray, Willis, Kinnock and their cronies. But militants must be won to see through his utopian left-reformism, his ultimate failure to stand by the banner of rank and file control which carried him into the leadership of the miners union, and his inability to BREAK WITH a bureaucratic labour movement leadership (to which he was vastly superior in his genuine commitment to struggle). In the last analysis, the role and politics of Arthur Scargill fatally disabled him in defeating the treachery of the TUC and Labour Party.

This lesson has a living relevance for Irish working class militants too - the lesson that any rank and file movement in the unions must establish its organisational independence - the guarantee of its ability to fight DESPITE and against the official leadership if necessary. But it must be independence not only from the proven misleaders of the class but also from EVERY left element of the bureaucracy that does not clearly and in practice submit itself to the democratic control of the ranks in struggle.

**BUILD A FIGHTING RANK AND FILE  
MOVEMENT ON A PROGRAMME OF ACTION  
AGAINST THE CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE!**



## ***James Connolly's Legacy Part 3***

# **The Confusion of Nation and Class in Irish History**

### CONNOLLY'S METHOD

James Connolly brought to bear on Irish politics a training in Marxism modified by a definite view of the Irish Question. The first two articles in this series looked at the nature of the Second International Marxism he derived from the Social Democratic Federation in the 1890's, how it was couched in terms of economic reductionism and failed to grasp the more general method of historical materialism. The second article went on to show that Connolly wrongly adopted as "socialist" the Populist tradition of the social-revolutionary of the 1840s, James Fintan Lalor, which had come to inspire him through the influence of his friend in Scotland, John Leslie.

The present article will show how Connolly's whole conception of Irish history was a further development and expression of this populism. This emerges in a number of distinct themes, centrally the collapsing together of the "nation" and the working class. Starting from the view that Pre-Norman Ireland was a communal and democratic Irish nation he goes on to portray all resistance to Norman and English conquests as revolts against the "alien" system of private property. Inevitably this leads him to deny any historically progressive role to the bourgeoisie in Ireland.

His major historical work, *Labour in Irish History*, so often claimed by the Irish left as a Marxist classic, emerges from this Marxist scrutiny as a bold, creative but essentially un-Marxist presentation of Irish history that was to seriously undermine his ability to establish revolutionary Marxism in colonial Ireland and leave enduring problems for Irish socialists in his legacy.

For James Connolly, Irish history was to serve as a wellspring of his ideas and as a weapon of propaganda throughout his political life. His friend Murtagh Lyng wrote of him in 1902:

James Connolly has a profound knowledge of ancient and modern history, especially in its applicability to the problems of social development. He is particularly well versed in Irish history, especially in the revolutionary phases of it. Connolly excels in the following and applying of abstract principles and historical parallels to the ordinary phases of our social life. (Quoted in "Socialism and Nationalism", *Three Candles*, Dublin 1948, p.19)

In the first issue of *The Harp* Connolly declared:

We propose to make a campaign among our countrymen and to rely for our method mainly upon imparting to them a correct interpretation of the facts of their history, past and present.

By a "correct interpretation" Connolly intended a Marxist analysis. His ability to provide this, however, must be critically assessed in the light of the limitations of the Marxism in which he had developed in Scotland - discussed in the first article of this series - and the way in which he had already regressed from Marxism towards petit-bourgeois perspectives in attempting to creatively address the national struggle in Ireland - discussed in the second article.

Connolly makes explicit claims about the method to be applied in approaching Irish history. Again in *The Harp* (Vol 1 No.6) he writes:

The Harp was established to show a more excellent way, to show how a socialist philosophy for Irishmen can be deduced from Irish history and ought to be so deduced; instead of the other method of striving to make socialists of Irishmen by reciting to them the unfamiliar history of England and America.

In this approach to history a misconception appears in the confusing of two distinct tasks. The first task, which was to the forefront of Karl Marx's work - as Connolly knew - placed England in a central place among the many countries whose histories enter into his analysis - Ireland included as we shall show - precisely because England was in the van of all capitalist development and best revealed the inner nature of capitalism for scientific analysis. Having elucidated the central role of class struggle and the mode of production in explaining society, Marx had the key to understanding the material basis of all past history. The second task, which is an absolute necessity for Marxists in every country - and Connolly was the first to approach the issue in Ireland - is to analyse the historical development of the economic and social forces within each country, so as to hammer out a revolutionary programme that is truly concrete in local conditions.



The misconception that already looms in Connolly's statement - and which emerges fully in his actual historical writings as we shall see - is his belief that a "socialist philosophy" can be "DEDUCED" from Irish history. This summary formula is already at odds with the Marxist approach to history.

In his own first work on Irish history, Erin's Hope (1897), we find Connolly acknowledging the conflict between the analysis to be made by the "sympathetic" student and the scientific materialist analysis of the "ardent student of sociology", i.e. Marxism:

The ardent student of sociology, who believes that the progress of the human race through the various economic stages of communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and wage slavery, has been but a preparation for the higher ordered society of the future; that the most industrially advanced countries are but, albeit often unconsciously, developing the social conditions which, since the break-up of universal tribal communism, have been rendered historically necessary for the inauguration of a new and juster economic order, in which social, political and national antagonism will be unknown, will perhaps regard Irish adherence to clan ownership at such a comparatively recent date as the 17th Century as evidence of retarded economical development, and therefore a real hindrance to progress. But the sympathetic student of history, who believes in the possibility of a people by political intuition anticipating the lessons afterwards revealed to them in the sad school of experience, will not be indisposed to join with the ardent Irish patriot in his lavish expressions of admiration for the sagacity of his Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic organisation of the Irish clan the more perfect organisation of the free society of the future. (Erin's Hope, pp 6-7, New Books 1972.)

The implications of this for Connolly's method are radical. He admits that a scientific analysis would conclude that Irish social development had been held back historically, but that a "sympathetic" analysis would reach a very different conclusion.

In The Harp (vol. 1, no. 6, p.4) he refers to two sets of impressions we all supposedly carry with us - one from our own life experiences and the other from a racial memory of the past - and writes:

We of the Harp and the Irish Socialist Federation believe in uniting both sources of influences upon our side in showing our fellow countrymen and women that the history of the Irish race combines with the history of the working class in pointing to the workers' republic - a society based on the ownership by all of the means by which all exist, as the true goal of our endeavours, the promised-land of our 1000 year journey in the wilderness.

We begin to see here that Connolly takes the ALREADY ESTABLISHED framework of Irish history as propounded among nationalists, instead of INVESTIGATING it from the Marxist standpoint of the development of the forces of production, social classes and the social formation, and centrally,

distinct historical epochs. As against the materialist method, his approach is idealist.

Centrally, he lends a purpose or teleology to Irish history. He holds that there is from early times a direction and an inner movement in history towards the socialist system. As a consequence he assimilates all the struggles of "the real Irish", against Norman feudal invaders, English mercantilist colonisers, British capitalist domination, 20th Century imperialism and native capitalism. This idealised, abstract, 1000-year struggle would end in the achievement of socialism and the recovery of the supposed communal and democratic life of Pre-Norman Ireland. Thirdly, he dissolves the distinction between the toiling peasant classes of different epochs and the modern working class, composing them into one social force under the name of an Irish "nation" that supposedly existed since Celtic times. For Connolly, this "nation" by "political intuition" and the instinctive racial sagacity of the Celt supposedly anticipates socialism and might have, so to speak, leaped over the capitalist stage of development were it not for the alien importation of capitalist social relations in property. This is the essence of a classical Populist position.

#### AN UN-MARXIST ANALYSIS

For Marx and Engels history is the progressive unfolding of the possibilities of human society, in a development driven by conflict - that is, dialectical development - from the more primitive to the more advanced. In this movement forward, which they saw as capable of suffering reverses, the transition always pivots on the conflict between the new forces of production - new classes and technical means - growing up in the old social formation, and the social relations of production - the forms of control and ownership - that increasingly hold back the new development. So, Marx and Engels correctly saw "primitive communism", a society unable yet to create a surplus of wealth which a ruling class could appropriate for its own privileges, giving way necessarily to the emergence of CLASS society - chattel slavery, feudalism, or the Asiatic mode of production. Marxism shows how this is a progressive development, just as it understands the transition to capitalism from feudalism as a stupendous step forward for mankind.

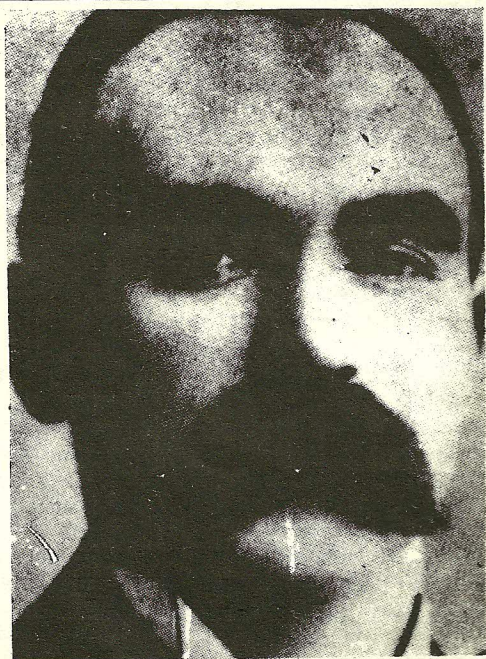
Even if it were true that a Gaelic-Celtic primitive communism persisted until broken up by a Norman-British invasion 'importing' a system of private property - and we shall see that Marx definitively refutes this - it would be totally foreign to Marxism to lament nostalgically over this inevitable eventuality or to rail against the emergence of private property as a cause of regret and woe as does Connolly:

In Ireland it was private property in land that was the original and abiding cause of all our woes. (The Harp, vol 1, No. 5 p.3.)

Connolly's backward-looking utopian conception of Celtic primitive communism is wrongly offered as superior to feudal private property. Even more mistaken, it was superior in Connolly's perspective to the capitalism which was later to replace feudalism in Ireland as the dominant mode of production.

This fundamental revision reduced the materialist analysis of Irish history (which is





James Connolly

essential for applying the Marxist programme to modern Irish society) to the repeated application of an abstract and wrong schema of which the following is the most concise expression:

The history of Ireland ever since the English invasion has been one long history of a conflict between common property represented by the Irish and private property represented by the English. (The Harp, vol 2, no.11, p.1.)

And again, in the Workers Republic in 1898:

There is only one remedy for the slavery of the working class and that remedy is the socialist republic, a system of society in which the land and all the houses, railways, factories, canals, workshops and everything necessary for work shall be owned and operated as common property much as the land of Ireland was owned by the clans of Ireland before England introduced the capitalist system amongst us at the point of a sword. (Connolly actually acknowledged that Irish society would have developed through its own stages of feudalism and capitalism but for the foreign conquest. Because it didn't, he mistakenly makes an EXCEPTION of Ireland from materialist analysis, applying instead a nationalist and populist plebeian perspective to deduce a "socialist philosophy of Irish history".)

Connolly arrives at a conception of historical progress that harks back to IDEALISED images of more primitive society, a cyclical conception to which many of the 19th Century "Populists" also held. The earlier Irish exponent of Populism and inspiration to Connolly, James Fintan Lalor, equally looked backwards and idealised the past to find a vision of a harmonious society that might escape the ravages of capitalist development (see previous article in this series) but Lalor looked back only to the small scale producers, artisans and peasants, of early capitalism in general and not to ancient Ireland.

#### MARXISM AGAINST POPULISM

Marxism in Russia developed its materialist analysis only in the fight against the populist and

nationalist intelligentsia. The 'father of Russian Marxism', Plekhanov, fought against the abstract schematism of the populist Tikmirov in terms that could apply equally to Connolly:

We have already seen that in his opinion history has some kind of independent abstract "movement towards the socialist system"; given such a movement one can with impunity criticise all the motive powers and springs which first compelled progressive mankind to face with sober senses their real conditions of life and their relations with their kind. (Our Differences, Plekhanov, Selected Philosophical Works I, p.95.)

Marxism sees no such abstract movement. The "motive powers and springs" of material necessity and social conflict alone can drive history ultimately forward. The historical "process" in any epoch is, in concrete reality, nothing more than the actual contradictions and conflicts stemming from the material realities of class society. To think otherwise can only blind one to the practical tasks of revolution against capitalism. Later we shall see that in Connolly's case his historical schema blinded him to the historically progressive character of nationalist bourgeois movements, and simultaneously to the BOURGEOIS character of the REVOLUTIONARY nationalism of his own time.

#### Connolly & Marx on Pre-Norman Ireland

Let us turn now to the contention that Connolly was in fact wrong about the nature of pre-Norman Irish society. Marx, in the writings now published in English as "Ethnological Notebooks" (referred to below as EN), made a detailed analysis of pre-Norman Ireland in which his characteristic thoroughness in going over the available sources arrives at a radically different conclusion to Connolly's.

In looking at pre-Norman Ireland Connolly in practice focusses on what he considered to be the social relations of production, with communal ownership of land as the exclusive form of property. For Connolly this defines Gaelic society overall as "communal" and "democratic". Other forces of production e.g. mills, looms, weavers etc. he merely mentions in passing. Marx, like Connolly, was aware of the existence of tribal forms of land tenure on a very large scale in pre-Norman Ireland:

The tenure in land in Ireland was essentially a tribal or family right ... all the members of a tribe or family in Ireland had an equal right to their appropriate share of the land occupied by the whole. (EN p.304)

All the unappropriated waste-lands are in a more especial way the property of the tribe as a whole and no portion can theoretically be subjected to more than a temporary occupation" (EN p.289)

However, in order to characterise the dominant mode of production and the social formation based on it, Marx did not take a single force of production in isolation from the other forces - such as cattle which greatly determined the productivity of land - nor did he overlook the actual relations of production - the real control of property in the creation of wealth and how it determined relations between the different classes which he points to in pre-Norman Ireland. Whereas Connolly makes do with a timeless schema of



communal ownership and egalitarianism which comes to ruin only at the hands of the invader's alien system, Marx's writings by contrast are rich in analysis of the new forces of production giving rise to new social relations which become pitted in class struggle and war against the remnants of communal control of land. Marx shows that these remnants were being actively challenged and already far advanced in decay by the time the Senchus Mor was written.

Marx notes that the growing power of chieftains in Ireland had transformed them into developing feudal lords before the oldest texts known were written, i.e. chiefly the Senchus Mor. Marx followed the scholar Whitley Stokes in attributing the Senchus to the 11th Century but later scholarship has placed them much earlier, most probably dating from the 8th Century.

Connolly, on the other hand, was arguing that an ancient classless society was not extinguished until the Cromwellian plantations in the 17th Century, more than 800 years after the Senchus Mor was written. Marx notes of the emergent Irish feudalism:

Even according to the Irish texts apparently oldest much of the tribal territory appears to have been permanently alienated to the sub-tribes, families or dependent chiefs. The glosses and commentaries show that before they were written this process had gone very far indeed. The power of the Chief grows first through the process elsewhere called "commendation", through which the free tribesman becomes "his man" and remains in a state of dependance having various degrees; further through his increasing authority over the waste-lands of the tribal territory and from the servile or semi-servile colonies he plants there; finally from the material strength he acquires through the numbers of his immediate retainers and associates, most of whom stand to him in more or less servile relations. (EN p.294)  
By "commendation" Marx is drawing out the similarities to European feudalism in which a vassal was a "commended man".

#### THE ORGANISATION OF PRODUCTION

Repeatedly, Marx notes that availability of land was not an economic problem in itself:

The difficulty - in ancient Ireland - was not to obtain land but the means of cultivating it. The great owners of cattle were the various chiefs, whose primitive superiority to the other tribesmen in this respect was probably owing to their natural functions as military leaders of the tribe. On the other hand it appears to be entailed by the Brehon laws that the chiefs were pressed by the difficulty of finding sufficient pasture for their herds. They got their growing power over the waste land through particular groups which they dominated, but the most fruitful portions of the tribal territory were apparently those which the free tribesmen occupied. Hence the system of giving and receiving stock to which two subtracts of the Senchus Mor are devoted. (EN p.297)

What then were the means of making productive the land one had or could control? There were implements, oxen - the tractor of the iron age -

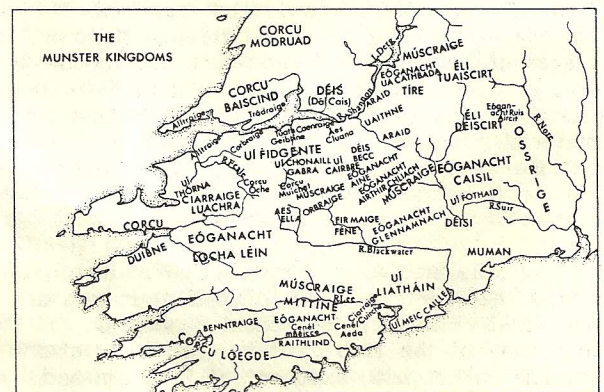
and human toilers. The latter included tenants-at-will ("fuidhirs" broken from their own tribes); "sen-chleithe" or hereditary serfs; varying numbers of slaves at the base of society; and different types of vassals resting on this base. Marx gives detailed consideration to cattle, oxen, tenants-at-will, hereditary serfs, base and free tenants and vassalage relationships. He draws a picture of a quickening transition from decaying clan society to a native Irish Feudalism.

In his analysis cattle - both stock in general and oxen - play the role of "fief" in binding vassals to their overlords in this period of transition. In tillage they served as instruments of production and sources of manure. When distributed to vassals by clan chiefs who were developing into feudal lords they were the basis for a return of rent in kind while allowing the vassal the means of subsistence. Thus vassals supplied the lord with some or all of the young cattle and with milk and manure. The vassals in turn had the means of imposing the same kind of fief on the serfs below them!

Horned cattle showed their greatest value when groups of men settled on spaces of land and betook themselves to the cultivation of food grain. First they were valued for their flesh and milk, but still in very early times a distinct special importance belonged to them as instrument or medium of exchange. In Brehon laws horned cattle figure as medium of exchange; fines, dues, rents and returns are calculated in livestock, not exclusively in kine, but nearly so. They constantly refer to two standards of value, 'sed' and 'cumhal'; 'cumhal' could originally have meant a female slave, but 'sed' is plainly used for amount or quantity of livestock. But later cattle were primarily valued for their use in tillage, their labour and their manure. (EN p.297)

#### FROM FREE TRIBESMEN TO VASSALS

The role of stock in establishing the 'fief' bonds between classes, transforming free tribesmen into feudal vassals is referred to as follows:



9th century map of feudal dynasties of Munster, from O'Corrain's 'Ireland before the Normans.' He notes, 'in classical Irish law, society is divided into three grades, kings, lords and commons...What distinguished the noble from the commoner, apart from birth and wealth, was his possession of clients, bound to him by specific but limited ties of dependence. (p.42)



Thus the Chiefs appear in the Brehon laws as perpetually giving stock and the tribesmen as receiving it. By taking stock the free Irish tribesman becomes the Ceile or Kyle, the vassal or man of his Chief, owing him not only rent but service and homage. The exact effects of commendation are thus produced.

The more stock the tribesman accepts from his Chief the lower is the status to which he sinks. Hence the two classes of Saer and Daer tenants corresponding to the status of free and higher base tenants of an English manor.

The Saer-Stock tenant receives only a limited amount of stock from the Chief, remains a freeman, retains his tribal rights in their integrity; the normal period of his tenancy was 7 years and at the end of it he became entitled to the cattle which he had in his possession. In the meantime he had the advantage of employing them in tillage, and the Chief received the growth and increase (i.e. the young and the manure) and milk. Similarly it is expressly laid down that the Chief is entitled to homage and manual labour as well; manual labour is explained to mean the service of the vassal in reaping the Chief's harvest and in assisting to build his castle or fort; it is stated that in lieu of manual labour, the vassal might be required to follow his Chief to the wars.

Daer-stock tenancy arose, when either any large addition to the stock deposited with the Saer-stock tenant occurred or an unusual quantity was accepted in the first instance by the tribesman. The Daer-stock tenant had parted with some portion of his freedom and his duties are invariably referred to as very onerous. ... If the Chief placed three heifers with a tenant he became entitled to the calf, the refections - i.e. the right of the Chief who had given the stock to come with a company of a certain number and feast at the Daer-stock tenant's house, at particular periods, for a fixed number of days - and the labour. This rent in kind or food rent had in this, its most archaic form, nothing to do with the value of the tenant's land, but solely to the value of the Chief's stock deposited with the tenant; it evolved later into a rent payable in respect of the tenant's land. The most onerous impositions on the Daer-stock tenant were the refections. (EN p.298-9)

#### BREAKING UP COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP

In dissolving the remnants of communal land ownership Marx assigns a crucial role to the tenant-at-will groupings planted in waste-lands.

The most crucial fraction of those classes which the Chief settled on the unappropriated tribal lands (were) those called Fuidhirs - strangers and fugitives from other territories, in fact men who had broken the original tribal bond which gave them a place in the community. It is evident from the Brehon law that this class is very numerous; they speak on various occasions about the desertion of their lands by families or portions of families. In certain circumstances the rupture of the tribal bond and the flight of those who break it were eventualities handled by the law. The responsibility of tribes, sub-tribes and families for the crimes of their members ... might be prevented by compelling a member of the

group to withdraw from its circle; and the Book of Aicill gives the legal procedure which is to be observed in the expulsion, the tribe paying certain fines to the Chief and the Church and proclaiming the fugitive. The result was probably to fill the country with "broken men" and these could find a home and protection by becoming Fuidhir tenants; everything which tended to disturb the Ireland of the Brehon laws tended to multiply this particular class.

The Fuidhir tenant was exclusively dependent on the chief and only connected to the tribe through the latter; the Chief was moreover responsible for them. They cultivated his land and were, thus, the first tenants-at-will known to Ireland. ... On the other hand the Chief had a major interest in increasing Fuidhir tenants. one of the tracts says 'He brings in Fuidhirs to increase his wealth'. The interests really injured were those of the tribe which suffered as a body by the curtailment of the waste land available for pasture. (EN p.301-2)

The Fuidhir as a type of tenant-at-will and another of the type, the Bothach - who had probably been driven down to his status by the lack of enough land and cattle for economic self-sufficiency - were freer to move than the vassals in base-clientship as they could part with their lord at any time by giving due notice that they proposed to abandon their holding, and surrendering two-thirds of the product of their husbandry. But they were also more liable to move downwards into the class at the base of Irish feudalism - as with feudalism elsewhere - the hereditary serfs or Sen-chleithe. The contemporary historian of the period, McNicholl writes that "the sen chleithe was bound to the land and passed with it when alienated as an appurtenance". He continues:

"Lower yet was the slave, male or female, a chattel whose owner possessed the power of life or death over him or her; yet not quite such a chattel that he could be given in fief like cattle. With him ranked the prisoner taken in war who had not been ransomed, who was as much at his captor's mercy as the slave". (Ireland Before the Vikings, Gill History of Ireland, I, p.68.)

(Ironically, Connolly acknowledged slavery in Pre-Norman Ireland in *The Harp* in 1908 - Socialism and Nationalism Collection, Three Candles p.84)

#### BREHON LAW

The process of forcefully appropriating waste land and colonising it with tenants-at-will gave way to new groupings and relations that undermined clan society. The Brehon legal forms both disguised the realities of feudal exploitation and provided the framework through which it actually came into existence.

The chief who "gave stock" i.e. made vassals of the recipients, was not always of the same tribe as those who received it.

"Brehon law sought to place barriers in the way of establishing this vassalage relation between a tribesman and a strange chief. But there are abundant admissions that this happened. Every nobleman is assumed to be as a rule rich in stock and to have an interest in dispersing his herds



by the practice of giving stock. The enriched peasant, the Bo-aire, had Ceiles who accepted stock from him. Hence the new groups formed in this way were often quite distinct from the old groups composed of the Chief and his clan. Again the new relation was not confined to Aires or noblemen and Ceiles (i.e. free but non noble tribesmen). The Bo-aire certainly, and apparently the higher Chiefs also, accepted stock on occasion from chieftains more exalted than themselves and in the end to "give stock" came to mean what was elsewhere meant by "commendation".

...

The natural growth of feudalism was not as some eminent recent writers have supposed, entirely distinct from the process by which the authority of the Chief over the tribe or village was extended, but rather formed part of it. While the unappropriated waste lands were falling into his domain, the villages or tribesmen were coming through natural agencies under his personal power. (EN p.300)

This growing power and wealth could be used to subordinate increasing sections of the free tribesmen who occupied "the most fruitful portions of the tribal territory", by turning them into payers of rent in kind (cattle, milk, refectations) and later payers of rent on their land.

Marx's understanding of pre-Norman Ireland, therefore, contradicts Connolly's assumptions about it. Connolly, guided by nationalistic sentiment, and with no more basis than a romanticised understanding of the Brehon Laws with their supposed clan ownership of land, conjured up an entire social order based on "democracy" lasting until about 1650. Even if it had existed, such terms in any case could not be applied to primitive society, as the basis of primitive-communal forms is understood by Marxism to lie in an economic scarcity so profound that it compelled groups to co-operate and share the results of their toil for the sake of bare survival.

Historically the only forms of "democracy" that have existed have been forms of a ruling class democracy which were enjoyed fully only by ruling classes and were sustained materially by massive exploitation of a majority of toilers - whether the slaves of ancient Greece or the wage-slaves of bourgeois society.

#### A NATIVE IRISH FEUDALISM

By contrast, Marx investigated the oldest available literature with a critical scientific eye for evidence of the real social relations rooted in a newly developing mode of production. He used the writings of scholars who had translated and commented on the oldest documents of pre-Norman Irish clan society (which in any case was also an exploitative class society, with clan forms, much more recent in origin than the essentially "pre-historic" primitive-communal society). Marx concluded that Irish clan society had undergone rapid decay and replacement by the elements of a native Feudalism before a date he assumed to be about 1100. With recent corrections in dating the old documents, Marx's view, corroborated by modern bourgeois scholarship, forces us to conclude that a feudal mode of production was in the ascendant a full three centuries or more before Norman feudalism penetrated the island, and all of eight

centuries or more before the Gaelic civilisation fell finally. By the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 a native Irish feudalism was the dominant mode of production.

For Connolly the period from the Norman invasion in 1169 to the Cromwellian victory over the Gaelic resistance in the 1650s was a struggle between an imagined native system of communal property and a foreign so-called "feudal-capitalist" system of private property. The scientific view, however, shows that the conflict up until the War of the Roses and Tudor absolutism was between the advanced and highly centralised Anglo-Norman feudalism and a more primitive Irish feudalism. The victory of the invader was made inevitable by the strengths of the Norman system. It had developed to the full the scope of military obligation as a service required of vassals and as a general levy on all free men. Irish feudalism, on the other hand, left the link between fief and military service more indeterminate. And in relation to the economic and social power of its rulers, the Anglo-Norman system had the advantage that when feudal tenures expired, the fief lands were remitted to the Crown. In the Irish system there was an the absence of any central "register" of titles though there is evidence of local chancery in the decade before the Anglo-Norman invasion (New History of Ireland, Vol 8, p.72). More importantly, vassalages could end, typically after seven years, without such remission. Thus was prevented the development of the kind of vast royal demesne enjoyed by the Anglo-Norman overlordship. Norman feudalism evolved a fully explicit rule of royal and noble succession whereas the native feudalism did not. Struggles over succession were the rule rather than the exception in Ireland.

The victory of the vastly superior Norman system of feudalism had its other side in the cultural assimilation of the Normans to Gaelic language and customs and the integration of many of the Irish chiefs into new political order. Cultural assimilation of conquering invaders is not historically rare. It serves to underline, however, the similarity in essential property relations of the two social systems - both feudal class systems, both rooted in a similar mode of production based on the exploitative ownership of means of production of a similar kind

Modern bourgeois study of Pre-Norman Ireland sharply contradicts the claims which Connolly, in contrast to Marx, took uncritically from the nationalist histories of his time. The "scholars" of modern Ireland, however, are rarely found to characterise Pre-Norman Ireland scientifically in terms of its class nature and mode of production. The nationalist myths about Brehon-law Ireland thus continue to have wide acceptance, not least among sections of the present-day Republican movement.

#### Connolly's Irish 'Nation'

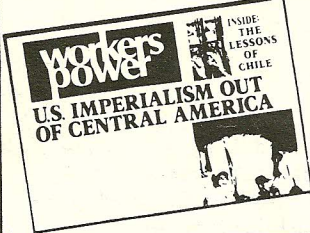
Inherent in all of Connolly's thought is an ahistorical idea of the "nation" that is clearly at odds with the Marxist tradition. It is a part of his legacy that remains a source of confusion in the traditions of "Republican Socialism" which he continues to inspire.

For Marx and Engels, nations are the creation of a developing bourgeois society. In the Communist



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drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilised world the national state is TYPICAL and normal for the capitalist period. (p.8-9)

Nation-states with more than one language were possible also but were not so well adapted to the requirements of a developing capitalism; so that a common language did not in itself necessarily mark out a nation and certainly did not create nations. Historically underlying the development of national movements for self-determination is always the tendency of capitalistic development to concentrate and unify as explained in the Communist Manifesto quoted above. Such development may in fact be transplanted into the colonies of capitalist nations and in the epoch of progressive capitalism was even capable of bringing about, as in the United States, economic independence from the former colonial power.

Manifesto we find their emergence described as follows.

The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected, provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, become lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff". (Communist Manifesto, Progress edition, p.48.)

The slogan of the "nation state" and nationalist ideology are thus necessary elements of the bourgeois programme for its own development. The nation-state becomes a key means, a market reservoir, for intensifying and concentrating the accumulation of capital. Thus, for Marx and Engels the "nation" only has meaning within a definite historical epoch, that of capitalist dominance.

Lenin defended this analysis of the nation-state slogan as specific to the epoch of the 'final victory of capitalism over feudalism':-

What should be understood by that term - the self-determination of nations? Should the answer be sought in legal definitions deduced from all sorts of general concepts of law? Or is it rather to be sought in a historico-economic study of the national movements? (The Right of Nations to Self Determination, Progress, p.7)

Throughout the world the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production the bourgeoisie must capture the home market. ... Unity and unimpeded development of language are the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism... Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of NATIONAL STATES, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most profound economic factors

Increasingly as colonial powers came to carve up the entire globe, capitalist development in the colonies relied on the export of capital by the developed nations. Thus a dependent or merely commercial, and not a competing native manufacturing bourgeoisie, tended to predominate in imperialised nations. A bourgeoisie, however weakly developed, emerges necessarily however in the colony and inevitably aspires to have the advantages of a national state, even though it may be incapable of struggle for self-determination.

Increasingly in the 20th Century, weak colonial or semi-colonial bourgeois classes were unable to struggle against imperialism for the national democratic programme - land to the tiller, universal suffrage, Constituent Assembly, civil liberties etc. Sections of the petty-bourgeoisie of town or country, however, take up the fight for such a programme, often securing the revolutionary support of masses of peasants or workers - as recently in Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, Grenada, El Salvador. What is significant, however, is that the programmatic heart of those struggles never goes beyond the framework on an independent bourgeois nation state, a framework which can neither fundamentally alter national economic dependence on imperialism nor solve the problems of the working class or peasantry. For socialists seeking to develop such mass struggle to the fullest potential - AS THEY MUST - and thereby to win it to the distinctly different programme for working class power and international socialism, a method is required that explicitly distinguishes the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian programmes so as to combine them with the necessary flexibility in the heat of struggle. Without a deep-going and historical understanding of national-democratic movements, however, such a method cannot be worked out.

James Connolly's failure in this task, therefore, cannot be unconnected to his conception of the nation and nationalism. Failing to see the nation as the specific creation of the bourgeois epoch, he increasingly lost sight of the inherent bourgeois class character, and therefore of the limits of the revolutionary nationalist banner under which the Irish labouring masses were roused against British imperialism. As events after Connolly's heroic death were to show, mass revolt under that revolutionary nationalist banner only succeeded in installing the bourgeoisie in power in an independent partitioned Free State in which the



back of the all-Ireland working class was broken. Neither republicanism nor republican socialism to this day have decisively and scientifically overcome this confusion about the "nation" and the limits of the national struggle. They continue both in strategy and tactics to disastrously relegate any fight for the proletarian programme.

For Connolly the "nation" was something that existed across all the epochs of Irish history - an essentially metaphysical and un-Marxist idea. He implies that an essentially communal and democratic nation exists long before the bourgeois epoch. Speaking of the 'Irish question', he wrote in *Erin's Hope*:

Its real origin and inner meaning lay in the circumstances that the two opposing nations held fundamentally different ideas upon the vital question of property in land. ... But, whereas, in the majority of countries now called civilised, such primitive Communism had almost entirely disappeared before the dawn of history and had at no time acquired a higher status than that conferred by the social sanction of unlettered and uneducated tribes, in Ireland the system formed part of the well defined social organisations of a nation of scholars and students, recognised by Chief and Tanist, Brehon and Bard, as the inspiring principle of their collective life, and the basis of their national system of jurisprudence. (*New Books edition, 1972, p.6.*)

As the Irish septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they rejected or accepted the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by their loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers henceforward will base their fight for freedom, not upon the winning or losing the right to talk in an Irish parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops and farms upon which a people's bread and liberties depend. As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question, the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself, in the last analysis, into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production in Ireland. (*Labour in Irish History, p.134*)

The "national struggle", he therefore defines as having the same class content across all the epochs - the issue of communal property as against private property in the means of production - with the result that no tactics are advanced to relate to workers on the basis of the pervasive aspirations for national rights in his own time which tied workers to the bourgeois forces as long as they remained unresolved. In his general conceptions and theory, and in his best known slogans he wrongly equates the the national question and the class question of the workers as the same thing. Failing to distinguish them he is thus unable in practice to tactically combine them to any effect.

His much acclaimed slogan - the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour, the cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland - far from being a leap forward for Marxism in Ireland, in reality embodies a profound confusion. It remains founded on a populist misconception of the "nation". As a political slogan it tends to liquidate the

political independence of the working class into revolutionary nationalism.

### ROMANTICISED NATION

His idealised Irish nation therefore includes the modern labour movement, the 18th Century revolutionary nationalists and even a landlord, Laurence O'Toole, Abbot of Glendalough (1163) and Archbishop of Dublin, who was chief witness to treaties between Irish Chiefs and Henry II, e.g. the Treaty of Windsor:

When the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League and made the land struggle the basis of their warfare, they were not only placing themselves in touch once more with those inexhaustible quarries of material interests from which all the great Irish statesmen from Laurence O'Toole to Wolfe Tone drew the stones upon which they built their edifice of a militant Irish patriotic organisation, but they were also, consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of labour. (*Labour in Irish History, p.131-2.*)



M M J Robespierre (1758-1794)  
-bourgeois revolutionary model for Tone

Another crucial consequence, as we shall see below, is that he denies any real or general revolutionary role ever to the Irish bourgeoisie in Irish history. Furthermore, he is forced to re-define historical figures, such as Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken and Robert Emmet as leaders of the Irish plebeian masses. These alone are seen as continuing the fight 'throughout all the ages' against feudal-capitalist and alien private property in the 1000-year journey to a classless society. No progressive content is allowed to the campaigns and programmes of constitutional nationalist leaders at any time in Irish history. They are written off as heretics to the social struggles of the "real Irish".



## Connolly & the Irish Bourgeois Revolution

In chapters five to nine of *Labour In Irish History* Connolly re-scripts the drama of Ireland's bourgeois-democratic revolution and re-casts the actors. His overarching concern is to demonstrate that genuine Irish separatism took its inspiration from the interests of the toiling and propertyless masses at all times. This led him to misunderstand the specific bourgeois character and limits of the United Irishmen, of Tone, of Emmet etc. and to dress them in the garb of precursors of socialism.

No doubt he correctly sensed that in his own time the bourgeoisie was becoming a moribund class and that the Irish bourgeoisie was unreliable in the struggle for national independence. But this led him to misinterpret the political and social content of the pre-Union upheaval, a misunderstanding that reinforced the confusions of his own programmatic attitude to the petit-bourgeois revolutionary nationalist currents of his own time.

Connolly's non-recognition of an indigenous Irish feudalism is followed by a refusal to recognise the emergence of an indigenous capitalist interest. The most that he concedes is that the implanted capitalism became 'disloyal' to British rule because of legislation restricting trade in the 18th Century.

Already by the outbreak of the Williamite war in the generation succeeding Cromwell, the industries of the North of Ireland had so far developed that the "Prentice Boys" of Derry were the dominating factor in determining the attitude of that city towards the contending English kings, and, with the close of that war, industries developed so quickly in the country as to become a menace to the capitalists of England to restrict and fetter their growth, which they accordingly did. With the passing of this restrictive legislation against Irish industries, Irish capitalism became discontented and disloyal without, as a whole, the power or courage to be revolutionary. It was a re-staging of the ever-recurring drama of English invasion and Anglo-Irish disaffection, with the usual economic background. We have pointed out in a previous chapter how each generation of English adventurers settling upon the soil as owners, resented the coming of the next generation, and that their so-called Irish patriotism was simply inspired by the fear that they would be dispossessed in their turn as they had dispossessed others. What applies to the land-owning "patriots" applies also to the manufacturers. The Protestant capitalists, with the help of the English, Dutch and other adventurers, dispossessed the native Catholics and became prosperous; as their commerce grew it became a serious rival to that of England, and accordingly the English capitalists compelled legislation against it, and immediately the erstwhile "English Garrison in Ireland" became an Irish "patriot" party. (*Labour In Irish History*, Ch. VIII, p.51.)

Connolly assimilates the emerging class of manufacturing capitalists in Ireland to the "ever-recurring" and "false" patriotism of landowning colons, i.e. Anglo-Norman landlords. Certainly Irish capitalism was slow to reach

revolutionary conclusions. The point is, however, that the developing bourgeoisie of the 18th Century in Ireland just as elsewhere, viewed historically, represented the interests of a new, capitalist mode of production which was necessarily pitched into opposition against feudal and semi-feudal - and colonial - barriers wherever it met them. To portray it in the same terms as the land-holding aristocracy of the previous century is to miss the point that the aristocracy had quite opposed interests to the rising class of capitalists, had no interest in creating a home market, no interest in national independence, no desire for democracy or a Republic, or religious freedom. Moreover, across the continent of Europe in that period it was precisely the bourgeoisie that originated such slogans. The Irish capitalist class may have been, indeed was, at a greater disadvantage but it was, nevertheless, the rise of this class that provided the conditions for a modern movement for a democratic revolution and the appetite for such ideas as were beamed out from the American and French revolutionary ferments 1776-82, 1789.

Connolly, unfortunately, though forced to acknowledge the existence of capitalism in Ireland as early as the 17th Century, was precluded from correctly understanding its revolutionary and progressive character in that epoch because of his preconception, his schema, of Irish history as the record of "labour" as the true patriotic force in an Irish nation supposedly existing across different epochs:-

This book does not aspire to be a history of labour in Ireland; it is rather a record of labour in Irish history. For that reason the plan of the book has precluded any attempt to deal in detail with the growth, development or decay of industry in Ireland, except as it affected our general argument. That argument called for an explanation of the position of labour in the great epochs of our modern history, and with the attitude of Irish leaders to the hopes, aspirations and necessities of those who live by labour. (*Labour In Irish History*, Ch. XVI, p.124.)

Connolly's concern to vindicate the honour of all the exploited propertyless classes on one side, as the true nation across the ages, and the propertied classes on the other side as the betrayers or false patriots, is an un-Marxist approach to history. It certainly offers "materialist" economic "explanations" of social conditions but simply to fill in the scene, as it were, for the drama of the toilers in Irish history. This is illustrated in the direct continuation of the above passage from *Labour In Irish History*.

Occasionally, as when analysing the "prosperity" of Grattan's Parliament, and the decay of Irish trade following the Legislative Union in 1800, we have been constrained to examine the fundamental causes which make for the progress, industrially or commercially, of some nations and the retrogression of others. For this apparent digression no apology is made, and none is called for; it was impossible to present our readers with a clear historical position of labour at any given moment, without explaining the economic and political causes which contributed to make possible or necessary its attitude.



Connolly thus aspires to view history from outlook of the exploited, subjectively as it were. He fails to distinguish historical epochs and in each of them to analyse the objective CLASS RELATIONS in terms of the totality, in relation to the specific mode of production and the social order. He fails to thresh out clearly what is progressive in each epoch and period, objectively. Marx was the most passionate partisan of the exploited and chronicler of their misery and oppression, and the most fearless prosecutor of the crimes of the exploiter, but in contrast to Connolly, this never blinded him to the objective analysis of the totality. It was of central importance to correctly understand what was progressive in developing the forces of production - factories, machines, techniques and especially the working class itself as a new historic class power. For Marxism it is essential at all times to carefully assess the progressive or reactionary character of bourgeois POLITICS in any period from this standpoint, THE BETTER to simultaneously organise the working class for its own class interest against the bourgeoisie.

Connolly thus inserts Labour's interests as the true content of the national struggle where Marxism has always seen it as the struggle of the bourgeoisie for the conditions most favourable to their exploitation of labour and accumulation of capital. From this standpoint it is possible for Connolly to lump the patriotism of the 18th Century bourgeoisie together with the "Patriot Parliament" convened by king James II in 1689, and even the "patriotism" of the Anglo-Norman landlords who joined with native Irish landlords in the 1641 rebellion, as agents of a "feudal-capitalist" and "foreign" system of private property.

His treatment of Swift, Molyneux and Lucas, who actually prefigured the later bourgeois nationalism of the 18th Century, is simply to dispatch them as mere repetitions of Sarsfield who had defended Anglo-Irish and Irish feudal property against the threat of William of Orange.

Of the trio of patriots - Swift, Molyneux and Lucas - it may be noted that their fight was simply a repetition of the fight waged by Sarsfield and his followers in their day - a change of persons and of stage costume truly, but no change of character; a battle between the kites and the crows.

They found themselves members of a privileged class, living upon the plunder of the Irish people; but early perceived, to their dismay, that they could not maintain their position as a privileged class without the aid of the English army; and in return for supplying that army the English ruling class were determined to have the lion's share of the plunder. The Irish Parliament was essentially an English institution; nothing like it existed before the Norman Conquest. In that respect it was on the same footing as landlordism, capitalism, and their natural-born child - pauperism. England sent a swarm of adventurers to conquer Ireland; having partly succeeded, these adventurers established a Parliament to settle disputes amongst themselves, to contrive measures for robbing the natives, and to prevent their fellow-tyrants who had stayed in England, from claiming the spoil. But in the course of time the section of land-thieves resident in England did claim a right to supervise the doings of the adventurers in

Ireland, and consequently to control their Parliament. Hence arose Poyning's Law, and the subordination of Dublin Parliament to London Parliament. Finding this subordinate position of the Parliament enabled the English ruling class to strip the Irish workers of the fruits of their toil, the more far-seeing of the privileged class in Ireland became alarmed lest the stripping process should go too far, and leave nothing for them to fatten upon.

At once they became patriots, anxious that Ireland - which in their phraseology, meant the ruling class in Ireland - should be free from the control of the Parliament in England. (LIH Ch. VI, p.21)

Molyneux's attack (1698) on the subjection of Dublin's Parliament (of Cromwellian and Williamite interests), Swift's "seditious" proposal for the universal use of Irish manufactures (1720) and Lucas's claim for Ireland's equal entitlement to England's freedoms (1747-49) have their significance entirely destroyed here in Connolly's confused presentation of a period of transition to the establishment of capitalism in Britain and Ireland.

Connolly's historical opus proceeds to write off the Irish bourgeoisie as a class opposed to the feudal aristocracy or capable of sustaining a fight for democracy, independence etc., at ANY time in Irish history. He concentrates on key political figures in the course of Irish history and draws a line between the constitutional reformers (such as Grattan who entered the Irish Parliament in 1755 and O'Connell, active from 1799 to the 1840s) and the revolutionary democratic wing - Wolfe Tone (1763-98), Robert Emmet (1779-1803), and later John Mitchel (1814-75). While the reformers are portrayed as representatives of the bourgeoisie and variously castigated for expressing anti-working class sentiments or being freethinkers, the revolutionaries are seen as instinctively representing the interests of the "real producers", the proletariat and peasantry. While a distinction must certainly be made, we believe that Connolly was quite wrong to ascribe quasi-socialist views and motives to Tone, the United Irishmen or Emmet. Moreover, his understanding of the "classic" bourgeois or middle-class type is also an erroneous backwards reading from the Home Rulers of Connolly's own time to a quite different period when the capitalists were very much a revolutionary force.

#### GRATTAN'S PARLIAMENT AND THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS

Henry Grattan is seen by Connolly as the bourgeois archetype:

It will be seen that Mr. Grattan was the ideal capitalist statesman; his spirit was the spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate. He cared more for the interests of property than for human rights or for the supremacy of any religion.

His early bent in that direction is seen in a letter he sent to his friend, a Mr. Broome, dated November 3, 1767, and reproduced by his son in his edition of the life and speeches of his father. The letter shows the eminently respectable anti-revolutionary, religious Mr. Henry Grattan to have been at heart, a



free-thinker, free-lover, and epicurean philosopher, who had early understood the wisdom of not allowing these opinions to be known to the common multitude whom he aspired to govern.

Certainly, Grattan was not a revolutionary - he was prepared to be rewarded by the Irish "Commons" for his role in the 1778-82 period; but neither was he the "spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate", or even of the developing bourgeoisie!

Grattan was initially a protege of the aristocratic Earl of Charlemont (1728-99) and "Grattan's Parliament", the "Commons" which took its name from him, was hardly more a Parliament of the bourgeoisie than of landowners on his account. The English-appointed executive had directly usurped much of the power of patronage formerly in aristocratic hands, by 1772. The Commons, since 1768 to be 'elected' every eight years, saw the rise of the reforming opposition movement after 1772. It included many lawyers, led by Flood and joined by Grattan in 1775. It attempted to resist the raising of Irish troops which might be used against the Americans, with whom they had sympathies. This Patriot Party's programme sought to copy the constitutional reforms won in England, a 'free constitution' for a 'Protestant nation' within a loyal colony. In this context Grattan was a bridging figure attempting to strike a balance between the interests of the propertied classes in Ireland - the landed aristocracy, and the merchant and manufacturing capitalists.

Henry Grattan



It was the American Revolution of 1775-79 that weakened the British "mercantilist" policy of restricting Irish trade and required the raising of the Irish Volunteers for the defence of Ireland when Britain withdrew its armed forces for the American war. The Volunteers became a force for reform against the same mercantile restrictions on Irish trade as affected the other colonies. Grattan rode with this tide and, with Charlemont, sought reforms under the pressure of the increasingly broad-based Volunteers. Free trade, the repeal of Poyning's Law of 1495 which made Irish Parliaments subject, and the repeal of the 1719 Statute 6 of George I on Irish court judgements, were reforms which could only be enforced by the creation of a permanent force out of the Volunteers. But the success of the American Revolution and the re-constitution of the English garrison in Ireland by 1783 presented a formidable challenge to the Irish propertied classes. Instead of having a showdown they accepted a temporary retreat. Indeed, from 1783 the more conservative wing - the aristocracy and conservative elements of the

bourgeoisie - defected, and Grattan impotently sought to straddle the divide. But the manufacturing bourgeoisie had still to stamp their mark on future events.

Connolly, by virtue of his historical schema, could not or would not allow that this was the case. For him, the Irish bourgeoisie may be written off by 1783. The disarming of the different corps of the Irish Volunteers - by stealth, agreement or the threat and use of force - is for Connolly the final watershed in the separatism of native capitalism as a whole:

...the capitalist class did not feel themselves strong enough to hold the ship of state against the aristocracy on the one hand and the people on the other, they felt impelled to choose the only alternative - viz., to elect to throw in their lot with one or other of the contending parties. They chose to put their trust in the aristocracy, abandoned the populace, and as a result were deserted by the class whom they had trusted, and went down into bankruptcy and slavery with the class they had betrayed. (LIH, Ch. VI, p.32.)

In this manner, Connolly dispatches the Irish capitalist class as a whole and redefines the whole subsequent period up to 1798 as the convergence of the workers and peasants of Catholic and Protestant religions, independent of and in opposition to indigenous capitalism and all propertied interests, under the banner of a democratic independent Republic in which the social question of the real producers would be solved. With the dissolution of the November-December 1783 convention of delegates of the Irish Volunteers, Connolly effectively ignores the subsequent evolution of the Volunteers into a more republican and revolutionary organisation which was ultimately to fuse with the United Irishmen after 1791.

He also ignores the fact that a parliamentary minority continued to operate as an opposition in the Dublin House of Commons and that Grattan was among this opposition grouping. In this way the capitalist class and the Volunteers are dumped as a whole and the scene is set for Connolly's characterisation of a straightforward regrouping of the toilers on one side and the aristocracy on the other, the age-old story:

The working men fought, the capitalists sold out and the lawyers bluffed.

Then, as ever in Ireland, the fate of the country depended upon the issue of the struggle between the forces of aristocracy and the forces of democracy. The working class in town and the peasantry in the country were enthusiastic over the success of the revolutionary forces in America and France, and were burning with a desire to emulate their deeds in Ireland. (LIH p.37.)

With a kind of chop-logic, Connolly "closes the chapter" on the Volunteers in 1783 and opens the new theme of plebeian democratic republicanism with the "contemporaneous" founding of the United Irishmen (LIH, Ch. VII, p.43) - though it was another seven years before that organisation was founded. He sets out to heighten the contrast between two trends: the Volunteers in the period of the parliamentary reforms of Grattan & Co., as against the subsequent revolution and insurrection led by the United Irishmen. It is more significant for Connolly than any contrast between 'reform' and 'revolution'; it is a contrast between the



"typical" middle-class attitude to revolution and that of the popular masses, the workers and oppressed tenantry. By opposing two supposedly contemporaneous trends in this way instead of recognising that a revolutionary bourgeois movement had yet to assert itself, within the limits and contradictions of development within a colonial Ireland, Connolly strains to deprive the period up to the Act of Union in 1800 of its bourgeois-revolutionary character, the better to deny to the bourgeoisie of his own day any claim on the aspiration for democratic, independent nationhood. His earnest intentions, however, did not cancel the dangers of re-writing history. For, in arguing that the capitalists in 1783 "sold out" while only the "working men fought", he wrongly transposes the substance and goals, represented by both the Volunteers and United Irishmen, from the capitalist class, whose interests they crystallised, to the working class and tenants. The attempt to portray Irish history in these particular class terms wrongly simplifies the actual class relations of emerging capitalism. Hence national secession, secular political organisation, democracy and equality - which he recognises in the French revolution as the war cries of the revolutionary capitalism - are presented in Ireland as generic slogans of Irish labour.

He places specific stress on the question of universal franchise and the role of the "men of no property" and assiduously portrays Tone as their champion as the basis for demarcating him from the reformers of 'Grattan's Parliament', an unsubstantiated stress to which, as we will see below, is appended the promise of significant property transformations which Connolly attributes to the United Irishmen in general and Tone, Thomas Addis Emmet and Robert Emmet in particular.

### Marx's Analysis

Marx's analysis of the period from the founding of the Irish Volunteers to the Act of Union differs significantly from that of Connolly. He shows a real continuity in the course of events and, since his studies are incomparably more detailed than Connolly's, he also brings out the concrete divisions within the period as a whole.

Early on in these studies Marx, far from ending the history of the Irish Volunteers in 1783, argues:

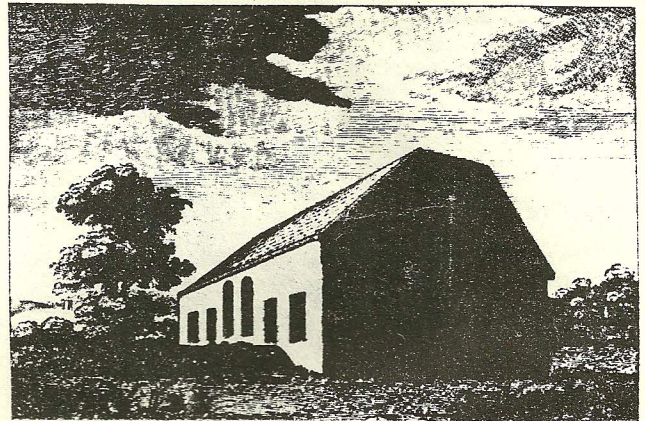
At this place, it will be interesting to anticipate the whole history of this Volunteer force, because, in fact, it is the history of Ireland to the moment when, since 1795, on the one hand, the GENERAL POPULAR NATIONAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT, represented by them, stripped off its MERELY NATIONAL character and merged into a TRULY REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT, and, on the other hand, the British Government changed secret intrigue for brutal force intended to bring about, and succeeded in bringing about the Union of 1800, i.e., the annihilation of Ireland as a nation... (Marx & Engels on Ireland, 1978, p.173-4).

From its foundation in 1778, due to the removal of the British garrison to fight the American Revolution, until the interregnum

following 1883 when the American war ended, Marx describes the Volunteers as follows:

In its first formation the Volunteers, the armed Protestantism of Ireland, embrace all vital elements of all classes... Their first object, emancipation from COMMERCIAL and INDUSTRIAL FETTERS which the mere mercantile jealousy of England had thrown around them. Then NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE. Then REFORM OF THE PARLIAMENT and CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION as one of the conditions of National Resurrection! Their official organisation and the disasters of England (a reference to the combined forces of France, Spain and America - CS) give them new strength but lay also the germ of their ruin, subordinating them to a weak bigot, aristocratic Whig, the EARL OF CHARLEMONT... (MEI p.174).

In spite of the betrayal by Charlemont, when in 1783 in Dublin the Volunteer Convention expressed its demands for "Free Trade or speedy Revolution" (Napper Tandy), the Volunteers remained important, though weakened, until 1791. Marx refers to it in this period as the "armed and popular support of the NATIONAL AND REFORMING OPPOSITION (MINORITY) of the House of Commons" (ibid). Unlike Connolly Marx refers to a split between the progressive part and the "reactionary part" of the Irish bourgeoisie after 1783:- "The aristocratic element and the reactionary part of the middle class withdrew, the popular element prevailing" (ibid).



Dungannon Presbyterian meeting house where Irish Volunteers Convention took place, 1782.

It was precisely the same elements of the radical bourgeoisie who had sustained the Volunteers that were to found the Society of the United Irishmen in 1791. Marx refers not only to Tone, unlike Connolly, but also to the bourgeois figures in Dublin and more especially in the industrial North-East. At the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 the reforming elements were "feeble and dispirited" but a "different race of men ... began to act upon the public". He refers to John Keogh, "a strong, rough, sagacious merchant, and men of his stamp" who, in Dublin, "sent the Catholic nobles flying in slavish dread". In Belfast "Neilson, Russel, McCracken headed a Protestant party, which advocated reform but began soon to think of Republicanism" (MEI p.175). With Tone they founded the United Irishmen in 1791. Marx continues, characterising the new wave of agitation in the 1790s as bourgeois-revolutionary, as follows.



From this moment, the movement of the Volunteers merges into that of the United Irishmen. The Catholic question becomes that of the Irish People. The question was no longer to remove the disabilities from the Catholic upper and middle classes, but to EMANCIPATE THE IRISH PEASANT, for the vast part Catholic. The question became social as to its matter, assumed FRENCH POLITICAL PRINCIPLES, as to its form, remained national. (ibid.)

The "social" question here is the rights of the tenantry to develop their agriculture as independent producers governed by the market, freed from the parasitic control of the landlords against whom they were pitted, i.e. the radical bourgeois programme for the peasantry. Marx was never ambiguous about the strictly bourgeois character of "French political principles"!

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The Volunteers and United Irishmen merged from 1791, with the former in the role of mass organisation, military and political. The movement took on a distinctly Jacobin character as reflected in a manifesto issued by "The Irish Jacobins of Belfast to the Public" (MEI p.210). It was the Presbyterian manufacturers who at this time were the leading element in the North and who openly supported another Volunteer convention in Dungannon in February 1793. This Convention, not mentioned in Connolly's history, rested its support on a mass base exceeding one million. The demands it raised were still logically connected to those of the reform period, and centred on Catholic emancipation and reform of the parliament. At that time, while the total population was some five million, 90 individuals - aristocrats and higher clergy - controlled the "Commons" majority. The Volunteers and United Irishmen still sought to use the minority in the Commons - particularly noteworthy among these was John P. Curran (1750-1817) who defended the United Irishmen when Coercion deepened from 1793 onwards - to articulate their demands as long as possible. Given the nature of the Parliament it is clear that the bourgeoisie lacked political power and the attempts to win reform and broaden representation together with independence were driving them towards a showdown with the British State, its Dublin executive and its reconstructed militia of yeomen led by the conservative aristocracy.

The government's response was to attempt to buy off the most conservative propertied element of the Catholics while doubling their coercion against the Presbyterian bourgeoisie in the North, thus splitting the movement and facilitating the introduction of an Act of Union as a "final settlement". This move towards a Union had been brewing in 1785 in the form of Orde's propositions, which aimed to create a common tariff around Britain and Ireland and to tax Ireland for the maintenance of England's imperial navy against French, Spanish and American rivalry. The propositions were dropped - amid a close division in the Irish Commons and threats from Curran that if passed they would be answered not merely "by words". The propositions then merged into the ulterior plan for a Union when the determination of Irish manufacturing capitalism was broken.

Connolly blandly passes over this stand-off and similarly ignores the manifest opposition of the "bourgeoisies of Dublin" in the mayoralty "elections" of 1790 when the manufacturing citizens of the city's Common Council rejected 8 successive "handed down" candidates selected by the corrupt aristocratic Privy Council, and eventually elected their own man, Howison. In the thick of these events was Napper Tandy, whose "Liberty Corps" (the plebeian ranks of the Volunteers in Dublin) Connolly singled out for praise in the events of 1783 (LIH p.36-7), and while Tandy was probably the nearest Irish approximation to the Sans Cullotte element in the French Revolution, it is notable that he convened a meeting of "freemen and freeholders" to back the election of Howison and turn the newly emboldened Dublin merchants, manufacturers and the nascent bourgeois peasants (freehold farmers) towards a more militant republicanism on the lines of the Northern developments. Tandy's meeting - the substance of whose resolution ("State of Facts") was a clear declaration in favour of independence, protection and the rule of the whole citizenry, a resolution to alter the compromiser attitude of previous years - was chaired by Hamilton Rowan (1751-1834), soon to suffer coercion and imprisonment as secretary of the Dublin United Irishmen. (MEI, p.205)

It was events such as these which led to the re-arming of the Volunteers, the foundation of the UI and the Dungannon Convention of '93. The platform was explicitly that of bourgeois democratic revolutionaries, inspired by the French Revolution in particular. The transformation taking place was not a shift from the bourgeoisie to the workers and peasants, even though the artisans, labourers and tenantry were a vital popular component, but a crystallising-out of a revolutionary bourgeois republican method instead of reliance on parliamentary reform, for the same goals. As Marx put it:

The VAIN ATTEMPT - in 1790-91 - of the parliamentary minority against GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION proves on the one hand its increase, ON THE OTHER THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION OF 1789. It also shows why, at last, the FOUNDATION OF THE UNITED IRISHMEN in 1791, since all Parliamentary action proved futile, and the majority a MERE TOOL IN THE HANDS OF THE GOVERNMENT. (MEI p.198)

Connolly's version of the origins and nature of the United Irishmen differs considerably from the foregoing in that he sees it as based on a union of workers and peasants in opposition to the



aristocracy with the 'middle class' as effectively a null factor or outright betrayer.

The middle-class growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of economic rivalry of England, almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal...

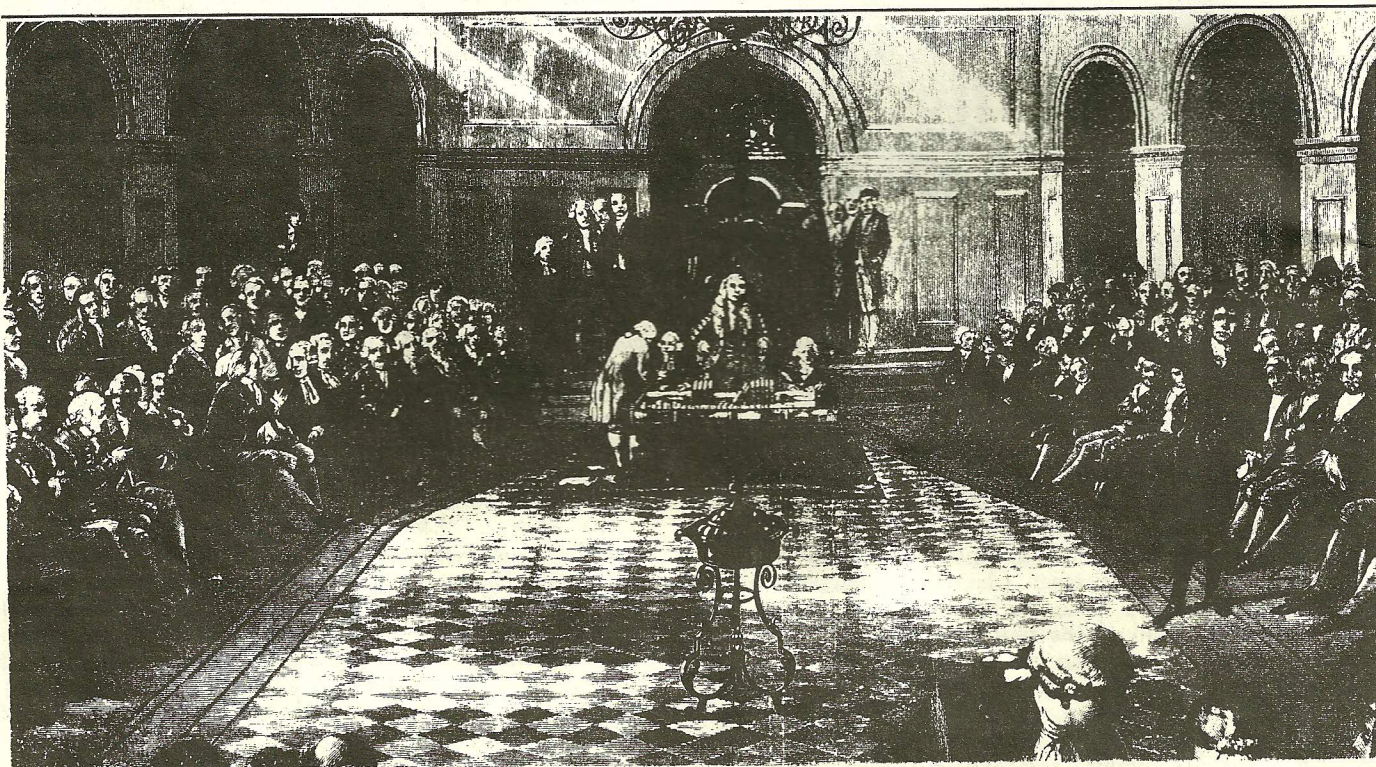
The Protestant workman and tenant was learning that the Pope of Rome was a very unreal and shadowy danger compared with the SOCIAL POWER OF HIS EMPLOYER or landlord, and the Catholic tenant was awakened to a perception of the fact that under the new social order (Catholic relief bills - CS) the Catholic landlord represented the Mass less than the rent roll. The times were propitious for a union of the two democracies of Ireland. They had travelled from widely different points through the valleys of disillusion and disappointment to meet at last by the unifying waters of a common suffering. (LIH p.52-3)

The French Revolution, Connolly tells us, acts upon the minds of the "Protestant workers" and their Catholic counterpart. Wolfe Tone comes to the fore in this union of these two TOILERS' "democracies". Connolly ignores the question of Tone's attitude and relation to the bourgeoisie, simply stressing his total disavowal of any role for the aristocracy and implicitly simplifying Tone's understanding of the class dynamics of the time. Connolly, after blanking out the bourgeois interest, continues:

It will thus be seen that Tone built up his hopes upon a successful prosecution of a class war, although those who pretend to imitate him today raise up their hands in holy horror at the mere mention of the phrase (LIH p.54).

While Connolly affirms the international character of the thought of the United Irishmen, its American and continental roots and ultimate hopes for a harmony of nations which must first be rooted in freedom to secede (LIH p.55) he wrongly assumes this outlook belonged exclusively to the toiling masses - "the real people of Ireland - the producers" (p.57). The effect is to once again collapse together in a confused manner the bourgeois democratic tasks inherited by the Irish proletariat of his own time and the specifically socialist goals facing it. Though these conditions each other in concrete reality, and must be tactically combined in any programme, Connolly saw them as one and the same.

This is seen in his attempt to flesh out the idea that workers and peasants were the exclusive agents of revolution in '98 and subsequently in the 1803 Emmet conspiracy, particularly with reference to the vital role of "weavers, tanners and shoemakers" in the Coombe district of Dublin in 1803. Most of these were deeply oppressed at the time and thousands had been unemployed in the years before the first reforms of the 1880s. They were oppressed and exploited by the rent they paid for equipment and the cost of raw materials supplied by big merchants. But in form most of them were of the artisan class, commodity producers, and despite growing attempts to organise themselves in craft unions they still saw their main hope in ending the dead weight of English mercantile discrimination, i.e. in national independence and protection. Many of them feared the very idea of industrial revolution, so that while they had definite social interests to express they were in no position to transcend the capitalist system but rather felt the need to free Irish capitalism from the shackles of landlordism and trade restrictions in the hope of improving their own situation. Connolly presents them as equivalent to the industrial proletariat and as expressing an



United Irishmen's defender Curran addresses the Irish House of Commons, 1790. (Barraud-Hayter reconstruction)



"internationalist" attitude to national independence. In these terms Emmet is then presented as a champion of political and social emancipation of the working class without any analysis of the content of his politics or the limits of their possibility. Emmet is characterised, therefore, not on the basis of his radical-bourgeois programme but on the basis of the social forces roused in his ill-fated insurrection of 1803. Connolly's anachronistic picture of the 'working class' only compounds the error. The artisans and the 18th labourers were not comparable to the workers of a century later whose numbers, organisation and developed antagonism to the employers and their growing self-consciousness were to make them a major class in society.

### Wolfe Tone - Myth and Reality

Labour in Irish History opens a chapter on the United Irishmen with Wolfe Tone's most quoted words, most quoted because they have become a talisman of Irish 'republican socialism'.

Our freedom must be had at all hazards. If the men of property will not help us they must fall; we will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community - the men of no property" (LIH p.43)

With this as the central motto, Connolly carves out an image of Wolfe Tone as a man utterly opposed to the tradition of the reforming bourgeoisie of 1778-83, as the representative of the toiling producers in pursuit of fundamentally different goals. Connolly quotes from Tone's criticisms of the "1782 Revolution" (in *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 1791) such that the reformers might almost appear to be the object of Tone's revolution (LIH p.40-1). But Tone's polemic is highly qualified. Tone's own development over time from a Grattanite to a revolutionary democrat illustrates the continuity which Connolly effectively denies in the rising struggle of the Irish bourgeoisie. Connolly omits Tone's references to "leaders (who) were of high integrity and some of consummate wisdom...". Referring to the compromises of 1783, Tone suggests: "The minds of men were not at that time perhaps ripe for exertions which a thousand circumstances that have since happened cry aloud for" (McDermott - "Tone and His Times", p.68). This might seem as merely tactical rhetoric during a dramatic turn of events toward more militant republicanism. However, Tone, in the self-same pamphlet, declares his allegiance to Ireland, AND to the King, in whose service he would gladly spill his blood (McDermott, p.70). Defence of the Catholics, also, was clearly limited to enfranchisement of the "liberal" classes on the basis of which property would be defended:

The wealthy and moderate party of their own persuasion, with the whole Protestant interest, would form a barrier against the invasion of property (*An Argument...*, in Dunne, 1982, p.31)

Extend the electoral franchise to such Catholics only as have a freehold of ten pounds per year (and) abolish the wretched tribe of forty-shilling freeholders (Dunne, p.31)



Napper Tandy - Irish sans-culotte

Tone, in contrast to Connolly, had great hopes for the commercial potential of an independent Republic "abounding in all the necessary materials for unlimited commerce" and "teeming with inexhaustible mines of the most useful metals" (McDermott, p.69). These, and not the social questions of the peasantry and the workers, were the axis of Tone's concerns, and burning concerns they were for a bourgeois Irish Jacobin. By contrast, Connolly's method, which consistently lacks the central Marxist concern with the material development of the forces of production, produces a pessimistic view of the possibility of Irish economic development then or later. He denies that it was possible even before the attempt at an Irish bourgeois revolution and again in the context of O'Connell's campaign for the Repeal of the Union.

...the Act of Union was made possible because Irish manufacture was weak, and consequently, Ireland had not an energetic capitalist class with sufficient public spirit and influence to prevent the Union... this we are certain is the proper statement of the case. Not the loss of the Parliament destroyed Irish manufacture, but that the decline of Irish manufacture... made possible the destruction of the Irish parliament (LIH p.31)

It is difficult to see how a promised repeal of the Union some time in the future could have been of any use to the starving men of Clare, especially when they knew that their fathers had been starved, evicted tyrannised even before, just as they were after the Union. (LIH p.80)





Wolfe Tone

Tone, moreover, in 1796, when urging the French to send as large as possible an expedition, was concerned precisely that it would be big enough to inspire "men of a certain rank as to property (to) at once declare themselves" (Tone's Life, edited by William Tone, his son, vol II, p.197). In the same work his views as late as 1798, on the question of wholesale confiscation of the aristocracy's land are revealing. While he observed that the gentry, "miserable slaves", "had furnished their enemies with every argument for a system of confiscation", along the lines of the radical bourgeois land reform of the French Revolution, Tone argued that it would be "a terrible doctrine to commence with in Ireland" (p.133). This weighs against even seeing Tone as the most politically advanced representative of the claims of the peasantry to the land. So, what is the meaning of his reference to the "men of no property"?

We believe it is essential to see the reference in its context. It arises in an account, in Tone's own work ( Vol.2 p.46 Tone's Life), of his negotiations with Delacroix, a representative of the French government, in March 1796. Delacroix doubted if it was possible to send an army on the scale required to attract the support of "those men of some property which was so essential in framing a government" (Tone had in mind a Convention including the liberal Catholic Committee on whose behalf he had written "An Argument"). Delacroix proposed a provisional military government if the invasion succeeded, just in case the Irish middle class did not rally to the French forces. The strong suggestion, in the whole context as explained by Tone himself, is that the rallying of the "men of no property" was put to Delacroix as a possibility that might further urge him on, rather than as something that was central in Tone's own preferences. As such, even if we "read" Tone as strategically aspiring for support from the "men of no property", this in no way justifies a claim that his programme was defined centrally by their interests. Rather it enhances his political genius as a bourgeois revolutionary. In this respect there is probably a similarity between Tone and Robespierre who was quite ready to free French capitalism through the mobilisation of the men of little or no property, even though this caused

consternation among more substantial bourgeois elements in France. But in any case, Wolfe Tone's supposed concern with "the men of no property" is far from being a theme, let alone a general feature, of his political thought. The quotation used by Connolly is the ONLY reference of its kind to mobilising the support of the "men of no property".

#### FROM REPEAL TO HOME RULE

In Connolly's gallery of heretics the next after Grattan is O'Connell. His evaluation of the "Liberator" echoes his attack on Grattan. Connolly saw little progressive content in Repeal of the Union as a goal of the national struggle. (His rejection of such "merely political" slogans also reflects the syndicalism which was later to dominate his outlook.) Marx and Engels understood the significance of the Union and the struggle for Repeal in the opposite light. Engels in particular saw the slogans for Catholic Emancipation and later for Repeal as an important means for the constitutional nationalist bourgeoisie to rally the support of the peasantry (Marx & Engels on Ireland, Engels to Bernstein in 1882 - p.451).

Engels, in his letters from London, 1843, at the height of O'Connell's mobilisations for Repeal, savagely attacked the posturing of O'Connell - his failure, in fact, to SERIOUSLY demand Repeal. (MEI, pp 43-6.)

In Labour in Irish History, Connolly exaggerates the strength of Irish labour, and of Chartism in Ireland, as a force at odds with O'Connell, as genuine freedom-fighters against a pretender and hypocrite, just as he counterposed 'the populace' to Grattan. In Connolly's perspective, the toilers supposedly know in their heart that the national freedom fight is a fight for SOCIAL revolution, opposed to private property, and thus socialist; but they are fooled by O'Connell:

Irish Chartist associations sprang up all over the island and we are informed by a writer in the "United Irishman" of John Mitchel, 1848, that in Dublin they had grown so strong and so hostile to O'Connellism that at one time negotiations were in progress for a public debate between the Liberator and a representative of the Dublin trades. But upon the arrest and imprisonment of O'Connell, the working class were persuaded to abandon their separate organisation for the sake of presenting a common front to the Government. step they later regretted. (LIH, p98-9)

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How these masses should have exposed the deception and manipulation that O'Connell was undoubtedly guilty of, Connolly does not suggest. How were they to expose his unwillingness to act as an "upright and consistent democrat" rather than "a two-faced



Whig" - to use the Engels' description in 1843. Certainly NOT by dismissing the Repeal demand as a slogan without relevance, as Connolly does in his reference (see above) to the starving men of Clare.

#### THE APOSTATES OF 1848

In his chapter on the Young Irelanders, Connolly continues the indictment of the apostates of the Irish freedom struggle, adding William Smith O'Brien and the reformist wing of the Young Irelanders. The pattern of the attack again echoes that on the Grattanites of 55 years earlier. According to Connolly, in 1848:-

The working class of Dublin and most of the towns were clamouring for their leaders to give the word for a rising; in many places in the country the peasantry were acting spontaneously. Eventually news reached Dublin in July that warrants were issued for the arrest of the chiefs of the Young Ireland party. They determined to appeal to the country. But everything had to be done in a "respectable" manner; English army on one side provided with guns, bands, and banners, Irish army on the other provided with guns, bands and banners, "serried ranks with glittering steel", no mere proletarian insurrection, and no interference with the rights of property. When C. G. Duffy was arrested on Saturday, 9th of July, in Dublin, the Dublin workers surrounded the military escort on the way to the prison at Newgate, stopped the carriage, pressed up to Duffy and offered to begin the insurrection then and there. "Do you wish to be rescued?" said one of the leaders. "Certainly not", said Duffy. And the puzzled toilers fell back and allowed the future Australian Premier to go to prison. (LIH Ch.13)

#### CONTRADICTION

The title of the chapter on the Young Irelanders enshrines Connolly's litmus test of historical progress - the attitude to private property:- "Our Irish Girondins sacrifice the Irish peasantry upon the altar of private property!" His abstract schema here denies what was, after all, at the heart of the peasant's aspiration to escape oppression - his right to private property in land.

#### "SOCIALIST" YOUNG IRELANDERS

On the other hand, Lalor and Mitchel, the revolutionary democratic Young Irelanders, who consciously represented the petit-bourgeois peasant aspiration, are presented as "socialists" (a misrepresentation discussed in the second article in this series). Connolly does not, however, consider whether the failure of their distinctively SOCIAL revolutionary programme for the peasantry might have been linked to their failure to relate to the "merely political" slogan of Repeal of the Union which, in liberal nationalist hands, was capable of rousing GENERALISED political movements.

#### FENIAN "SOCIALISM"

The Fenians of 1857-68, quintessentially a revolutionary nationalist petty-bourgeois movement, who did indeed embrace some socialist elements, are presented by Connolly as an essentially working class force, in a brief uncritical treatment. Writing of the Fenians in 1867, Marx sees them as

having a "socialistic" tendency in terms of their social roots, and in a negative sense:

"What the English do not yet know is that since 1846 the economic content and therefore the political aim of English domination in Ireland have entered into an entirely new phase, and that, precisely because of this, Fenianism is characterised by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by being a lower orders movement." (Marx to Engels, 30 Nov 1867. MEI p.157)

Politically, Fenianism never broke out of the bourgeois limits of the revolutionary nationalist programme.

#### HOME RULE

Following a passing reference to the period of the Land League, in the rest of this his final chapter, Connolly says nothing about the Home Rule movement between the Fenians and Parnell, and even more strangely says nothing about Parnell's leadership of it. We have already established in these three articles the overall context which explains this.

When Connolly worked out Labour in Irish History in the 1890s, he took aboard the petit-bourgeois socialism of John Leslie's "Irish Question" in which Home Rule was a "dissolving view" and a "discredited abortion", and on the other hand, "labour" had reached the state of maturity to write the slogan of national independence and freedom into its own maximum programme for socialism. As the chapter heading announces - "The working class: inheritors of the Irish ideas of the past - the repository of the hopes of the future" - labour is poised to bring about the resurrection of the nation with the communist form of its supposed pre-Norman existence, but with the social content of the modern working class. This is the context that illuminates the otherwise startling pages with which Connolly concludes Labour in Irish History, centred on the thesis that

The merely political heresy under which middle class DOCTRINAIRES have for nearly 250 years cloaked the Irish fight for freedom has thus run its course ... the great social struggle of all the ages will again arise and re-shape itself to suit the new conditions.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite its attempt to chart a course for the Irish working class of his day, his attempt to "deduce a socialist philosophy" from Irish history, on the whole blinds Connolly to the rich programmatic tradition of Marxism on the National Question. His idealist collapsing together of the Irish nation and Irish labour leads on in practice to the political collapsing of the working class struggle into that of the revolutionary nationalists, as further articles will show. It established also the perspective within which Connolly was to adapt also to some reactionary elements of the nationalism of the "real Irish" which had historically become a specifically Catholic nationalism. In the next article we turn our attention to this aspect of the legacy of James Connolly.



# ***"Communism in Modern Ireland"***

## **A RECORD OF FAILURE AND TREACHERY**

Communism in Modern Ireland -  
The pursuit of the Workers' Republic since 1916  
by Mike Milotte.

This is a most valuable book for a number of reasons. First, it is the most thorough record yet of the political struggle of post-Rising socialists in Ireland to found and build a revolutionary international communist party in the years 1917-28. This struggle took place amid great historic events both in Ireland and world-wide which provided a unique test and enormous challenge to the programmes, strategies and tactics of revolutionary Marxists everywhere. Secondly, it covers with important detail the impact of Stalinisation, beginning in 1924, upon Irish communism, leading via the Revolutionary Workers Groups' to the later refounding of a Communist Party staffed by Moscow-trained hacks. Thirdly, it examines and lays bare with deadly precision the facts of the 50-year record of this party, under different labels at different times, as it twisted and turned to the policy requirements of Stalinism and the bureaucracy of the USSR, at the price of betraying every serious workers' struggle in Ireland.

### **COMMUNISM AND STALINISM**

The notorious 'stages programme' for the Irish socialist revolution, the abandonment of the goal of the Workers' Republic, the popular-front alliance with Fianna Fail, the Great Patriotic 'anti-fascist unity' with British and U.S. imperialism after July 1941 and the attack on workers' strikes in Belfast as 'treason' - all these and many more betrayals up through the anti-Unionist revolt of 1968 to electoral support again for Fianna Fail - flow from the stalinist programme of "socialism in a single country". The adoption of that reactionary utopian slogan by the Stalinist bureaucracy, as a cloak for its own monstrous privileges, meant subordinating the Communist Parties and the class struggle - in Ireland and worldwide, to the foreign policy interests and survival of the Kremlin bureaucrats.

As the vast bulk of the book is devoted to recording and examining this history, it would have been more precise, and only fair to those in Ireland who continued and who continue now to fight for the authentic communist internationalist programme, to have titled the book to indicate this. It is, for the most part, a history not of communism but of Stalinism.

### **POLITICAL EXPLANATION**

It is vitally important that the record of Stalinism in Ireland, so impressively presented by Mike Milotte, should be thoroughly known by every socialist and militant. It has a living relevance. Equally important for all Marxists is to understand what Stalinism is, and remains, underneath all its kaleidoscopic zig-zags and betrayals, a task of EXPLANATION in which the book fails, we believe. That is one of the issues with which this article will concern itself. First we analyse Milotte's treatment of the initial struggle, and failure, to root Bolshevism in Ireland. Secondly we focus on Milotte's uncritical treatment of the James Connolly tradition, in which the first Irish communists developed; how it affects both their struggle and Milotte's analysis of it. And finally, in a book that focusses on the 50-year history of Stalinism in one country, we address the question of whether and how Milotte attempts to EXPLAIN it.

### **THE FIRST TEN YEARS**

The first four chapters of the book are concerned with the first ten years. In the years following the defeat of the Rising, James Connolly's old Socialist Party of Ireland was regrouped under the leadership of William O'Brien and Cathal O'Shannon, reformists whose 'revolutionary' mettle was once more put to the test by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. In order to head off millions of workers across the globe inspired by that revolution and the subsequent revolutions in Germany, Bavaria, Hungary etc., the leaders of the almost defunct reformist Second International - the 'stinking corpse' as Rosa Luxemburg had called it in 1914 when it led millions of workers to slaughter under the banner of their own imperialist national bourgeoisies - organised a conference in Berne with the explicit intention to condemn the Russian revolution and its programme of the dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' power.

O'Shannon of the SPI and Johnson of the Labour Party attended, as representatives of a self-styled 'Irish section of the International'. They presented a document arguing for Irish self-determination, having first submitted it for the approval of Sinn Fein. In return for supporting Berne they hoped to get recognition for the Irish republic declared in January 1919, and approval for the right of armed struggle to establish and defend it.



Despite their abstention on the votes for BOTH the reformist programme of parliamentarism and the revolutionary programme of working class dictatorship, these opportunists got no support from Berne for their demands. Only the Communist International, at its first congress in the Soviet Union in 1919, gave that support. James Larkin's telegram from prison in New York was the only Irish representation at the first Comintern Congress. The Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC) remained unaffiliated to either in 1919.

These events prompted Sean McLoughlin (who at the age of 16 had fought with James Connolly in 1916), and Paddy Stephenson, later joined in the SPI by Connolly's son Roddy, to fight for affiliation to the Comintern. (Roddy Connolly had worked with the communists in Glasgow since 1917.) In 1919 the Dublin Council of Trade Unions put forward the call to the ILPTUC to affiliate to the Comintern but withdrew it on the wooden pretext that the Labour Party would not be acceptable to the Comintern. The Trades Council's other motion, for principled opposition to the Second International, was defeated at the ILPTUC by only 97 to 54. The left in the SPI succeeded nevertheless in having its members, R. Connolly and Eamonn Mac Alpine, officially delegated by the SPI to the Second congress of the Comintern in Moscow in July 1920.

#### COMINTERN, UNITED FRONTS AND IRELAND

Milotte's too-brief treatment of the political content of this and later links with the Comintern, so central to understanding the early failure and the continuing lessons for Marxists in Ireland, presents the Comintern's tactics for the colonies very one-sidedly and is wrong in a number of its implications. The first four years of the Communist International, 1919-22, not only have an enduring and special importance in programmatically guiding socialists to this day, but they were also years in which revolutionary communist parties began to take root on a mass basis in many countries. For both reasons, therefore, the failure of Communism in Ireland is of special importance and demands explanation. A thorough political understanding of what happened would be a vital gain for all who are committed to building a revolutionary socialist movement in Ireland today.

The following passage is from chapter two of Milotte's book.

For the Irish delegates the most vital matter on the agenda was the discussion on the national and colonial question. A special commission, presided over by Lenin and with Connolly as one of its members, was set up to examine the issue in detail. In the commission Lenin emphasised strongly the need for communists in the colonies to enter into TACTICAL ALLIANCES with the emerging national revolutionary movements, and particularly with their peasant base, so as to forge an alliance between them and the Soviet state against their common enemy, world imperialism. He wanted also to ensure that the small communist groups in the colonies did not adopt a sectarian attitude that would isolate them from the revolutionary bourgeoisie. In contrast to Lenin, the young Indian Marxist M.N. Roy emphasised the class polarisation that was occurring within the colonial countries between the

bourgeoisie and the workers and advocated a more independent line for the communists. (P.42)

Given that he says nothing much anywhere else about the Comintern tactics towards the colonial bourgeoisie, Milotte is guilty here of actually gutting them. The impression is given that Lenin saw no class antagonisms or class struggle in the colonies or that his and the Comintern's tactics chose to ignore it! The exact opposite is the case. The Comintern did not confine its programme for communists in the colonies to a single tactic - alliances with the bourgeoisie; nor did that tactic ever permit the liquidation of the independent communist programme of open class struggle! It simply will not do to substitute a momentary emphasis for the WHOLE method of the Bolshevik leaders and the Comintern - embodied in theses, resolutions and directives and constantly developing.

Tactical alliances with bourgeois forces in actual struggle against colonialism, on strict conditions, was only one side of the method advocated. The other side was to combine this unity of action with communist political independence and open criticism and warnings against the unreliability of the bourgeoisie, as the basis then to win the most militant sections of the oppressed to the proletarian programme. The application of a united front tactic against imperialism did not depend on the relative absence of class 'polarisation' in the colonies.

The author goes on to offer his belief that the Comintern tactics neither applied to Ireland nor were re-examined with the failure of the Comintern's world perspectives:

Ireland, where the bulk of the small farmers had been transformed into a class of owner-occupiers and where the workers' movement was already well developed and experienced, seemed to conform more to the pattern outlined by Roy, but the Irish communists, as we shall see, adhered fairly dogmatically to the strategy set out by Lenin as a TEMPORARY TACTICAL EXPEDIENT only. The triumph of the working class in the advanced capitalist countries, then believed to be imminent, would enable the backward countries to proceed to socialism without an intermediate capitalist stage. But the question of how communists in the colonies would act if the metropolitan revolutions failed to materialise, or materialised and failed, was left unanswered. (p.42)

While this tactic for the colonies was posed initially within the perspective of imminent world revolution it did not, however, ultimately pivot on this outcome. By 1920 the Comintern, while generally holding to a strategic prognosis of European revolution, was forced to recognise a conjunctural retreat and precisely in that context CONTINUED to develop the tactical method which in the imperialised countries was known as the "anti-imperialist united front" and, where reformism predominated within the working class, as the "workers united front".

In the light of the actual content of the Comintern's anti-imperialist united front tactic, Milotte's view that it did not apply in Ireland because of the social formation is not tenable. His



view is linked to the belief that capitalism might be skipped over by the colonies in the event of world revolution. The reality was, however, that the colonies were already deeply penetrated by capitalism. China, for example, also had a very strongly developed proletariat and extensive capitalist relations in agriculture and commerce.

Having implied that the problem of the Irish communists was the WRONG advice from the Comintern and a dogmatic adherence to it, he goes on to quote the fourth congress of the Comintern in 1922 to underline the point, IGNORING that it was precisely the fourth congress that re-affirmed and codified the tactic of the "anti-imperialist united front":

The Fourth Congress also discussed the national question at some length, concluding that "The communist workers' parties of the colonial and semi-colonial countries have a dual task: they fight for the most radical possible solution of the bourgeois democratic revolution which aims at the conquest of political independence and they organised the working and peasant masses for their struggle for their special class interests, and in so doing exploit all the contradictions in the nationalist bourgeois-democratic camp".

The CPI's uncritical support for de Valera, whose social aims it recognised as reactionary, was clearly out of step with the second of these 'dual tasks'. (Milotte p.63-4)

That the young communist party founded by R. Connolly and the SPI left faction in 1921 seriously erred in its politics is beyond question. The error, however, was not because the CPI "dogmatically adhered to the strategy set out by Lenin". It was precisely the failure of the Irish communists to apply concretely and in a principled way in Ireland the strategy and tactics of Lenin and the Comintern that contributed to the the CPI's political confusion. Is Milotte saying that revolutionary communists didn't (and still don't?) need specific tactics to deal with the political and ideological hegemony of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois movements among workers and small farmers faced by national conflict with imperialism? Certainly he offers nothing by way of an alternative.

#### WHAT PROGRAMME FOR IRELAND?

The CPI's early perspective document is correctly described by Milotte as inadequate. It not only ignored the strength of reformism, syndicalism and nationalism within the working class and small farmers, but also, astonishingly, suggested that the protestant working class, while having no interest in fighting for a bourgeois republic, would be eager to fight for a genuine workers' republic.

With the signing of the Treaty the CPI quickly abandoned its strategic goal of the Workers Republic in favour of uncritical and unconditional support for 'the republic' and the anti-Treaty republicans. Simultaneously a whole wave of militant workers' struggles was condemned as 'reformist' because they did not call for the abolition of the wages system and capitalism. The CPI became the chief advocate of civil war in the naive impressionistic belief that the vast majority

of the masses would automatically swing behind the republicans. In July 1922, according to Milotte (p.58-9), the CPI paper, Workers Republic, claims the approval of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI) for its line. On the evidence of the two brief sentences quoted, the appearance is given of Comintern approval for a distinctly 'stageist' programme - the class struggle only AFTER real national independence. If that was indeed the substance of the ECCI's attitude, whatever impressionistic reports of the Irish situation it might have been based on, it was unquestionably in stark contradiction with the Comintern's own enunciated principles. Such a 'stageist' programme was unquestionably wrong and was seen to be so in its consequences. When the Civil War broke out the CPI put its "Red Guards" under the discipline of the IRA but within a week the party's active involvement in it had ended.

#### BORODIN'S PROGRAMME

Roddy Connolly went to London to have 'Workers Republic' printed without Free State censorship. There he met Michael Borodin, the Comintern representative, who drafted a revolutionary action programme for Connolly which, it was hoped (by whom we are not told), the Republican leadership would also fight for. Milotte cites it as reported in the Workers' Republic of 12 August 1922:

It called for state ownership of heavy industry, the transport system and the banks; municipalisation of all public services and their free use by the workers; rationing of housing and the abolition of rents; an eight-hour working day and control of working conditions by joint councils of workers, unions and the state; trade union rates for the unemployed; confiscation, without compensation, of the large ranches and estates and distribution of the land to landless families and farm labourers, together with the abolition of all forms of indebtedness, whether to private interests or the state; and finally, the arming of all urban and rural workers.

Milotte comments that it "was extremely radical, although not fully communist" and criticises it - "Significantly, the programme did not raise the matter of which CLASS would control the state". This is formally correct, but such formalistic objections miss completely the real nature and significance of the programme.

Whatever criticisms one might now make (no mention of the Civil War, Partition, the Labour Party, amnesty, or demands on church, religion, women, the protestant working class, or the question of government), the programme represents a particular form of a TRANSITIONAL action programme, drawn up with specific reference to the Irish situation of the day. The concept and method of the transitional programme was the unique product of the Bolshevik party in the period following the 1917 February revolution and embodied specifically in the strategy and tactics of Lenin's April Theses, which laid out the path to mass insurrection and workers' power.

#### TRANSITIONAL POLITICS

The Four congresses of the Comintern represent, as mentioned above, the elaboration of transitional politics as the highest and most developed expression of the communist programme in



the light of the Bolshevik revolution. No other programme would be adequate to the imperialist epoch and the direct struggle for power. Its essence lay in overcoming the traditional separation between the 'minimum programme' (immediate, partial and democratic demands including the national question), and the 'maximum programme' (the dictatorship of the proletariat, systematic expropriation of capital, the planning of the economy, and the monopoly of foreign trade as the first steps to socialism). Such a separation had been typical of the Second International parties prior to 1914 and today characterises 'centrist' parties and groups who have adapted to syndicalism, nationalism, social democracy or stalinism, and whose 'Marxist' goal of 'workers power' is combined in practice with opportunist self-limitation to minimum demands. Borodin's programme was of a piece with the programme of action for France which was to be adopted by the Fourth Congress in December 1922 (for which, see *The First 5 Years of the Comintern*, Vol. 2 by Trotsky). It seeks to mobilise the plebeian masses, including the petit-bourgeoisie in town and country, around the most burning issues of the day - wages, conditions, unemployment, rent, housing, land, with the perspective of connecting these struggles, if taken up and fought for, to the struggle to decide which class will rule, the struggle for workers' power. The path of struggle to which it is a guide bridges the minimum-maximum divide.



Trotsky, Lenin & Kamenev during the 2nd Comintern Congress, July, 1920

The author's silence on this aspect of Borodin's programme is completely consistent with the record and method of the political current to which he belongs and which acknowledged him with uncritical acclaim - the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the Socialist Workers Movement in Ireland. This centrist current resulting from the degeneration of Trotsky's Fourth International at the end of the 1940s, has completely abandoned the conception of a transitional method and programme, replacing it with a hybrid of the old minimum-maximum programme.

#### OPPORTUNISM TOWARDS REPUBLICANISM

Roddy Connolly's offer of Borodin's programme to the anti-Treaty republicans was rejected, as they bravely but blindly sought a military victory over the Free State. Connolly and Pollock of the CPI then attended the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, to be fiercely criticised for their

opportunist tailing of the republicans. This Congress re-affirmed the validity of the united front tactic towards revolutionary nationalists, on strict conditions and in certain circumstances, in the colonial and semi-colonial countries - a fact, as we have already noted, that is ignored by Milotte.

It would be embarrassing to admit that the problem for Irish communists was NOT the relevance of the tactic but the manner of their application in Ireland, for the SWP and SWM have never recognised the correctness or relevance of the tactic in present-day Ireland or anywhere else. But, without this tactical method as carefully spelt out by the Comintern, what PRINCIPLED basis is there for communists to join in the struggle against imperialism where petit-bourgeois revolutionary nationalists actually lead that struggle?

The experience of the young CPI is only one example. More recently the H-Block campaign offered another where the SWM trailed behind Sinn Féin and abandoned its duty to fight for working-class methods and leadership in the struggle. In the years of struggle leading up to the desperate last recourse of the hunger strikes, SWM never fought consistently in practice for the goal of workers' action to be taken up as the key to victory. SWM voted for the popular-frontist 'humanitarian' basis on which the National H-Block Committee was founded (ONLY IWG registered open opposition at the conference) and SWM's leader Kieran Allen sat on that founding Committee, offering neither open criticism nor an alternative to the republican strategy. During the hunger strikes SWM never fundamentally challenged the nationalists. After five prisoners' deaths they wrote (SWM H-Block pamphlet p.8) that "It has become possible to talk in terms of mass workers action for the prisoners in the H-Blocks", but workplace committees and 'days of action' were the high point of their strategy. Meanwhile, they lined up with the nationalists against the IWG's battle to commit the campaign to the only adequate general perspective of struggle, once the hunger strikes had actually begun, with deaths drawing nearer by the day. That was the perspective of struggle led by the working class and centred on the fight for indefinite general-strike action to win political status for the prisoners.

The SWM, NEVER having based itself, in relation to the national struggle, on an explicit scientific conception of strategy and tactics rooted in the communist tradition, but knowing that the H-Block struggle had to be taken up, was incapable of linking the TACTIC of joint ACTION with republicans to the STRATEGIC necessity of unrelenting open political battle within the campaign, against the perspective, methods and leadership of the nationalists. The abandonment of communist principles invites opportunism, as Milotte so devastatingly shows with regard to the Stalinists in Ireland. It is no less so for those who call themselves real communists.

After the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, and after the removal of Roddy Connolly's leadership in January 1923 by the conference of the CPI, a new leadership attempted to build among workers in economic struggles. This resulted in improved membership but it is apparent from the facts presented by Milotte that the party had gained little of real programmatic understand-



ing from its links with the CI. Yet it is just this crucial point that Milotte fails to investigate.

In 1922, before the civil war, the anti-Treaty republicans had won 36 seats in the Dail election and Labour 17 of the 18 it contested. The 1923 election, called after the civil war to consolidate the victory of the Free State government over the republicans, saw the inclusion of 5 Larkinite candidates. Milotte merely records the fact that 8 more republicans were returned while Labour lost three due to the Larkinite opposition, leaving the reader without any evaluation of the CPI or Comintern electoral tactics.

In the light of the Comintern's theses and documents, especially of the fourth congress, it is clear that the CPI had failed to grasp the vital relevance of principled TACTICS to pose the question of Government to the working class in a way that would mobilise them in struggle for political goals in the context of the elections. In particular, the slogan of the "Workers and Small Farmers Government", with its anti-capitalist programme spelt out clearly, was advocated by the Comintern to be used under definite conditions as a revolutionary transitional goal of struggle capable of putting to the test and breaking reformist illusions in a mobilised working class. It is the governmental form of the workers' united front slogan. In the context of critical support for the Labour Party in elections, it was vital to argue demands on Labour with the explicit call to break it from collaboration with the bourgeoisie and British imperialism, to force it onto the road of STRUGGLE with the tactical goal of the Workers' and Small Farmers' Government. It is an issue where, again, Mike Milotte's treatment of the period fails to explore the contrast between the political floundering of the CPI and the tactical richness of the Comintern to which it was affiliated; an issue where the SWP-SWM current similarly ignores the legacy of the Comintern.

We are, of course; not claiming that the tiny CPI would have had its tactics accepted by the masses in 1923, but a principled fight would have concretely addressed real confusions and 'illusions' among many of the best militants in the LP, Sinn Fein or in neither. That was a necessary first positive step for this party whose political life came to an abrupt end following Connolly's return to the leadership and the outbreak of bitter struggle between the left (syndicalists) and the right (republican socialists). Larkin's return to Ireland from America and his refusal to associate with the CPI (despite his close links with U.S. communists), was a further element which led the Comintern to dissolve the CPI.

#### LARKIN'S IRISH WORKER LEAGUE

The Comintern was additionally persuaded by the CPGB that only around Larkin could a real communist movement emerge. Within a few months of his return he had also broken with the Labour Party bureaucrats in a bitter row. In September 1923 he founded the Irish Worker League, whose first publication had actually appeared in June of the same year. The Comintern instructed the CPI to dissolve and individually enrol in the IWL which in turn was accepted as the official Comintern section in Ireland. The hopes of the Comintern were soon dashed. The IWL was a disaster - no meetings or dues, no conditions of membership. The whole thing reflected the syndicalist political backwardness of Larkin.

#### LARKIN AND STALINIST DEGENERATION

During his attendance at the fifth congress of the Comintern in 1924, at which Stalin's anti-Marxist thesis of "socialism in one country" saw life for the first time, Larkin offered no analysis of the Irish situation, did not refer to the civil war or its outcome, and made no attempt to assess the relative strengths and interests of the contending class forces, in the debates on the national question.

The Stalin line on the question was now for long-term strategic (NOT tactical) alliance with the nationalist bourgeoisies of the colonial countries. This position reflected on the international plane the developing counterrevolutionary interests of the emerging bureaucracy in the Soviet Union - the survival of the workers' state, at the expense of the class struggle internationally, as a material basis for its own caste privileges. It was consistently opposed only by Trotsky. Larkin neither accepted nor rejected the analysis and it is quite obvious now, as it was to James Connolly, that Larkin was seriously out of his depth in theoretical and political analysis.

Despite this - or is it because of it? - he was elected to the Comintern Executive. In Ireland the 'Irish Worker' made no attempt to discuss and appraise the congress resolutions, and despite the fact that 16,000 workers left the ITGWU to form Larkin's Workers Union of Ireland, the Irish Worker League was set on a course for extinction.



Bob Stewart of CPGB failed to salvage CPI in 1925.

Before it finally got there, the CPGB sent over one of its most experienced and trusted cadre, Bob Stewart to stop the rot. But the deadly impact of Stalinism was already having its effect, and the two front-organisations founded by Larkin's Irish Worker League (International Class War Prisoners' Aid, and Workers' International Relief, WIR) collapsed, having excited little interest and less support. The WIR refused to agitate on the basic issues of the poverty it sought to relieve in the West - the inability of small farmers to pay their annuities, leaving the initiative a year later to the left-republican Peadar O'Donnell who organised widespread anti-annuity struggles in the west.

The final ignominy was reached when after a manifesto containing a new constitution and programme were drawn up to be launched at a mass meeting in the Mansion House in Dublin in May 1925, the 'Irish Worker' could not find room to print it, but claimed that it was endorsed by the Executive of the party - which was untrue, as Larkin refused



to sign it, without ever giving a reason. The ECCI intervened with the establishment of a special commission, at the same time as the central committee of the CPGB took over from its own colonial departments. Beyond this, however, nothing happened and with the announcement of the Boundary Commission in December 1925 that partition would remain, followed by the split in Sinn Fein in early 1926 and the emergence of Fianna Fail, the IWL was rendered totally dormant, incapable of offering analysis or perspective on the question of Partition, despite which it was to remain the official section of the (Stalin-dominated) Comintern, and a vehicle for Larkin's electoral politics. Milotte again ably records the facts of this organisational and political fiasco but never places them in the context of an alternative for the working class that would be consistent with the first four congresses of the Comintern (as championed from then on only by Trotsky's International Left Opposition).

### THE WORKERS PARTY OF IRELAND

An attempt was soon made to regroup elements of both the extinct CPI and Larkin's dormant IWL, resulting in May 1926 in the Workers' Party of Ireland, including Connolly, Carpenter, Pollock etc. of the CPI, a number of ex-Larkinites and a number of republicans. The party stood for the overthrow of capitalism and the goal of the Workers' Republic, and saw the gaining of national freedom as only achievable on the basis of the workers' struggle for emancipation. Fianna Fail was correctly characterised as a party of national capitalism and a capitalist Ireland could never be free. Such a policy, however, was in sharp conflict with the Stalinist Comintern line which liquidated working class independence under the nationalist bourgeoisie. The political weakness of the WPI was revealed, however, as soon as it decided to apply for membership of the CI, for it revised its attitude to comply with the Stalinist line! It's application to join the Comintern never came to the test, however, for the CPGB opposed the Workers Party of Ireland affiliation, and in February 1927 the ECCI duly turned the application down, instructing the membership to join, as individuals, Larkin's dormant Irish Worker League.

Connolly and some of the WPI executive accepted this, with the intention of fighting it inside Larkin's IWL but the membership of the WPI refused. The WPI executive resigned and a new leadership set about giving fulsome praise and support to Fianna Fail's radical politics in the June election of 1927.

The anti-Larkin WPI supported the Labour Party also, calling for a coalition of Labour and Fianna Fail. Milotte's sketchy treatment of the WPI's attitude to Labour, however, bears the hallmark of the SWP-SWM centrism which, in sectarian fashion, rejects the tactics of placing demands in struggle on the reformist leaders. He rejects as 'conciliatory' (p.87) the WPI's belief in regard to the official Labour leaders, that the workers could or should "compel to become leaders of the struggle".

In the first of two elections in 1927 Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein and Labour won 73 seats to the Government's 47, but with FF and SF abstaining, Labour remained as official opposition with 22 seats. After the assassination of government minister Kevin O'Higgins, and a new Public Safety

Act prohibiting abstentionist candidates from contesting elections, FF entered the Dail and a new election was called for September. The communist groups were in total disarray. Larkin called for a conference of all opposition parties to plan resistance to the repressive laws. Only De Valera turned up, while his party negotiated in private with the Labour Party - viciously opposed by Larkin.

Around its three election candidates, Larkin's IWL announced a programme for the abolition of capitalism, the arming of the workers and the reunification of the country under a workers' government. It raised NO immediate demands around which workers could actually struggle in the here and now, and was clearly an election stunt by Larkin, who still called in public for support for "the revolutionary anti-imperialist party", Fianna Fail, who would - it was confidently stated in private - expose themselves as hopeless petit-bourgeois politicians incapable of leading the workers, thus enabling a revolutionary workers' party to organise and overthrow capitalism! As Mike Milotte correctly points out, if the petit-bourgeois politicians would expose themselves there was no need for Larkin to do so, nor did he attempt to!

In the second general election of 1927 Fianna Fail won 57 seats, doing best in the working class constituencies - not despite the communist movement but with its explicit approval! Larkin's IWL remained rudderless, though winning a seat for Larkin himself. The demise of the IWL was staved off by the Stalinist Comintern which now ruled that Larkin's anti-Labour Party stance had been correct. The rival Workers Party of Ireland had taken the opposite line, in accordance with Comintern perspectives but was now the victim of the new twist which was a harbinger of the coming "left turn" of the Comintern. This turn was occasioned by Stalin's need to crush the Right wing of his own bureaucracy, Bukharin & co. It entailed a savage offensive against the social base of the Right-wing, the Soviet peasantry, all in the name of "collectivisation", to crush the growing power and private property of the upper peasantry and the danger of re-emergent capitalism - purely for the sake of the bureaucracy's own survival. This turn, internationally, forced the communist parties into disastrous sectarian war against the reformist workers' organisations and thus permitted the victory of fascism - all under the rubric of imminent world revolution.

Larkin's IWL did not long enjoy its new-found Comintern approval as against the WPI. Stalin's so-called "class-against-class" ultra-left zig-zag simply re-inforced the Larkinite phantasy that the republicans and reformists were increasingly irrelevant and that the IWL was advancing on every front. As a result, growing sectarian isolation led to the collapse of the party in 1928.

The next initiative in 1929-30 would see the emergence of "revolutionary workers' groups" under Stalinist control, which by June 1933 had become the Communist Party of Ireland, remaining under that name until 1941. It then divided into a Free State section adapting to the war-time "neutral" Southern bourgeoisie and a Six-County party supporting the Unionist and British states at the expense of the working class. It re-united as the CPI in 1970, and has increasingly hardened its



slavish allegiance to the Kremlin.

Mike Milotte's achievement in documenting the obscene record of that party up to 1980 deserves a close reading by every working class militant. But, as we shall see later, the record of events leaves fundamental questions unanswered.

In concluding this critique of his first four chapters, we return to Milotte's starting point for his thesis on "the pursuit of the Workers Republic since 1916" - the overshadowing figure of James Connolly.

#### IRISH COMMUNISM AND THE HERITAGE OF JAMES CONNOLLY

In the first chapter of the book, "The Heritage of James Connolly", Milotte argues that Connolly anticipated Trotsky's theory and programme of Permanent Revolution in his early and subsequent analysis of the Irish political situation, when he declared in 1897 that "The Irish working class - the only secure foundation on which a free nation can be reared ... the Irish working class must emancipate itself, and in emancipating itself it must, perforce, free its country" (Erin's Hope). It is impossible within the limits of this review to do justice to the issues raised by this view of James Connolly, a view held by every centrist "Trotskyist" current in Ireland. But, as the IWG has already shown in its series of articles on Connolly's legacy, his theoretical developments of Marxism in relation to the colonial question in Ireland, while certainly innovative, had nothing in common with the materialist political economy which, when applied to Russia, led Trotsky to the strategy and programme of Permanent Revolution.

On the contrary, it was precisely Connolly's failure to produce an objective Marxist political economy of the development of capitalism in Ireland that accounts for his reliance on elaborating a number of the theoretical insights of the populist James Fintan Lalor. His writings, following on the ideas of his Edinburgh socialist friend, John Leslie, outlined a theoretical perspective that, ideologically speaking, owed more to petty bourgeois 'narodism', Populism, than Marxism. The strategy and tactics that flowed from this analysis led him to underestimate politically the power and hegemony of nationalism, the national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. It led him, in his programme, to destroy the important Marxist distinctions between class and nation and thus destroy the correct relationship between the distinct political tasks related to each.

The strategy of Permanent Revolution, by contrast scientifically COMBINED the distinct tasks such that TACTICS on the bourgeois-democratic questions serve to accelerate the mass revolutionary momentum and bring it under communist leadership for the distinct STRATEGIC task of smashing capitalism.

James Connolly failed to develop a genuine scientific programme as the basis for a revolutionary workers' party. Milotte acknowledges only Connolly's organisational failure to build a Party. Consequently, not having explored Connolly's political and theoretical weaknesses, he appears not to understand that Connolly's failures did not just flow from the complex objective difficulties facing him. To suggest, as Milotte does, that

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Connolly's IDENTIFICATION of "the cause of labour" with "the cause of Ireland" was any THEORETICAL basis for a programme is to reduce serious political questions to the level of cracker mottoes; which is about where James Connolly's thought is in the hands of today's centrists and 'republican socialists'.

According to Milotte, the post-Rising socialists and communists "failed to grasp James Connolly's point that the two aspects (nation and class) were inseparable and that only an autonomous workers' movement linking them together in theory and practice, could bring the struggle to a successful conclusion" (p.69). Not so. The reality is that in adopting Connolly's slogans, which were generalities empty of any real programmatic content, his followers were left almost nothing in the way of a correct Marxist understanding of the tasks and objective conditions they faced in Ireland.

The real political and intellectual crucible in which the young communists of Ireland should have developed their Marxism was the Comintern of Lenin and Trotsky. Its leadership, discussions and theses as a whole provided the only way out of the morass confronting Connolly's inheritors in the period of the Independence struggle. Milotte in this way gives theoretical expression to the wrong assumptions about Connolly that prevail among the centrist "Trotskyist" left, assumptions which may indeed contribute to their neglect or abandonment of the rich heritage of the early Comintern.

#### TROTSKYISM, "STATE-CAPITALISM" AND THE NATURE OF STALINISM

Even though Milotte and the SWP-SWM claim that only Trotskyism continued to uphold the unfalsified communist programme of Marx, Engels and the Bolsheviks, very little indeed of his book is devoted to recording, and none at all to analysing, Trotskyism in Ireland.

The Revolutionary Socialist League, in Belfast, and the Trotskyists in Dublin united in a Revolutionary Socialist Party during the war and became a section of the Trotskyist Fourth International in 1946 - not mentioned by Milotte. One brief success of the Trotskyists is recorded, however - that of the RSL in Belfast which had a peak of 100 members, many Protestant, but with a popular appeal mainly in the nationalist areas because of its strongly anti-Unionist stance. Milotte records that the Stalinists collaborated with the police against it, as also against the IRA. The RSL, unlike the Stalinists, fully supported the 1944 general strike. His quote from the RSL leaflet is worth repeating in full:

Russia must be defended! But how? By giving up strikes and accepting the bosses' programme as the ex-Communist Party demands? No. The workers may agree to halt the class war, but the bosses won't. If we sacrifice our rights ... they will grow bolder in their encroachments, and fascism at home will be the outcome. Then the Soviet Union will be crushed. If we cannot defend our trade union rights, we clearly cannot defend the Soviet union. Despite their diplomatic blandishments, the capitalist politicians - Churchill included - hate Russia. Only working class political power can save the Soviet Union. Only by defending ourselves on the industrial front can we prepare for political power. (RSL quoted in Milotte, p.214)



Milotte's political credo forbids any "defence" of the USSR or other "communist" countries against imperialism. His indulgence in using this quote from the RSL is because his own SWP doctrine about the "communist" countries was not put forward by Tony Cliff, himself in Dublin during the war, until 1947.

In an early review of Milotte's book in the Irish Times, ex-CPer George Jeffares, with some justice, demanded to know what was so superior about Milotte's politics as against those of the CP if Trotskyism in Ireland had nothing to show for it! Any honest answer to this valid question must confront how the Fourth International after 1947, before it developed any mass parties, degenerated - not into the anti-working class treachery of Stalinism - but into programmatic confusion, centrism, and inability to grapple with the problems of the new world period.

One of those centrist fragments, today's SWP/SWM, distinguished itself by bending in the winds of the new Cold War period and dusted off an old but convenient theory that the USSR was a new form of capitalism, that it should not be defended in any conflict with imperialism. Trotsky had never wavered in rejecting this view, and by the time he was killed the USSR had long ago undergone the definitive bureaucratisation that led him to call it a "degenerate Workers State", in need of POLITICAL REVOLUTION to rebuild workers' control, but not a social revolution against a capitalist class already abolished.

The SWP analysis of the USSR and other Stalinist states as "state-capitalist" is a radical and very central revision of the whole Trotskyist tradition and breaks with Marx's understanding of capitalism in important respects. Many things flow from it and it would seem virtually impossible to focus a whole book on the record of Stalinism in Ireland without once relating it to the centrally important question of the class nature of the USSR. Especially as Milotte "explains" the zig-zagging of the Irish Stalinists as expressing the world interests of the Kremlin, the question cries out for an answer - what are those interests, and what is the class nature of the society they arise out of?

Milotte's silence is deafening. Nowhere does he record his belief that the USSR is a society ruled by a new capitalist class. On page 245 Milotte, having referred to the states in Eastern Europe, asserts as an aside in brackets: "(There the state was all-powerful, but it was NOT a workers' state.)". And that, incredible to relate, is as much of his position as he is prepared to disclose! On page 238 he tells us that the Stalinists reduced internationalism "to fawning expressions of solidarity with the bureaucratic anti-working class regimes of the Soviet Bloc". But this is the term used by Trotsky AGAINST the "new-class" theorists! - the Stalinist states ARE ruled by an anti-working class BUREAUCRACY, not a "state-capitalist" class.

Whatever level of conscious dishonesty may be involved in this evasion, the author's silence on his actual position proves once more that the anti-Marxist theory of the USSR as a new "state-capitalist" system with a capitalist ruling class EXPLAINS NOTHING. What could be a better proof than to see the upholders of this theory IGNORE it when

31 it comes to analysing the 60-year record in one country of a world-wide political current which CANNOT be understood EXCEPT in relation to the nature of the Stalinist states!

The author argues that the slogans of the CPI (pages 244-6) for nationalisations and state enterprise are merely "state-capitalist", and he relates this to their "acceptance of the USSR as socialist". His meaning remains obscure precisely because he fails to state his belief that the USSR is a system of "state capitalism." But it has always been true of REFORMIST programmes that their demands for state economic intervention have only ever been a series of state-capitalist measures, i.e. measures demanded of a capitalist state but not aimed at expropriating the capitalist class. It is NOT because these parties stand politically with the Kremlin that their slogans amount to nothing more than state-capitalist measures. Their social programmes are mere borrowings from petty-bourgeois social democracy.

#### UNDERSTANDING STALINISM

Milotte thus fails to locate what is essentially distinctive to Stalinism. Without a full and dialectical understanding of Stalinism, it becomes virtually impossible to assess it programmatically in its many different actual forms. Milottes' view of the CPI as as local representative of the Kremlin ruling class will not do to explain the evident Stalinism of the anti-CPI "Workers Party". Less still will it cope with Stalinist "eurocommunism" and the many national variants from Yugoslavia, through China, Albania, Cuba and Vietnam to the reactionary nightmare of the Kampuchean Communist Party. Without that understanding genuine communists can seriously flounder when confronted with important struggles in which Stalinists control the leadership.

Trotsky's understanding of Stalinism, of its programmatic essentials and its relation to the world working class was inseparable from his analysis of the USSR as a counter-revolutionary, bureaucratically degenerated WORKERS state, i.e. a highly contradictory reality. An essential task of authentic communists today is to restate that understanding so as to fully comprehend the extraordinary expansion of Stalinism since the 1940s and its continuing grip on mass sections of workers in many capitalist countries. That is a task to which the groups of the MRCI, Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International, are committed. "The Degenerated Revolution", the book jointly published by Workers Power (Britain) and the IWG is, we believe, a major contribution to this end.

Mike Milotte's book, despite its serious political and theoretical flaws, will serve revolutionary communists in as an important guide to the historical record of the class struggle in Ireland, and specifically of the counter-revolutionary nature of Stalinism in the working class.

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# RESISTANCE TO PINOCHET MOUNTS

**IF THE PINOCHET** Government believed that it could solve the deep economic, social and political crisis currently wracking Chile then they have been speedily undeceived. Far from the intensified repression halting the mass struggles of the working class, the urban poor and the students, it has hardened this resistance and made it more determined.

On the other hand the changes within the institutions of the dictatorship have failed to consolidate the forces of the Right. The bourgeoisie has not been able to unite behind Pinochet. The economic changes introduced by the ministers Escobar and Collados were a recognition of the failure of the policies of the Chicago boys- the free market economists of the Milton Friedman school. These changes themselves failed to produce the hoped for economic upturn.

The economic crisis of this backward capitalist economy have been deepening over the last months. The new ministers tried to reverse some of the policies of the "free market". For example they raised import tariffs, but this measure means nothing in a situation where half of Chile's export earnings go to service the 18,000 million dollar debt.

Also the banks are failing to make profits and their debts are accumulating as the Chilean peso falls against the dollar. Contributing further to this crisis has been the fall in the value of copper. In August 1984 it was 57cents per pound producing a commercial deficit of 66.4 million dollars.

## ■ LIMITING THE STRUGGLE ■

The policies of the Economic Minister have satisfied neither the workers, who have been subjected to an inflation rate of 40% in the price of basic necessities and a wages freeze, nor the IMF, who have demanded that ever sharper austerity measures be imposed on the Chilean masses.

The ministerial crisis of the last weeks led to the replacement of the ministers for the Interior and the Economy. Throughout all these events Pinochet continued his plans to renew the dictatorship by a new "11th September" - ie. a coup which would restore the dictatorship to its full severity. These new manoeuvres must be understood not only in relation to the internal situation in Chile but also as a product of US foreign policy.

On one side sections of the American bourgeoisie are in favour of creating a bourgeois opposition to Pinochet, including sections at present friendly to the regime. However they are afraid that even a minor destabilisation like this could produce a collapse of the whole system. This proposed re-alignment and unification of the bourgeoisie would take place around the Christian Democrat and National Parties. It would exclude the left.

The differences of Pinochet have weakened the influence of the faction of the American bourgeoisie pushing for such changes. Moreover it does not hold the whip hand in Washington. Since Reagan's re-election he has made plain his determination to root out "communism" - ie. anti-imperialist and working class resistance to the United States - in his "backyard".

This re-affirmed anti-communism has borne fruit for the Chilean dictatorship. A few weeks ago the Inter-American Development Bank gave a loan of 30 million dollars to Pinochet. Reagan has decided to stick by Pinochet because the US cannot afford to see another area of instability

opened in South America. In addition Chile could prove much more difficult to handle than Argentina or Brazil. The dismantling of the Argentine dictatorship and the "liberalising" of the Brazilian one took place in the context of there being a clear bourgeois alternative to the military. This is not the case in Chile. A revolutionary crisis is a likely result of the crumbling of the dictatorship.

The renewed support of the American imperialists for Pinochet's repression cannot for long contain the struggles of the Chilean workers. On the contrary, even though at the moment many workers and students are on holiday, large demonstrations are still taking place against the regime.

For example the student unions used the vacation to organise voluntary work amongst the peasants. This was immediately declared illegal because of the state of siege and curfew. When the students defied this ban 240 were arrested. But the regime was forced to release them because of the pressure from workers and students.

The sacking of the two ministers, Onofre Jarpa (Interior) and Luis Escobar (Economy), plus the previous sacking of the ambassador in the Organisation of American States (OAS) Monica Madariaga, increased the isolation of Pinochet, turning the bourgeois opposition further against him. This also fuelled the disagreements within the Christian Democratic Party between those who favour using the Chilean Communist Party to control the workers and those who think the Stalinists should be kept at a safe distance.

## ■ IDEALISED DEMOCRACY ■

The Democratic Popular Movement in this situation is still carrying on with its programme of creating a liberal bourgeois democracy within Chile. This programme limits the struggle of the masses to the winning of an idealised "democracy" which preserves the capitalist economy and the forces of the capitalist state. It shuts off the workers and the urban poor from the only solution to their crying immediate needs as well as their historic interests- the socialist revolution.

Bourgeois democracy will offer these masses only austerity programmes and army and police repression. It would only lead to a new and bloodier version of the Popular Unity debacle of the early 1970s. In fact it is being used as a basis for a compromise with the Army itself. This craven class collaboration- given a militant gloss by urban guerrillaist spectacular blows- cannot destroy the dictatorship.

Only the independent class action of the proletariat can lead all the oppressed of town and country to the destruction of Pinochet's regime. Mass strike action leading to an insurrectionary general strike can alone pave the way to not only the smashing of the dictatorship but also prevent its replacement by another anti-working class government which would force the masses to pay the cost of Chile's crisis.

What is needed now is the building of a united front of the workers' parties and unions which will ally itself to the peasants and all oppressed and exploited classes and strata. The final objective must be to replace the dictatorship with a workers and peasants government, based on workers and peasants councils and an armed militia made up of the working and exploited masses. In the struggles for this objective a revolutionary communist party, capable of leading the masses to final victory, must be forged. ■

by Diego Mocar