

IM

# *Red Banner*

*a magazine of socialist ideas*

SOCIALISM MUST BE  
CREATED BY THE  
MASSES, BY EVERY  
PROLETARIAN,  
WHERE THE CHAINS  
OF CAPITALISM ARE  
FORGED, THERE  
MUST THEY BE BRO-  
KEN. ONLY THAT IS  
SOCIALISM, AND ONLY  
THUS CAN SOCIALISM  
BE CREATED.

·ROSA LUXEMBURG·

issue 1

£2

# *Red Banner*

*a magazine of socialist ideas*

35 C Gloucester Street South  
Dublin 2

issue 1: November 1997

## **Unfurling *Red Banner***

*Red Banner* is a revolutionary socialist magazine. If you are sick of the way the world is run, then *Red Banner* is for you. We intend to present socialist ideas to as many people as we can, and to develop and apply those ideas to the needs of the struggle for socialism today. It is our belief that that struggle requires a clear understanding of its situation, of its history, of the conditions of its victory.

That necessity is as great today as it has ever been. Capitalism every day proves itself to be incapable of resolving the basic problems facing humanity. If the human race is to have any kind of a future at all, the creation of a socialist society, in Ireland and internationally, is a crying need. *Red Banner* wishes to contribute, as far as it can, to ensuring that socialism succeeds in rescuing the world from barbarity.

Just as obvious as the failure of capitalist society is the failure of the left, thus far, to get rid of it. There is no use denying it: there are too many on the left who see the struggle in terms of their own narrow organisational success, and not enough whose main concern is the strength and fighting consciousness of the working class. *Red Banner* has no illusions whatsoever that it is destined to form some revolutionary vanguard, but we are convinced that a powerful socialist movement can be built in the

working class. *Red Banner* has no illusions whatsoever that it is destined to form some revolutionary vanguard, but we are convinced that a powerful socialist movement can be built in the working class, on condition that the sectarian disorder is eradicated, and that the actual fight for socialist revolution once again becomes all-important.

We will be affording zero tolerance to sectarianism. The petulant squabbling of one group with another will find no echo in our pages. As far as we are concerned, the left can beat each other up outside any dance hall they like, but we won't be holding their coats. Organisational affiliations will in no way preclude contributors, but we will have no advertising and no jargon. We refuse to condemn the readers of *Red Banner* to the sight of sets of initials hurling freshly-coined insults at each other in the spirit of comradely fraternity. Neither convoluted internal gibberish nor patronising tabloid journalism will find its way in here.

Rare as such an admission may be in this part of the political world, *Red Banner* is not the bearer of all truth, does not have all the answers. None of us have climbed Mount Sinai, and the only tablets we possess are of the paracetamol variety. (Although they can come in handy when navigating the murky waters of the left....) We have our opinions, and believe them to be correct: but we can't summon up enough arrogance to deny that others have lessons to teach as well.

This is not to say that *Red Banner* will be a retirement home where bewildered lefties can rest their weary heads. We intend to work out, in the heat of debate, clear strategies for the battles ahead. We are attempting to answer the question generations of revolutionaries have put to themselves: What is to be done?

*Red Banner* will be an unapologetically *revolutionary* magazine: the answers we propose arise from the politics of Marxism. Like Karl Marx before us, we are convinced that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the

working classes themselves. The rainforests are in bad enough shape as it is, so we won't be wasting paper with appeals to seek salvation in the election of nice politicians, or in the ascendancy of benevolent dictators. We stand for the workers of the world independently and self-consciously taking control of it.

But we won't be resorting to censorship and heresy-hunting to put our views forward. Only those unsure of their politics need gunboats in the bay to enforce an intellectual monopoly for their product. We, on the other hand, have enough confidence in the strength of revolutionary socialist politics to believe that they will win through and grow stronger in the free competition of ideas. We want *Red Banner* to act also as a forum to discuss the ways and means of making socialist revolution a reality.

This means we will need the help of our readers. We want them not to be passive consumers of this magazine, but actively involved in making it something of a force to be reckoned with. Send us articles, write us letters, make proposals and criticisms. Subscribe to the magazine, get others to read it, take a few copies to sell. The magazine will appear every six months to begin with – with the next issue out in May 1998 – and hopefully more often in the near future. But the existence of *Red Banner* depends on the support we get from our readers.

We firmly believe it is high time something like this magazine came along. The situation is ripe for the spread and development of socialist ideas. The success of those ideas depends fundamentally on the concrete struggles of the working class. Our aim in *Red Banner* is only to play a part, however modest, in the ultimate triumph of socialism, in theory and in practice.

## Contents

## Back to basics

*Joe Conroy*

### Back to Basics

*Joe Conroy* 5

### Class, creed and consent

*Mick Doyle* 9

### Racism: A class issue

*Rosanna Flynn* 19

### REVOLUTIONARY LIVES Rosa Luxemburg

*Maeve Connaughton* 22

### Ó cheardchumannachas go sóisialachas

*Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh* 41

### Forgotten Voices: Women and the Land War

*Eve Morrison* 45

### The Hidden Connolly 52

### The myth of *Michael Collins*

*Brian Hanley* 59

cover *Alan Casey*

In the world we live in, someone starves to death every other second while food mountains pile up. More and more armaments are produced to kill more and more people in more and more wars. The so-called lucky ones, people with jobs in the advanced industrial economies, spend half their waking hours at some boring, soul-destroying task just to make a rich person even richer, and to buy themselves some semblance of a human existence once the clock gives them permission.

As the millenium draws to its close, the evidence in the case against capitalism remains overwhelming. If the public is to be protected from the menace of such a hardened criminal system, the penalty of death by socialist revolution is called for. The only thing is to bring in the verdict.

That task falls to the working class. Socialism is, and has to be, a movement of the workers. As capitalism creates a working class, it creates the force that can bring about its downfall. To begin with, the people who are forced to work for the capitalist class and maintain it in the style to which it has grown accustomed have an obvious and direct *interest* in getting rid of it. But, also, the people who create all the wealth for that same capitalist class have the *power* to stop creating it for them, to cut the lifeline of capitalist profit. So socialism is the self-liberation movement of the working class.

This, of course, doesn't mean that no one will be allowed take part until they have presented a pair of suitably-calloused hands for inspection. The working class is not the cloth-capped stereotype of the middle-class mind, but, quite simply, everyone who has to sell their ability to work to a capitalist in order to make a living – whether that work is manual, clerical, both, or neither. And those outside the working class who want to play a part in the workers' self-liberation are more than welcome – after all, Karl Marx, the greatest socialist of them all, was a lawyer's son. In fact, it's not only permissible but indispensable that, in the fight for socialism, our class rallies all those who suffer from capitalist society behind our lead.

In the search for socialism, however, you have to be wary of cheap and nasty imitations. One brand goes under the name of labourism, or social democracy, or various other hybrid appellations. According to this conception, our job is to elect well-meaning socialists to the Dáil or wherever, who will then enact reforms here and there so that capitalism

won't be quite so horrible – and, with a bit of luck, will end up more or less socialist anyway, or as near as makes no difference.

Experience, however, shows that this reformist road usually ends in tears. For a start, the heart of capitalist power doesn't reside in its parliaments. The Dáil can pass as many laws as it likes: the decisions that really matter are made in the boardrooms of big business, well out of the reach of any ballot box. And those who control the capitalists' physical forces – the army, the police, the prisons – aren't elected either, but chosen from the loyal ranks of the high and mighty themselves. In fact, the strategy of socialism by means of reforms ends up achieving neither socialism nor reforms.

On the other hand, but fundamentally cut from the same cloth, is the Stalinist perversion of socialism, as tried and failed in Russia, China, eastern Europe, Cuba and elsewhere. This consists of a small clique taking control of the state and bringing the economy under its control. Of course these economies are no more socialist, as a result, than the ESB is socialist, or Bord na Móna, or any other state-owned industry. And the tyrannical denial of even the most basic of rights to the working class confirms that what we have here is another case of capitalism – state capitalism rather than private capitalism, but capitalism nonetheless. Popular revolt has thankfully meant that this blot on the socialist landscape is now hardly to be seen.

What both these dead ends have in common is that their version of 'socialism' condemns the working class to the most passive of roles: maybe scribbling numbers on a ballot paper if we're lucky, looking on while the elite hand us our freedom and expect us to be grateful. Real socialism has nothing in common with such an idea. Socialism is something that has to be won by the workers for ourselves, from the bottom up, taking control of our workplaces, of our communities, of society as a whole, and running it to fulfil the needs and desires of human beings.

This is revolutionary socialism, that works for a complete overthrow of capitalist rule – as peacefully as possible, but as violently as necessary – and for the building of a new society. This means a system of the most radical and thorough workers' democracy to utilise the opinions and capacities of all in getting rid of the remnants of oppression and laying the foundations for a new world.

Glimpses of socialism have been seen over the years when workers have succeeded in taking control for a period – in Paris in 1871, in Russia in 1917 until the revolution was crushed, in Hungary in 1956, and elsewhere. But the particular form a socialist society would take remains to be seen.

That will be a job for those who are reared in a society free of exploitation, for fresh generations, who can safely ignore any blueprints that twentieth-century socialists might feel constrained to draw up. But it will mean more than just taking the money from the rich: it will mean an entire recasting of the relations between human beings to enable them to live and work together, developing all their individual and collective capacities to the full. Mistakes will be made, of course, and not every human problem will disappear, but a world built on human freedom would make the wildest dreams of today seem petty.

But how to get from here to there? That, as the man says, is the question. The answer starts from the small revolts that happen all the time in capitalist society. A society based on class division, on antagonism between those who rule and those who work, inevitably creates tensions – a class struggle. Like the tide, that struggle ebbs and flows, but like the tide, it is always there.

Workers don't have to be geniuses to realise that, as the bosses continuously attempt to squeeze more work out of us for less, the only effective defence is our collective strength. And when workers strike together, you can get an idea of the power of our class: the wheels stop turning when the workers stop turning them. In this situation, assumptions can be questioned. People can see the police, the media, the politicians ganging up against them; they can see that their only hope of success lies in solidarity; they can see that their fight is part of a much wider struggle. In every collective fight of workers against capitalists, the potential of socialism is there – if it can be harnessed. Plenty of strikes come and go, of course, leaving little in their wake. But often, lessons are drawn, workers are won to the cause of socialism.

It comes down to this: the conscious, socialist section of the working class. Our job, put simply, is to win the rest of our class to socialism. This means being involved in the day-to-day struggles, doing our bit to achieve immediate victory. But it also means pointing the moral of the story: persuading people that we need to win, not just the battle, but the war as well, that the fight has to become a fight to emancipate all workers and all the oppressed. Socialism has to win the battle of ideas in the midst of working-class struggle.

It sounds easy when you say it quickly. In reality, as the poet Bertolt Brecht wrote, socialism "is the easy thing That is hard to do". But if the fight sometimes proves to be a hard slog, the prize is a world worth

fighting for. The continuation of capitalism means prolonging and worsening human misery. Socialism means the struggle for human liberation. Everyone has to decide for themselves which side they are on.

## Class, creed and consent

*Mick Doyle*

It's fair to say that the overwhelming majority of people, on both sides of the border and in Britain, have welcomed the IRA ceasefire. After almost thirty years of war, after more than three thousand deaths, near countless injuries, bombings, riots and the everyday oppressive atmosphere that has existed in the six counties, it's not difficult to understand the hope with which the cessation was greeted. But welcome though this peace is, any solution that might come out of the current talks will not deal with the root cause of 'the troubles': the sectarian nature of the six county state.

Consent is one of the buzzwords sent spinning out of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. It is enshrined in the framework of that process, and watched over vigilantly by the Irish, British and American governments. But consent was far from the minds of the men who wrested the six counties out of the turmoil of 1920s Ireland.

It was set up to be "a protestant state for a protestant people", as its first prime minister proudly boasted. The Unionists jettisoned three counties of their beloved Ulster in order to copperfasten a protestant majority – probably the only time in history a people willingly surrendered territory. Its borders were then drawn unilaterally by the British government and anti-catholic pogroms were whipped up to smash any dissent from a community that suddenly found itself a minority. Between 1920 and 1922 257 catholics were killed. The state was policed by an overwhelmingly protestant force. A 'Special Constabulary', recruited mostly from the Ulster Volunteer Force, was established. Internment was introduced almost immediately, resulting in the detention without trial of 728 people, all of them catholic. Electoral boundaries were gerrymandered to ensure Unionist domination of as many local councils as possible. Employers and property owners were allowed extra votes. Although this affected catholics most severely, it affected protestant workers too. Only householders were allowed to vote, giving Unionists a strong incentive to deny catholics housing.

Not content with physical and electoral attacks the new state ensured that catholics got the hard end of the stick in employment as well. Being a member of the Orange Order practically guaranteed you a job and businesses like Harland & Wolff were almost exclusively protestant. In 1933, Sir Joseph Davidson, Grand Master of the Orange Order spelled it

out: "It is time Protestant employers in Northern Ireland realised that whenever a Roman Catholic is brought into their employment it means one Protestant vote less... I suggest the slogan should be: Protestants employ Protestants." The statement was made during a period of widespread social unrest, a period of working class unity across the sectarian divide, and it is as good an example as you are ever likely to get of what the Orange Order is really about.

The Special Powers Act 1922 enabled the police to search, arrest and detain without warrant. It also targeted political organisations, meetings and publications. Although ostensibly an assault on Republicanism, it was in fact an attack on the entire working class. (South African prime minister John Vorster was later to remark that he would abandon all his repressive apartheid powers for a single clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act.)

Pogroms and sectarian violence erupted again and again throughout the following decades, becoming a feature of life in cities such as Belfast and Derry. The bigots didn't have it all their own way though. Significant strikes had broken out even before partition, involving both protestant and catholic workers.

1907 was a year of serious industrial unrest in Ireland. Jim Larkin arrived in Belfast at a time of high working class militancy. He set about unionising workers, sparking off a succession of strikes in the process. The bosses shipped five hundred troops in to back up the police. The *Northern Whig*, a unionist paper, was terrified: "We are on the eve of an experience something akin to that which has paralysed Russian cities during the last couple of years."

Thousands of workers came out during the summer bringing the city to a standstill. 200,000 marched along the Falls and the Shankill Roads. And all of this during what should have been the Orange marching season.

1919 was another flashpoint. The successful revolution in Russia had inspired workers all over the world and the carnage of the First World War had sickened them towards their rulers. A general strike for a shorter working week was organised in Belfast. It involved around 40,000 catholic and protestant workers directly and a further 200,000 indirectly.

The class struggle brought working class protestants and catholics together time and again in the early years of the state's existence.

1932, in the midst of a worldwide economic depression, saw the Outdoor Relief riots. Official estimates put the number of unemployed in Belfast at 72,000. (Unofficially it was estimated at over 100,000.) Those on schemes organised by the Board of Guardians received a paltry salary,

while those not on schemes were given food parcels. The Revolutionary Workers Groups set up the Outdoor Relief Workers Committee which called for better pay, full relief for single men and an end to payment in kind. They organised a strike for Monday 4 October. 2,000 workers took part. 60,000 marched in Belfast that evening demanding "work and wages, not charity". 7,000 marched on the workhouse the next day. By the following Friday the Poor Law Guardians were offering a 50% increase in rates. This was refused and another march was called. Marchers rallied in West, East and North Belfast. The march was banned under the Special Powers Act. The police, reinforced by 700 extra officers, attempted to break it up. Rioting spread from the Falls to the Shankill Road and barricades erected by the rioters remained in place for days.

The civil and industrial unrest continued into 1933. On 31 January a rail strike broke out to halt a cut in wages. The Belfast-Dublin train was derailed in County Louth, killing two scabs. 5,000 demonstrated in Belfast on 24 March, trains were stoned, dockers and carters came out in sympathy. Solidarity action took place in the South and the first Great Northern Railway bus to make it to Dublin was burned out by supporters of the mainly protestant strike, who then rioted against gardai.

The Republican Congress, one of the most significant groups to come out of the upheavals of the 1930s, was a left-wing breakaway from the Republican movement, with five clubs in Belfast, four of them in protestant areas. 500 members travelled to the Wolfe Tone commemoration in Bodenstown carrying a banner that read: "Shankill Road Belfast Branch. Break the Connection with Capitalism. Connolly's Message Our Ideal. On to the Workers' Republic." Deplorably, the right-wing leadership of the IRA ordered the banner to be taken down and fighting broke out in the cemetery, with some IRA volunteers taking the side of the Shankill men.

During the Second World War also, the assumption that protestant workers were inherently tied to the empire rather than to their class was shaken. Strikes raged in the North throughout the war. An electricians' strike in 1944, for instance, spread from Shorts to include 40,000 workers at its height when shop stewards were jailed.

These were some of the main battles fought out between northern workers and their bosses and some of the more significant organisations involved in them. The men and women who took part in these battles were not only up against the usual hostility of the government and the media, or up against the scheming and cowardice of their own union leaders, but had to contend too with a bitter cauldron of sectarianism that was stirred at every opportunity. In both the 1907 dock strike and the 1932 Outdoor

Relief riots, for example, catholic areas were saturated with troops and police in order to sow dissension between the two communities. Unionist employers and politicians cajoled protestant workers with better housing and wages than their catholic neighbours but sectarian divisions meant significantly worse conditions for the entire working class of the six counties than for their counterparts in England, Scotland or Wales. Unfortunately, sectarianism worked well and apart from flashes of class unity the two communities remained bitterly divided for the most part.

The IRA's Border Campaign in the 1950s and early 60s left the northern state still intact. The status quo still prevailed. Catholics, even where they were in a clear majority, lived in appalling ghettos, with little hope of finding steady work and seemingly without the political clout to do anything about it. But the political clout existed, and was discovered in Derry in the late 1960s.

Derry city was the classic example of how gerrymandering worked. The city's catholic population had been relegated to gerrymandered ghettos like the Creggan, the Brandywell and the Bogside, and electoral boundaries fiddled to create a Unionist majority on the city council. Unemployment was chronic and with a deliberate policy of diverting work from the city the situation gave little hope of improving.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was set up in 1967. Its demands were tame enough by today's standards but in actual fact they unintentionally challenged the very basis of the state. NICRA sought one person one vote; an end to gerrymandering; anti-discrimination legislation; a points system for the allocation of housing; the repeal of the Special Powers Act; and the disbanding of the B Specials. A series of protests and marches, modelled on the civil rights movement in the United States, culminated in a march called for October 5 in Derry. The participants would march from the Waterside area to the old walled part of the city. The march was banned. Faced with a phalanx of policemen on the western side of the Craigavon Bridge, the marchers had begun to disperse when they realised another group of police had sealed off the bridge behind them. The police charged, batons drawn. Eighty eight marchers were injured and thirty six arrested. Water cannons were brought in and citizens crossing the bridge were indiscriminately showered. Rioting broke out soon after in the Bogside and went on into the next day. Worldwide media coverage of the violence had a huge impact on the British public and put pressure on the Unionist regime at Stormont via the British Labour government.

15,000 took part in a repeat march (also banned) on November 16 and the police made no attempt to attack them. Stormont leader Terence

O'Neill was forced to concede some of NICRA's demands a little over a week later. Although many NICRA figures were satisfied with this, others, particularly those in the left-wing People's Democracy, were not. They saw the reforms as the beginning of their campaign rather than the end. They organised a march from Belfast to Derry at the start of 1969. At Burntollet Bridge, eight miles from their destination, the marchers were set upon by a loyalist mob while the RUC looked on. Sympathetic rioting broke out in the Bogside, and the RUC ran amok.

That August saw the high point of the violence. 15,000 loyalists marched along the Derry walls to commemorate the defeat of King James there 280 years before. They literally looked down upon the residents of the Bogside, taunting them and throwing pennies into their streets. The Bogside responded by throwing stones. The police moved in and the worst rioting yet ensued. Stronger barricades had been erected in anticipation of an assault, showers of petrol bombs were hurled at the police from the roof of the towering Rossville Flats and youths on the ground fought them hand to hand. Charge after charge of RUC, loyalists and B Specials was driven back. The Bogside held firm and Free Derry was proclaimed. After two more days of the Battle of the Bogside, British troops were ordered into the city.

The violence spread to other parts of the six counties. Belfast, already the scene of sectarian warfare that year, was the worst affected. The Falls Road was attacked by gangs of loyalists on August 14 while the RUC drove up and down the road in Land Rovers firing indiscriminately. A nine year old boy and a British soldier home on leave were killed. Within thirty six hours over 150 catholic houses had been burnt out. Bombay Street on the Lower Falls was totally destroyed. Ten had been killed and over a hundred wounded. The troops moved into the Falls on 15 August.

The explosion of violence that month caught a dormant IRA unawares. For one thing the leadership was largely based in Dublin and woefully out of touch with the situation in the six counties. A caricature of Marxism they had devised held that fighting against the Northern state got in the way of the fight for socialism, and they ignored appeals for weapons from their members in the North, which weapons they had sold anyway to a group of Welsh nationalists. Catholics had to flee or defend themselves, throwing up barricades at the ends of their streets. Graffiti declaring "IRA - I Ran Away" was common. Shamed by the inaction of their leaders, their communities under relentless attack, northern Republicans were fast moving towards a split with the organisation.

Although viewed with wariness by members of the IRA and some members of the Citizens Defence Committees, British soldiers were welcomed in catholic areas overall. Many catholics saw them as their protectors against marauding loyalist mobs. But the real reason for their presence was to give the gasping RUC a respite and to shore up the Stormont regime. When push came to shove the army would do what Stormont told it to do.

The IRA finally split in December 1969. It split ostensibly over whether or not the movement should recognise the Dáil, but it had more to do with the argument over armed struggle. Younger militants in the North had lost patience with the leadership's 'Marxist' stages theory, that postponed the fight against the Northern state endlessly. The dissidents disavowed any kind of Marxist politics. On the other hand, they wanted a fightback in the six counties. Around one hundred delegates walked out of the Sinn Féin Ardfeis in January 1970 to form what would become Provisional Sinn Féin, supporting the newly-formed Provisional IRA. The Provisionals immediately set about stockpiling weapons and explosives in preparation for what they knew was an inevitable confrontation with the British Army. They were soon bombing commercial premises across the North with ferocious repetition. By June of that year forty four bombs had been set off, without a single civilian fatality.

The Provisionals' first major test came on the 27th of that month. Bernadette Devlin MP had been jailed the day before for making petrol bombs during the Battle of the Bogside and the inevitable riots had broken out in Derry. The following day trouble flared between catholic residents in Ardoyne and Orange marchers. The 'Provos' were on hand and three loyalists were killed in the gun battle that followed. Loyalists bent on revenge attacked St. Matthew's church in the Short Strand. The Provisionals stepped in again, killing two in a second gun battle and driving the attackers off. This proved to be the turning point for the fledgling organisation. The British Army had failed to respond to appeals for help from the Short Strand community and the Provos had hurried to their defence.

The situation was now one of spiralling action and counter-action. Overseen by Stormont and with the support of the new Tory government, the army began a massive house to house search of the Falls. Stones were thrown at the troops, who replied with tear gas, firing a total of 1,600 canisters in all. A thirty-six hour curfew was imposed. Four people were killed, twelve wounded and three hundred arrested.

The British generals' shoot-to-kill policy, floated the previous April, was not only endorsed by the new Stormont leader Brian Faulkner but brutally developed to include anyone 'acting suspiciously'. The army duly obliged, shooting two men in Derry on July 8 1971.

Internment was to be the government's trump card. The troops swooped at 4am on Monday August 9. 342 men – all catholics – were detained without charge or trial in the first twenty four hours. 116 of them were released within 48 hours, an unofficial admission of the indiscriminate nature of the operation. The IRA leadership escaped the round-ups virtually unscathed. 882 people were picked up within the next three months and over the next two years 2,158 internment orders were issued. Some of those detained were singled out for sensory deprivation torture. they were hooded, made to stand spreadeagled against a wall for long periods, deprived of sleep, given meagre amounts of food and drink and exposed to 'white noise', a continuous humming sound piped into their isolation cells. Others were hooded and thrown out of helicopters hovering just above the ground, having been told the choppers were high over Belfast. Internment backfired completely.

The response of the Provos was fearsome. In the four months following its introduction 30 soldiers and 11 RUC and UDR men were killed, and 73 civilians died in the fighting. In August alone 35 were killed, 100 bombs went off and 200 houses were burned. Internment swung large sections of the nationalist community decisively behind the Provisional IRA. No-go areas became a reality in Belfast and Derry, with stiff resistance to a security force presence in other areas. The Provos began to recruit rapidly. Republicans who were interned used the jails to debate and develop a political strategy.

Greater horrors awaited in the new year. On 30 January 1972 the British Army committed what was without the doubt the most brutal atrocity in the fighting north of the border. As a large and peaceful anti-internment march headed back into Derry's Bogside, members of the 1st Parachute Regiment were loosed like the proverbial dogs of war. The Paras poured into the area, randomly firing live rounds. They killed 13 unarmed civilians that afternoon and wounded 29, one of whom died later. It became known as Bloody Sunday.

It was Bloody Sunday that brought Stormont crashing down, although it had long lost control of the reins. From now on the six counties would be ruled directly from Westminster. Bloody Sunday also sparked off a massive and angry reaction in the 26 Counties. A huge general strike paralysed industry. A national day of mourning was called by the government, as

much an attempt to head off the industrial action as anything else. The British embassy in Dublin was burned down during a demonstration of over 30,000. But the Widgery report into the killings was a travesty, totally exonerating every Para involved. More recruits flooded into the IRA and the organisation set about waging full scale guerrilla war on the police, the army and loyalist paramilitary groups. Such was the strength of feeling in the community, and the ferocity of the IRA's onslaught, that they declared 1974 would be "the year of victory". It didn't work out like that though, and, after coming close to calling a halt to the war a couple of years later, they settled down to a long, bitter campaign. The state for its part unleashed a reign of murder, torture and intimidation, while sectarian gangs like the Shankill Butchers slaughtered catholics they picked up at random.

The situation flared up again in 1981. Margaret Thatcher was forcing through the policy of 'criminalisation', treating political prisoners as criminals. Republican prisoners in the H Blocks of Long Kesh and in Armagh had for some time been refusing to wear prison clothing, and mounted a hunger strike on 1 March. Bobby Sands was elected to the House of Commons and two other hunger strikers were elected to the Dáil. Thatcher however was unmoved and when Bobby Sands died on May 5, after sixty six days on hunger strike, the North erupted. Thatcher's intransigence caused the death of ten men in all, with intense rioting following on each death. Seven civilians were killed by the security forces, among them two young boys run over by an army vehicle in Derry and 12 year old Carol Ann Kelly who was hit by a plastic bullet as she was returning from an errand. The families of the surviving strikers finally took them off the fast. As merciless as the episode had been, the hunger strikes jumpstarted the Republican movement again and brought Sinn Féin to the fore as a political force.

Sinn Féin were not the only political force to emerge from the conflict. The loyalist paramilitaries were beginning to grow political wings as well. The IRA ceasefire put paid to the lie that loyalist violence was reactive (only fifty of their thousand-odd victims have been active Republicans) and pressure mounted on loyalist paramilitaries to follow suit. Only days before their ceasefire they were killing and trying to kill innocent catholics. Graffiti calling for death to all Irish nationalists appeared in areas they operated in.

Almost immediately after the 'Combined Loyalist Military Command' declared their ceasefire in October of 1994 though, the world was treated to a flood of rhetoric about the working class. It surprised many north and

south. This was not the bitter bile of uncompromising bigotry. These were the hard men of Loyalism, the fighters, the killers, and it seemed they were telling it like it is.

The living conditions of working class protestants are no different to those of working class people anywhere. They are brought face to face with social inequality every day of their lives. Almost all Loyalist paramilitaries come from working class backgrounds and they and their political soulmates merely mirror the views of their communities when they talk about class. Working class protestants have probably never faced such an uncertain future. Many no longer feel the state guarantees them a decent livelihood. Over half the manufacturing workforce has disappeared in the past few decades, unemployment is running at chronic levels and all the big employers have shed jobs. They know that they haven't been adequately represented and are looking for an alternative. The PUP and UDP are putting themselves forward as that alternative.

But their threat to Unionism is more imagined than real. Neither the PUP nor the UDP are prepared to tackle the sectarian state. On the contrary, they pride themselves on their history of defending it. (They did all the fighting, killing and dying while the middle and upper classes did all the talking.) They talk about reforming the RUC, ignoring the fact that the RUC are unacceptable to many protestants, never mind catholics. They talk about keeping the minority in their hearts and minds but random murders of innocent catholics have continued throughout the loyalist 'ceasefire'. What these parties offer at the end of the day is a battle for votes with parties like the DUP, which will in turn lead to a sectarian scramble with nationalists for the crumbs expected to come from the Peace Process table.

Nobody could argue that the Republican movement and the nationalist community have not moved forward since the troubles began in 1968. The Croppies lie down no longer, the call of No Surrender has echoed more and more hollow down the years, Stormont was brought down, the B Specials were disbanded and the British Army and security forces have been fought to a standstill. But the IRA too have implicitly admitted that the armed struggle is unlikely to achieve its aims. Their move towards an unarmed strategy and their subsequent ceasefire are living proof of that. Sinn Féin are now involved in peace talks. But what can they hope for from the talks? They can argue for a united Ireland 'somewhere down the line' but it is clear a united Ireland is not on the table. A 32 county socialist republic seems further from Sinn Féin's mind than ever. Alliances with bourgeois parties in the 26 Counties and appeals to the US administration are not

likely to bring it any closer either. Some form of power-sharing is most likely, with Sinn Féin and the SDLP going on to lobby for unification.

Even if the war is really over and the gun is taken out of Irish politics (unlikely with elements on both sides trying to destabilise things) the result is likely to freeze sectarian divisions well into the next century, not to end them. The British may want to be rid of the North but for the time being at least it seems they are prepared to back the unionist veto. The troops will maintain some sort of presence, the RUC will remain predominantly protestant with a unionist outlook and the Orange Order will continue to demand the right to march through catholic areas.

The catholic working class has borne the brunt of sectarianism in the North since the founding of that state. But protestant workers have little to show for their loyalty to Britain except poverty and exploitation. Fighting alongside catholic workers, and workers in the South, offers an alternative that could end all that. It would be foolish of course to pretend that the bulk of the protestant working class, held back by a few gunmen, are straining at the leash to be united with their catholic brothers and sisters. Class unity, wherever it occurs has to be warmly welcomed and built upon. Unfortunately, it continues to happen against a background of sectarian hatred.

The road to class unity will be a hard one, and anyone embarking upon it will have to be straight about the nature of the northern state, clear about the contradictions and limitations of nationalism and honest about the desire for unity existing in the two communities. Truly though, class unity is the only way to go, the only way to dismantle the northern state, the only way to realise the vision of a 32 county workers' republic.

## Racism: A class issue

*Rosanna Flynn*

1997 was the year that racism reared its ugly head in Ireland. A few years before, there were intimations that we had the first symptoms of this dread disease, when graffiti appeared on Asian-owned businesses on Dublin's northside. The condition worsened drastically during the last election campaign, when racism was whipped up by the media, and right-wing politicians used it as a vote-catching ploy, mainly in run-down inner-city constituencies. The influx of refugees was wildly exaggerated, and they were targeted as the cause of all ills – unemployment, lack of housing, crime, drug abuse, prostitution, etc. It was conveniently forgotten that these problems have been around as long as any of us can remember. The so-called 'Celtic Tiger' has not reached the poorest and most deprived among us.

Far from being scroungers, asylum seekers have no choice but to claim the same pittance that every other social welfare recipient has to live on, because they are legally prohibited from working. But then the papers have always claimed that if you live on welfare, you are some sort of scrounger, living it up at the expense of the taxpayer. The fact that crime levels have fallen recently did not deter the racists from blaming a fictitious 'crime wave' on refugees.

Another myth put about by the media is that refugees somehow jump lists and get housed before Irish people. This is not true. It is one of the running sores of our 'prosperous' country that many people, some of them children, are forced to beg and sleep rough. We see it in our capital city every day and night, and it was happening long before the advent of the refugees. This kind of deprivation in our so-called 'booming economy' embarrasses the government, who are not prepared to make the sweeping changes that are needed to address this sorry situation. So their lackeys, the newspaper editors, scapegoat any minority to shift the blame from their own shoulders.

Taking their cue from the 'respectable' racism of the press, a minority will always be persuaded to go just a bit further, and progress from graffiti to firebombs. A refugee hostel and a mosque on Dublin's South Circular Road were both attacked in this way, and it was purely a matter of chance that no one was hurt. The only winners in this scenario are the capitalists,

who have succeeded in turning poor Irish people against poor refugees, and diverting the blame for bad conditions from themselves.

Divide and rule has always been the most useful tool of the ruling class. We must be united as a class, with no barriers of race or creed, before we can hope to bring about the fundamental changes the world so desperately needs. This is nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of society, sweeping aside the politicians and media millionaires who are the architects of this crumbling edifice in which we are all forced to exist.

Racism has been around a long time. The ruling classes have always used it as one of their methods to keep the poor under their control, but it was with the rise of capitalism that it entered its golden age. The increase in the demand for cheap labour in the southern states of America gave rise to the abomination of the slave trade. The Americans had a problem to get around, a little thing like the wording of their constitution, which speaks of all men being created equal. The only way to address this was to de-humanise blacks, and this they did very successfully. At the best, they said, blacks were childlike savages, and at the worst, they were subhuman brutes of the most degraded type, who deserved all they got – although it is hard to imagine what could have been more vicious or degraded than the slavers themselves. To kidnap people, chain them up in vessels that would have made Ireland's coffin ships seem quite comfortable, and then sell them into captivity for life, is about as low as you can get. Even after the abolition of slavery, racism was a very useful tool, and the old 'divide and rule' tactic was used to great effect in the southern states. Poor whites were encouraged to take the most violent path in keeping the blacks down – we only need to look at the Ku Klux Klan to see how the authorities aided and abetted murder again and again. The rich took advantage of the divisions to exploit the poor whites as well as blacks.

We Irish have suffered at the hands of racists from time immemorial, both under British rule in Ireland, and when forced to become refugees ourselves. Up to the present day we have been the butt of cruel jokes and cartoons, discriminated against and abused in many ways. Prospective tenants often came up against the stipulation "No blacks, no Irish" and discrimination in housing and employment is still an everyday occurrence. Police harassment and brutality are well known from the cases of the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four, but harassment of Irish people and many other miscarriages of justice remain. In 1870 Karl Marx made some shrewd observations about anti-Irish racism within the English working class:

All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the *ruling nation* and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*. He harbours religious, social and national prejudices against him. His attitude towards him is roughly that of the 'poor whites' to the 'niggers' in the former slave states of the American Union. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of *English rule in Ireland*.

This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. *This antagonism* is the *secret of the English working class's impotence*, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this.

We must welcome refugees who were forced to leave the countries of their birth because of poverty, famine, and persecution – the very same reasons untold numbers of our forebears have been forced to leave Ireland. In the same way that the Irish have enriched the cultures of their adopted countries, the Bosnians and Zaireans will enrich our country. Some will be temporary residents, but many will settle and integrate with us. Just as Irish refugees have played a prominent part in the workers' movement worldwide, so Ireland's refugees will play their part in the movement here. Racism is not just a moral evil, it is a cancer which divides our class. All of us must fight for the right of refugees to come here or to any country they choose, with the same rights as the rest of us. The world belongs to us all, and borders should mean nothing to us. We want no quotas on immigration, and no refusal of so-called economic migrants. All working class people are our brothers and sisters, and we must unite to bring about the end of capitalism, and build a socialist world where poverty is abolished, and all people can live and work together for the common good.

## REVOLUTIONARY LIVES Rosa Luxemburg

*Maeve Connaughton*

The life of one of history's finest revolutionaries began on 5 March 1871 when Rosa Luxemburg was born in Zamosc in Poland. The youngest of a Jewish middle-class family, she grew up under the rule of the Russian empire. The academic abilities she displayed as a young girl allowed her to become one of the limited number of Jews permitted to attend Warsaw's state schools. The anti-Semitism was part of the Tsarist educational system's Russification policy, which also banned children from speaking Polish.

It comes as no great surprise, therefore, that Luxemburg's opposition to oppression dates from her schooldays. "My ideal", she wrote to a friend at the age of sixteen, "is a social system that allows one to love everybody with a clear conscience." Although her exam results earned her a gold medal, the school authorities withheld it from her on account of her rebellious attitude. She had already made her first contact with the socialist movement, probably joining the illegal Proletariat party. To avoid falling victim to the state persecution of its members, and to continue her studies, she fled across the border to Switzerland.

In Zurich she encountered a wide circle of socialist intellectuals, and was a founder member of the exile Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland. The SDKP stood on an uncompromising internationalist platform: rather than fight for the reconstruction of the Polish nation, Polish workers should unite with Russian workers in a common fight for democracy and socialism. Luxemburg was one of the party's leading thinkers, putting its position forward in opposition to the right-wing Polish Socialist Party (the PPS) which refused to talk about the struggle for socialism until national independence had been won. Her writings in the SDKP paper *Sprawa Robotnicza* (Workers' Cause) and her activity on the international socialist stage won her a respected role in the movement. (Although she was far from respected by the PPS, who, in a futile attempt to keep her out of the 1896 Socialist International congress, resorted to the claim that she was on friendly terms with the head of the Warsaw police!)

### Fighting reformism in Germany

In 1898 Luxemburg moved to Berlin. Germany was the undisputed centre of European socialism, and the German Social Democratic Party (the SPD – all socialists went by the name of social democrats at the time) the jewel in its crown. She rapidly made a name for herself agitating amongst the Polish workers in eastern Germany, but it was her opposition to reformism that brought her to centre stage.

Eduard Bernstein, a leading member of the SPD, published a series of articles attempting to revise the party's politics completely. Marx's analysis of capitalism was out of date, claimed Bernstein: the system was not headed for crisis, but showed an almost infinite adaptability. The SPD should abandon all talk of revolution, therefore, and come out openly as a plain and simple party of social reform.

The most powerful reply to Bernstein's attack was Luxemburg's pamphlet *Social Reform or Revolution?* Firstly, she wrote, he was wrong to place the fight for reforms in opposition to the fight for revolution:

For Social Democracy there exists an indissoluble tie between social reforms and revolution. The struggle for reforms is its *means*; the social revolution, its *goal*.... Legal reform and revolution are not different methods of historical progress that can be picked out at pleasure from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages.... He who pronounces himself in favour of the method of legal reforms *in place of and as opposed to* the conquest of political power and social revolution does not really choose a more tranquil, surer and slower road to the *same* goal. He chooses a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new social order, he takes a stand for surface modifications of the old order.

Point by point Luxemburg refuted Bernstein's propositions. Small business was *not* flourishing; trade unions could *not* end the exploitation of the workers; the credit system made capitalism *less* stable; the breakdown of the economy *was* inevitable; socialism could *not* be legislated for bit by bit. The reformist emperor had no clothes on, she concluded:

What? Is that all you have to say? Not a shadow of an original thought! Not a single idea that was not refuted, crushed, ridiculed, and reduced to dust by Marxism decades ago!

It was sufficient for opportunism to speak in order to prove that it had nothing to say.

One of opportunism's chief characteristics, she wrote, was its hostility to theory – and little wonder, for Marxist principles demand that activity serves the cause of the working class. “It is thus natural for those who only run after practical results to want to free their hands, i.e., to split our practice from ‘theory,’ to make it independent of theory.” Luxemburg always insisted on the importance of theory – not, as she wrote later, a set of holy texts, but a continuous and developing understanding of the world:

it is only where economic matters are concerned that we are entitled to speak of a more or less completely elaborated body of doctrines bequeathed us by Marx. The most valuable of all his teachings, the materialist-dialectical conception of history, presents itself to us as nothing more than a method of investigation, as a few inspired leading thoughts, which offer us glimpses into an entirely new world, which open to us endless perspectives of independent activity, which wing our spirits for bold flights into unexplored regions.

Her reply to Bernstein won Luxemburg her spurs in German social democracy, but the party leadership still had their suspicions. The old, reasonable, Teutonic men weren't quite sure what to make of her – young, a Pole, a Jew, a woman, and above all a revolutionary. She was “not *de la maison*”, she wrote, not ‘one of us’, as far as the SPD was concerned. They were none too happy, for instance, with her criticisms of the party papers:

The style is conventional, wooden, stereotypical... just a colourless, dull sound like that of a running engine. To my mind the reason behind it is that when people write they mostly forget to reach deep into their own selves, to relive the importance and truth of the subject. I believe that every time, every day, in every article you must live through the thing again, you must feel your way through it. Only then will the old, familiar truths, expressed in words new and bright, go from the writer's heart to the reader's heart.

#### **What kind of party?**

Luxemburg retained her link with the SDKP all the time, which meant that Vladimir Lenin's efforts to build a revolutionary socialist organisation for the Russian empire concerned her directly. In 1904 she reviewed his book *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* and disagreed sharply with many of its conclusions.

She agreed with Lenin that a centralised revolutionary organisation was necessary to replace the scattered circles of Russian socialists. But he was wrong to model this on the republican societies of the French revolution, with virtually unlimited powers for the party leadership: “the Social Democratic centralisation cannot be based on blind obedience, nor on the mechanical subordination of the party militants to a central power”. What was required was “so to speak, a ‘self-centralisation’ of the leading stratum of the proletariat; it is the rule of the majority within its own party organisation”.

Lenin was wrong, she said, to believe that reformism could be warded off by correct organisational statutes. A socialist party would always have to steer, in practice, between two reefs: “the loss of its mass character and the abandonment of its goal, becoming a sect and becoming a bourgeois reformist movement”. What Russia needed was a leadership that would regulate and co-ordinate socialist activity, rather than “his majesty the central committee” prescribing and ordaining it:

the true subject to whom this role of director falls is the collective ego of the working class, which insists on its right to make its own mistakes and to learn the historical dialectic by itself. Finally, we must frankly admit to ourselves that errors made by a truly revolutionary labour movement are historically infinitely more fruitful and more valuable than the infallibility of the best of all possible “central committees”.

(Lenin, for his part, later admitted that he had pushed his point too far in an attempt to overcome his opponents. And subsequent writings of his on the question of party organisation advocated the exact opposite of the self-confessed bureaucratic conception he had earlier put forward.)

#### **The 1905 revolution**

The question assumed a more practical importance in 1905 when revolution broke out in Russia and Tsarist rule came under sustained attack by a wave of demonstrations, strikes, and uprisings. Luxemburg managed to get back to Warsaw by the end of the year to take part, but within three months was arrested for her trouble. On bail pending her trial, she went to Finland where she drew some of the revolution's lessons for the German workers' movement in the pamphlet *Mass Strike, Party and Unions*.

She described the immediate effect of the revolution's outbreak:

it for the first time awoke feeling and class-consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock. And this awakening of class feeling expressed itself forthwith in the circumstance that the proletarian mass, counted by millions, quite suddenly and sharply came to realise how intolerable was that social and economic existence which they had patiently endured for decades in the chains of capitalism. Thereupon there began a spontaneous general shaking of and tugging at these chains.

Here concessions on wages were won, hated foremen driven out; there an eight-hour day achieved, piecework abolished. The workers moved continually from one front to another: "Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes in individual branches and general strikes in individual cities, peaceful wage struggles and street battles, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, next to each other, cross one another, flow in and over one another; it is an eternally moving, changing sea of phenomena."

The fight against Tsarism and the fight against capitalism went hand in hand:

Between the two there is a complete reciprocal action.

Each new rising and new victory of the political struggle simultaneously changes itself into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle by expanding the external possibilities of the latter, increasing the inner drive of the workers to better their situation, and increasing their desire to struggle. After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth. And vice-versa. The ceaseless state of economic war of the worker with capital keeps the fighting energy alive at every political pause. It forms, so to speak, the ever fresh reservoir of strength of the proletarian class, out of which the political struggle continually renews its strength.... The economic struggle is that which leads the political struggle from one nodal point to another; the political struggle is that which periodically fertilises the soil for the economic struggle.... And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike.

The German trade union leaders were wary, not to say frightened, of the Russian mass strikes, and concerned above all to prevent the idea catching on in Germany. The growth of the unions, wrote Luxemburg, had

cultivated an entrenched bureaucracy at the top, placing their organisation and its petty gains above the general struggle of the working class. But the mass strike was not some proposal that could be implemented or rejected by means of conference resolutions: it was a spontaneously emerging form of the workers' struggle itself – and "revolutions allow no one to play schoolmaster to them".

### **Pushing for revolutionary internationalism**

Luxemburg was far from the only revolutionary exiled in Finland. In discussions with leaders of the Russian Bolshevik party, a mutual respect and understanding grew, especially between herself and Lenin, despite their earlier differences. One result of this appeared at the 1907 congress of the Socialist International, where they successfully proposed an amendment to sharpen up the compromise anti-war resolution :

In the case of a threat of an outbreak of war, it is the duty of the working classes... to do everything to prevent the outbreak of war by whatever means seem to them most effective... Should war break out in spite of all this, it is their duty to intercede for its speedy end, and to strive with all their power to make use of the violent economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the people, and thereby to hasten the abolition of capitalist class rule.

But their agreement didn't extend as far as the national question. Luxemburg had always argued, against the right wing of Polish socialism, that national independence should not be the Polish workers' objective. They should unite with the other nationalities in the Russian empire to win a democratic state where the Poles would enjoy autonomy, control over their own national and cultural affairs. The right of national self-determination, she argued, was meaningless in the era of international capitalism, and socialists should ignore nationalist aspirations and strive to unite workers across national boundaries.

Lenin insisted that international workers' unity could only be achieved by fighting all national oppression – as did Luxemburg. But, he argued, this could only be done by demanding the right of oppressed nations to complete independence if they so wished. Limiting them to cultural autonomy would only give ground to the nationalists' attempts to split the working class. While Polish socialists were correct to argue for Poland to stay linked with Russia, Russian socialists had to insist on its right to

separate. On the national question, it was Lenin who was right and Luxemburg who was wrong.

Meanwhile, back in Germany, Luxemburg was crossing swords more seriously than ever with the SPD leadership. In 1910 the SPD was supposed to be in the middle of a campaign to win the right to vote for all workers, but Luxemburg was convinced that their hearts weren't in it. In a series of articles and speeches she called for mass action, including strikes, to win the vote. If the party leadership weren't willing to call for such action, rank and file workers should initiate it themselves.

While Luxemburg had long been the bugbear of the SPD's right wing, this brought on the opposition of the entire party leadership, from left to right. Karl Kautsky, the SPD's leading theoretician and a personal friend of Luxemburg, was considered the intellectual head of the German left, but even he joined in the attack, advocating instead of radical action a strategy of wearing down the government gradually. Luxemburg gave as good as she got, reserving her worst for Kautsky. (Even Lenin, at this stage, retained his admiration for Kautsky: it took the events of 1914 to open his eyes.)

Now she was in open opposition to the leadership there were no holds barred. In 1911 war threatened when the German government sent a warship to Morocco to protect its interests against France. When the Socialist International inquired of the various parties what action should be taken, the SPD leaders thought it best to do nothing for fear that opposition to German imperialism would lose it votes in the following year's elections. Luxemburg published their reply to the International, angering the leadership but promoting a debate in the party. The SPD would achieve nothing, she wrote, as long as it looked at the class struggle "merely from the point of view of the ballot slip". The left wing of the party began to organise, taking a clear form at the end of 1913 with the appearance of their paper *Sozialdemokratische Korrespondenz* (Social Democratic Correspondence).

### War and the great betrayal

But even the left were surprised by the depth of the SPD's betrayal in 1914. The long-expected war for empire broke out, and on 4 August the SPD parliamentary deputies voted the money needed to wage it. After all the years of fine words and big resolutions against war social democracy joined hands with the ruling class. The workers of other countries now became the enemy as far as the SPD was concerned, all criticism of the government was stamped on, and the class struggle was postponed for the duration. The

other socialist parties throughout Europe followed suit, with a few honourable exceptions, and the hopes of international workers' solidarity were buried on the battlefields.

Luxemburg was apparently suicidal at the news: the socialist movement had crumbled to pieces in front of her eyes. But slowly the forces of socialist opposition to the war began to gather: Franz Mehring, the socialist historian; Clara Zetkin, veteran agitator for the liberation of working women; Julian Marchlewski, an old comrade since the founding of the SDKP; Karl Liebknecht, soon to become the only SPD deputy to vote against the war; and Rosa Luxemburg. These, and others who joined them, managed to get a paper out, *Die Internationale* (The International), and to get their standpoint across despite everything.

But this opposition was dealt a heavy blow six months into the war when Luxemburg was arrested. Apart from three months in 1916 she would spend the rest of the war under lock and key. If the authorities sought to silence her, however, they were disappointed. From her prison cell she still managed to smuggle out articles and documents for the struggle outside.

Foremost among these was *The Crisis in German Social Democracy* – better known as the Junius pamphlet, from the pseudonym Luxemburg adopted – written in 1915 but not published until the following year. "The scene has fundamentally changed", she began. Gone was the hysteria of the war's beginning, as the mundane business of killing and profiteering took over and capitalism stood forth in all its glory:

Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping with filth – thus stands bourgeois society. And so it is. Not as we usually see it, pretty and chaste, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, ethics and culture. It shows itself in its true, naked form – as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity.

And in the midst of this orgy a world-historical tragedy has occurred: the capitulation of Social Democracy.

There was no use attempting to minimise the tragedy – it had to be faced up to in its full extent:

Self-criticism, cruel, unsparring criticism that goes to the very root of things is life and light for the proletarian movement... No other party, no other class in capitalist society can dare to expose its own errors, its

own weaknesses, before the whole world in the clear mirror of criticism, for the mirror would reflect the historical limits which stand before it and the historical fate behind it. The working class can always look truth and the bitterest self-criticism in the face

Undoubtedly there were objective causes for the weakness of social democracy in the hour of need. But its failure was, at bottom, a failure of courage and conviction. It was a lame excuse to throw the blame on some mysterious 'objective factors':

Scientific socialism has taught us to understand the objective laws of historical development. People do not make history according to their own volition. But they make it nonetheless. In its action, the proletariat is dependent upon the given degree of ripeness of social development. But social development does not take place apart from the proletariat. The proletariat is its driving force and its cause as well as its product and its effect. The action of the proletariat is itself a co-determining part of history. And though we can no more skip a period in our historical development than a man can jump over his own shadow, it lies within our power to accelerate or to retard it.

The barbarity of the world war presented humanity with the starkest of choices: "Either the triumph of imperialism and the destruction of all culture and, as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration, a vast cemetery. Or, the victory of socialism, that is, the conscious struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method: war." The decision would rest upon whether the working class threw its weight in the scales – and if it did, "the shame and misery will not have been in vain".

Luxemburg examined the history of German imperialism and the background to the war. She examined also the history of the SPD's opposition to war and its mysterious disappearance on 4 August 1914. This was no war to defend the German people or to defeat Tsarism – it was a war in the interests of imperialist expansion. Whichever empire won, the war constituted a disaster – the world was witnessing "*the mass destruction of the European proletariat*" in the trenches:

It is our power, our hope that is being daily mown down like swathes of hay under the sickle. It is the best, most intelligent and well-trained forces of international socialism, the bearers of the holiest traditions and the boldest heroism of the modern workers' movement, the advance

troops of the entire world proletariat – the workers of England, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia – that are now being gagged and cut down together.

Only the revolutionary solidarity of the workers could call a halt to the horror: "The madness will only stop, and the bloody hellish nightmare will only cease, when the workers in Germany and France, in England and Russia finally wake up from their drunken sleep, clasp each other's hands in brotherhood and drown out the bestial chorus of the imperialist warmongers and the hoarse cry of the capitalist hyenas with the mighty battle cry of labour: Proletarians of all countries, unite!"

Luxemburg's period in prison was amazingly productive. As well as continuing her lifelong study and development of Marxist economics she found time to translate the memoirs of the Russian writer Vladimir Korolenko. It was pointless, she wrote in her introduction, to judge literature by the author's formal political viewpoint:

Patterns such as "revolutionary" or "progressive" in themselves mean very little in art.

Dostoyevsky, especially in his later writings, is an outspoken reactionary, a religious mystic and hater of socialists. His depictions of Russian revolutionaries are malicious caricatures. Tolstoy's mystic doctrines reflect reactionary tendencies, if not more. But the writings of both have, nevertheless, an inspiring, arousing, and liberating effect upon us. And this is because their starting points are not reactionary, their thoughts and emotions are not governed by the desire to hold on to the status quo, nor are they motivated by social hatred, narrow-mindedness, or caste egotism. On the contrary, theirs is the warmest love for mankind and the deepest response to social injustice.... with the true artist, the social formula that he recommends is of secondary importance; the source of his art, its animating spirit, is decisive.

Luxemburg's letters from prison document her compassion and spirit, that endured against all odds. Her new year's greeting to a friend was accompanied by a firm instruction:

see to it that you remain a *human being*. To be human is the main thing, and that means to be strong and clear and *of good cheer* in spite of and because of everything, for tears are the preoccupation of

weakness. To be human means throwing one's life "on to the scales of destiny" if need be, to be joyful for every fine day and every beautiful cloud – oh, I can't write you any recipes how to be human, I only know how to *be* human... The world is so beautiful in spite of all the misery and would be even more beautiful if there were no half-wits and cowards in it.

But above all she smuggled out writings for the *Internationale* group – or Spartacus, as they soon became known, after the leader of the famous slave revolt. In one Spartacus pamphlet she rounded on those who saw international solidarity as a strictly peacetime institution: "the proud old cry, 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' has been transformed on the battlefields into the command, 'Proletarians of all countries, cut each other's throats!'" Luxemburg's faith led in the opposite direction; "The world brotherhood of workers is the highest and most sacred thing on earth to me: it is my guiding star, my ideal, my fatherland. I would rather lose my life than be untrue to this ideal!"

### **The Russian revolution**

That ideal came a little closer to realisation in Russia in February 1917 when the Tsar was overthrown, and closer still in October when the workers took power. Luxemburg greeted the news enthusiastically but doubted if the Russian working class could hold on for long. The German socialists had to behold the mote in their own eye, she concluded: a revolution in Germany was needed if the Russian workers were to be freed from the cleft stick of isolation.

But her attitude to the Bolsheviks was never uncritical, and she wrote a critique of their policies – not for publication but to clarify her own and her comrades' minds. The German workers would never take power themselves, she wrote, without learning to think critically: "Not by the creation of a revolutionary hurrah-spirit, but quite the contrary: only by an insight into all the fearful seriousness, all the complexity of the tasks involved, only as a result of political maturity and independence of spirit, only as a result of a capacity for critical judgment on the part of the masses, which capacity was systematically killed by the social democracy for decades under various pretexts, only thus can the genuine capacity for historical action be born in the German proletariat."

There was no question, however, but that the Bolsheviks had achieved an unparalleled feat:

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary far-sightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which western social democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism.

At the same time, the revolution took place in desperate circumstances, and was forced to take desperate measures. Undoubtedly, said Luxemburg, the Bolsheviks "have taken many a decisive step only with the greatest inner hesitation and with most violent inner opposition". It would be completely wrong, therefore, that every tactic forced upon them "should be regarded by the International as a shining example of socialist policy toward which only uncritical admiration and zealous imitation are in order".

Her first disagreement was with the Bolsheviks' land policy. The classic Marxist view had always been that the land should come into common ownership: that rich farmers should be expropriated, and poor farmers encouraged to move voluntarily towards co-operative farming. The Bolsheviks, however, had allowed the farmers to seize the land and divide it among themselves. Instead of moving towards socialist agriculture, claimed Luxemburg, they had placed obstacles in its way.

In the abstract Luxemburg was right enough; but in practice the Bolsheviks had little choice. The farmers were already taking over the land for themselves – all the Bolsheviks did was to accept the fact. To oppose the land seizures would have meant launching a civil war. The workers could never have come to power in the towns without the support of the small farmers in the country, and the Bolsheviks' recognition of that fact was a key factor in the revolution's success.

Luxemburg's next point of attack was the Bolshevik position in regard to the nationalities. Instead of defending the territorial integrity of revolutionary Russia, they were promoting the abstract right to self-determination, encouraging bourgeois nationalists to break territories away from the revolution. Luxemburg was here advancing her long-standing position on the national question once again. And again, the policy advocated by Lenin was the correct one: only by defending their right to separate could the oppressed nationalities of the old Tsarist empire be won to the new workers' state.

Luxemburg then criticised the dissolution of the constituent assembly following the revolution. The Bolsheviks, she felt, should have maintained

this parliament alongside the workers' councils that had taken power in October. But the workers' councils were far more democratic institutions, directly expressing the will of the revolutionary working class. The constituent assembly could only have become, at best, a talking shop – or, at worst, a rallying-point for counter-revolution.

Luxemburg's strongest objection was to the restrictions that were placed on workers' democratic rights:

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom. Freedom is always the freedom to think differently. Not because of a fanaticism for “justice” but because all that is animating, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a privilege.

The right to dissent was a vital necessity if the people were to play a full and intelligent role in political life and contribute to overcoming the revolution's many problems. She gave a grim warning of the shape of things to come if this didn't happen:

Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, however, but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians

The problem with Trotsky's and Lenin's conception of workers' dictatorship, she wrote, was that – just like their reactionary opponents – they saw it as a question of “Dictatorship or democracy”. In reality the workers' rule is about putting real democracy into practice:

We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether.

The working class needed untrammelled rule to defeat the resistance of the capitalists, to create the conditions in which a socialist society could grow: a dictatorship of the proletariat was necessary. “But this dictatorship must be the work of the *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.”

Luxemburg's picture of Russia was undoubtedly one-sided. The wonder of the revolution's first years is how far it did manage to fulfil her vision of vibrant workers' democracy. Given the attempts of world capitalism to physically strangle the revolution at birth, and the isolation of the Russian working class, it is hardly surprising that socialism failed to flourish – and that, within a short time, the Stalinist counter-revolution would succeed in wiping out what was left of workers' power and fulfilling Luxemburg's worst nightmare ten times over.

She herself recognised the situation the revolution found itself in. Having described the democratic essence of socialism, she continued:

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the World War, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles.... It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy.

But the problem was the tendency that the Bolsheviks had to make general principles out of measures that would never have been taken only for the unfavourable position the revolution was in:

The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in their own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced upon them by necessity, they render a poor service to the international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion

But nothing could take away from the Bolsheviks' historical achievement. In the midst of mass slaughter and social democratic betrayal they had dared to fight for socialism. The ultimate responsibility for the shortcomings of the Russian revolution lay with the failure of the working class internationally, and especially in Germany. The revolution would have to become an international one if it was to succeed: "In Russia the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia, it can only be solved internationally. And *in this sense*, the future everywhere belongs to 'Bolshevism'."

On some of the questions raised in this critique, Luxemburg later changed her mind. On the question of the constituent assembly, for example, she would soon spend half her time during the German revolution arguing against those who thought that a system of workers' councils should be combined with a national assembly. But she quite rightly made no apologies for daring to criticise the Bolsheviks: "Enthusiasm coupled with the spirit of revolutionary criticism – what more could people want from us?"

### **Revolution in Germany**

The horror of the world war was finally ended in 1918 – not by peace conferences but by revolution. German soldiers and sailors refused to carry on fighting their rulers' unwinnable war, and the mutiny was followed by an uprising in Berlin on 9 November. The Kaiser fled, workers' and soldiers' councils sprang up, and an SPD government took office. The

revolution was underway, and it was the revolution that opened the prison gates for Luxemburg.

In the first issue of the new Spartacus paper *Die rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) she counselled a sober assessment of the situation. The German empire was gone but capitalism still ruled: "What is called for now is not jubilation at what has been accomplished, not triumph over the beaten foe, but the strictest self-criticism and iron concentration of energy in order to continue the work we have begun." At the same time, mindful of the prisoners she had left behind her, she demanded the immediate abolition of the death penalty:

Rivers of blood have flown in torrents during the four years of imperialist genocide. Now every drop of the precious fluid must be preserved reverently and in crystal vessels. Ruthless revolutionary energy and tender humanity – this alone is the true life's breath of socialism. A world must now be destroyed, but each tear that might have been avoided is an accusation; and a man who, while hurrying on to important deeds, inadvertently tramples underfoot even a poor worm, is guilty of a crime.

Now that the empire was gone Germany was faced with a simple choice: "bourgeois democracy or socialist democracy? For the dictatorship of the proletariat is democracy in a socialist sense." And socialist democracy meant workers' freedom: "The essence of socialist society is that the great working mass ceases to be a ruled mass and instead lives and controls its own political and economic life in conscious and free self-determination."

In a Spartacus pamphlet she laid out the role and character of a socialist party:

The Spartacus League is not a party which desires to achieve power over the working mass or through the working mass.

The Spartacus League is only the most resolute part of the proletariat that at every step points out to the whole broad mass of workers its historical tasks, that at each individual stage of the revolution advocates the ultimate socialist goal, and that represents the interests of the proletarian world revolution in all national questions....

The Spartacus League will never assume governing power in any way other than through the clear, unambiguous will of the great majority of the proletarian mass in all Germany, never in any way other

than on the strength of the masses' conscious agreement with the views, aims and methods of struggle of the Spartacus League.

Throughout the war Spartacus had remained a tendency within the SPD, and from 1917 within the Independent SPD, a left-wing breakaway. The time had now come, they decided, to break away completely, to form a separate revolutionary organisation.

They have been accused of leaving it too late and condemning the German revolution to failure for want of an established revolutionary party. And while it would be simplistic to reduce the failure of the revolution to the absence of an organisation, the organised presence of revolutionaries in the German working class was undoubtedly weak, and this was a major factor in the ultimate defeat. But the claim that that defeat would have been averted if Luxemburg and her comrades had organisationally separated from the SPD at an earlier date is, at best, unproven.

Luxemburg was never averse to clear-cut revolutionary organisation – as her activity in the Polish movement shows – and she had *politically* separated from the SPD back in 1913, if not before. But she was afraid that the mass of socialist workers would be left in the hands of the SPD leadership if Spartacus broke away: by staying in the party formally, they could reach a wider audience. The main obstacle to this work – both before and after the war – was not the lack of an organisational apparatus but the activity of the government's censors, prison guards, and soldiers. *Acting* as a revolutionary organisation was more important than formally *proclaiming* one.

The new organisation, the Communist Party of Germany (the KPD), was founded on 30 December 1918. In her speech to the party's first congress Luxemburg set out the task facing the German workers: no less than the destruction of capitalism. That would mean the revolution becoming economic as well as political, a struggle of labour against capital:

The struggle for socialism has to be fought out by the masses, by the masses alone, breast to breast against capitalism, in every factory, by every proletarian against his employer. Only then will it be a socialist revolution. ... Socialism will not and cannot be created by decrees; nor can it be established by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there must they be broken. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created.

But the new party was largely young and untested, and had to find its feet in the midst of a revolution. This was fatally exposed in January 1919 when the right-wing forces provoked a battle with the left, a battle for which the left were completely unprepared. The KPD saw it as their duty to take part in the struggle, bad as the odds were, and they shared in its defeat. The army officers now held the initiative and, with the tacit support of the SPD in government, attempted to press home their advantage and finish off the revolutionaries once and for all.

The witch hunt caught up with Luxemburg on 15 January when she was arrested by soldiers and taken to their temporary headquarters at Berlin's Eden Hotel. After a session of verbal and physical abuse, she was taken out the front entrance, where a soldier smashed her skull with two blows of his rifle butt. She was dragged into a waiting car, where a lieutenant finished her off with a bullet through the left temple. They drove to the Liechtenstein Bridge, from where her body was dumped in the Landwehr Canal.

#### **Luxemburg today**

Luxemburg's body was not washed up until the end of May, and in the meantime rumours began to circulate round Berlin. Was she still alive? Had she managed to escape? Was she lying low, waiting to emerge and lead the revolution to victory? Of course, the grain of truth contained in these rumours was that Luxemburg's *ideas* were still alive, they had escaped the assassins, and would emerge again.

Even now Luxemburg's words and deeds remain powerful. Her stand against opportunism is still the greatest answer, not only to the reformist politicians who would sell their grandmother for a cabinet seat, but also to those further left who measure victory by their own petty day-to-day successes. Her opposition to war and imperialism still shames the labour leaders who send workers out to die for the greater glory of capitalism. Her understanding of the power of the working class in action is a standing reproach to the infallibility of self-proclaimed saviours of the proletariat, still attempting to play schoolmaster to the revolution. Her undying critical attitude, even faced with as magnificent a phenomenon as the Russian revolution, remains an absolute necessity for those who would follow her in the struggle for socialism. And above all, we cannot do without her determined recognition that that struggle means nothing if it is not a fight for complete human emancipation.

Rosa Luxemburg's life ended in defeat. But in her last article, published the day before her murder, she pointed out that the way to revolutionary victory is always prepared by defeats: "Where would we be today *without* these 'defeats' from which we have drawn historical experience, knowledge, power, idealism!" To those who crowed over their temporary triumph, she warned that they would soon get theirs:

"Order reigns in Berlin!" You stupid lackeys! Your "order" is built on sand. The revolution will tomorrow "raise itself up clashing" and to your horror will proclaim, with trumpets blazing:

*I was, I am, I will be!*

## Ó cheardchumannachas go sóisialachas

*Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh*

Is cosúil nach dtaitníonn an ceardchumannachas leo siúd a chumann an nuaíocht. Is "drochscéala tionsclaíochta" acu i gcónaí stailc a bheith ar na bacáin. Ag seasamh taobh amuigh de dhoirse an Chúirt Oibreachais dó, deir an comhfhreagraí tionsclaíochta go bhfuiltear "dóchasach" gur féidir "tarraingt siar ón duibheagán". Nuair a thagann staitisticí stailce amach, insítear dúinn líon na laethanta a "cailleadh" leis an ngníomhaíocht thionsclaíoch.

Ach dháiríre, is é a mhalairt is fíor. Is deascéala é oibríthe a dhul amach ar stailc. Is é an duibheagán ceart é Conradh Géillte a bheith socraithe ag ceannairí ceardchumainn. Agus ní haon lá cailte é lá ar stailc, ach lá gnóite. Óir is íontach go deo é an ceardchumannachas.

Ar an gcéad dul síos, ní beag ann féin cupla punt a bhaint den fhostóir. Ciallaíonn sé a lán an pacáiste pá a bheith beagáinín beag níos tibe in ndeireadh na seachtaine. Is ionann na punta breise sin, b'fhéidir, agus a bheith in acmhainn dul thar lear ar saoire i mbliana. Is ionann iad, b'fhéidir, agus a bheith in acmhainn féiríní cearta a fháil do na gasúir an Nollaig seo. Cuireann stailc bhuaiteach ar chumas na n-oibríthe sciar níos fearr den saibhreas a chruthaíonn siad a fháil.

Anuas air sin, is ceannairc í stailc. Nuair a théann daoine ar stailc, diúltaíonn siad glacadh leis an gcinniúint atá ceaptha ag an gcaipitleachas dúinn, cuireann siad a leas féin chun tosaigh ar leas na gcaipitlithe. Seasann siad an fód, más ar an mionchóir féin é, in éadan an dúshaothrú. Agus nuair a éiríonn leo, cuireann sé le neart agus dóchas na haicme oibre trí chéile, tugann sé spreagadh d'oibríthe eile a lorg a leanacht.

Nuair a thógann tú do cheann, is íontach an méid atá le feiceáil agat. Tugann gach stailc deis do dhaoine – do na stailceoirí féin agus do dhaoine tharstu – eolas a chur ar an saol. Tá firinne an tseanfhocail cheardchumannaigh "Ní neart go cur le chéile" le feiceáil ina steillbheatha. Tugtar léaráo ar an gcumhacht atá ag a lucht leanta dúinn. "Cuireann gach stailc smaointe sóisialacha go han-tréan i gcumhne an oibrí," a scríobh Vlaidimir Leinin, "smaointe faoi choimhlint na haicme oibre uile ar son na fuascailte ó leatrom lucht an chaipitil."

Ach is gearr i mbun troda aon cheardchumannaí sular léir constaic sa mbealach: ceannairí na gceardchumann. Déanann oifigigh an cheardchumainn a míle dícheall chun féachaint chuige nach dtarlaíonn aon

troid idir na hoibrithe agus an bhainistíocht. Má tharlaíonn dá n-ainneoin, ní hé bua a gcuid ball a bhíonn ag déanamh inní dóibh, ach iad a chur ar ais ag obair a luaithe agus is féidir. Sna 26 Chonae tá síocháin bhradach déanta acu leis na fostóirí chun cos a bhualadh ar aon ghníomh de chuid na n-oibrithe. Mar a dúirt an té a dúirt, bíonn tacaíocht na gceannairí le stailc ar nós meala ar an uilleann: is féidir amharc a fháil air, is féidir baladh a fháil air, ach maidir le blaiseadh a fháil air...!

Is beag an t-ionadh é iompar an oifigeach ceardchumainn nuair a chuimhnítear ar an saol atá aige. Ní hé pá na ngnáthbhall atá aige, ach tuarastal fostóra. Ní hé docúlacht an láthair oibre atá le fulaingt aige, ach an suíochán compordach ina oifig ghalánta. Nuair atá caint ar dhaoine a chur chun siúil ó mhonarcha, ní bhíonn a shlí mhaireachtála seisean i mbaol. Nuair a chastar fostóir air, ní fheiceann sé an saoiسته a bhíonn ag iarraidh tuilleadh brabaigh a shú as, ach an comh-mhargálaí a bhfuil sé chun na fadhbanna beaga a smúdáil i gcomhar leis. Dar leis, ní cath riachtanach chun coinníollacha a chosaint i stailc, ach ábhar cantail a chuireann isteach air.

Agus ní haon rud nua é seo. Thiar i 1913, agus oibrithe Bhaile Átha Cliath i ndeabhaidh lainne leis na caipitlíthe, bhí acmhainní uilig an ITGWU in ainm is a bheith taobh thiar de na hoibrithe. Ach, i ngan fhios do Shéamas Ó Conghaile agus do Shéamas Ó Lorcáin, choinnigh cisteoir an cheardchumainn na mílte punt siar leis an morgáiste ar Halla na Saoirse a ghlanadh. (Fuair sé cion a sprionlaitheachta i 1916 nuair a rinne na Sasanaigh fothrach den fhoirgneamh le linn an Éirí Amach.) Is sainghné de dhearcadh lucht ceannais na gceardchumann, mar a scríobh Rosa Luxemburg, “an iomarca tábhachta a thabhairt don eagraíocht, a ndéantar cuspóir inti féin di, de réir a chéile, seachas dóigh le cuspóir a bhaint amach, maoin fhíorluachmhar a dtugtar tús áite ar leas an chatha di”.

Ní hé clocha an ghnáthcheardchumainn atá ar phaidrín an cheannaire, mar sin. Ní fhágann sé sin, áfach, gurb ionann é agus an fostóir. Is é gnó an oifigeach ceardchumainn margáintíocht a dhéanamh leis an gcaipitlí, praghas chumas oibre a chuid ball a phlé leis. Ní thig leis an oifigeach an idirghabháil seo a dhéanamh má ghéilleann sé roimh ré.

Tá brú ón dá thaobh air dá bharr: na hoibrithe ag iarraidh pá a ardú agus coinníollacha a fheabhsú, na caipitlíthe ag iarraidh a mhalairt. Bíonn sé idir eatarthu, ina Thadhg an dá thaobh: an craiceann agus a luach is mian leis, comhréiteach áit eicint i lár na páirce. Agus dá réir sin féadfaidh sé gothaí troda a chur air féin, bagairtí bladhmanna a dhéanamh nuair a fheileann sin dó. Seasann cuid acu ar an eite chlé de ghluaiseacht na

gceardchumann dá thoradh, ag cur an leataobh seo d'ionad contrártha na gceannairí in iúl.

Faoi ghnáthbhallra na gceardchumann atá sé, áfach, troid cheart a chur suas. Féadfaidh gnáthcheardchumannaithe an ceardchumannachas a mhothú ina gcnámha, arae pé saol nó só nó sláinte atá acu, is trí choimhlint cheardchumainn a baineadh amach é. Braitheann éifeacht an cheardchumannachais ar ghníomh na ngnáthbhall, ar neamhchead do na ceannairí más gá. Caithfidh siadsan a bheith i lár báire.

Ach ina dhiaidh sin, níor chóir ligean leis na ceannairí, ach úsáid a bhaint astu. Nuair a throideann siad ón bhfiacail amach, ba cheart beart de réir a mbriathair a éileamh orthu, leas a bhaint as a dtacaíocht – dá bhréagáí é – chun dlúthpháirtíocht a iarraidh ar oibrithe eile. Nuair a théann cuid acu ar chlé agus an chuid eile ar dheis, ba cheart teacht i dtír ar an scoilt, taobhú leis an eite chlé in aghaidh na heite deise – ach gníomh a dhéanamh dá gcuid cainte. Ní féidir muinín a chur in aon cheannaire, áfach. Nuair a théann an cás go cnámh na huillinne, loicfidh siad orainn; má ghéaraíonn siad linn, ag iarraidh muid a shrianadh atádar. Ní féidir brath orthu – is é gníomh na ngnáthbhall an buachaill.

Leag Leon Trotscaí a mhéar air: “Leis na gnáthoibrithe – i gcónaí; leis na ceannairí guagacha – amanna, ach an fhad amháin is a sheasann siad ar cheann na ngnáthoibrithe. Caithfear úsáid a bhaint as na ceannairí guagacha agus na gnáthoibrithe á mbrú chun cinn, gan éirí as na ceannairí seo a lochtú, ar feadh nóiméid féin.”

Ach ní leor é an ceardchumannachas. Chuir Luxemburg an ceardchumannachas i gcosúlacht le saothar Shiosafais. Sa seanmhiotas, daoradh Siosafas chun cloch mhór a bhrú suas an cnoc; ach ní túisce a bhíodh sí ardaithe de bheagán aige ná thiteadh sí anuas aríst, sa gcaoi is nár bhain sé mullach an chnoic amach léi riamh. Ar an gcaoi chéanna, brúnn an ceardchumannachas coinníollacha na n-oibrithe suas de bheagán, maolaíonn sé an daoirse; ach titeann na coinníollacha aríst, ní féidir leis an daoirse a chur ar ceal. Caithfear an chloch a bhrú suas i gcónaí, ar ndóigh, nó a bheith basctha faoina bun; ach caithfear an saothar a chríochnú, mallacht Shiosafais a chur dinn.

Ní foláir dul thar an gceardchumannachas agus cur ar shon an tsóisialachais. Ní mór cur in aghaidh chuile leatroim, lasmuigh agus laistigh den láthair oibre – cuireadh ceardchumannaithe i gcoinne an chos ar bolg a imrítear ar an lucht siúil; cuireadh ceardchumannaithe an tuaiscirt i gcoinne an tseicteachais a imrítear ar na hoibrithe Caitliceacha. Agus i gcath an tsóisialachais, tá páirt le déanamh ag chuile throdaí, cuma cén cárta ceardchumainn atá ina bpóca, nó gan aon chárta acu.

Ní féidir le sóisialaithe neamhshuim a dhéanamh den cheardchumannachas. Is é buntroid na haicme oibre é, agus féadfaidh sé a bheith mar choiscéim ar bhóthar na réabhlóide. Is fíor i gcónaí don mhéid a dúirt Marx leis na ceardchumannaithe fadó: "Instead of the *conservative* motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!' they ought to inscribe on their banner the *revolutionary* watchword, 'Abolition of the wages system!'" Baineann chuile stailc tarraingt as slabhraí na n-oibrithe; is é an rud mór iad a bhriseadh.

## Forgotten voices: Women and the Land War

*Eve Morrison*

... the whole agelong 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... Who would own and control the land?... Without this key to the meaning of events... Irish history is but a welter of unrelated facts, a hopeless chaos of sporadic outbreaks, treacheries, intrigues, massacres, murders, and purposeless warfare.

*James Connolly*

The period in Irish history from 1879 to 1882, known as the "Land War", was one of the largest agrarian revolts in nineteenth century Europe. It was also the first time that the struggle of the exploited and impoverished Irish peasantry for economic justice was linked with the fight for national independence. The Irish National Land League united, for a brief but crucial period, the normally disparate forces of Irish parliamentary politicians, radical Irish republicans and the mass of the Irish peasantry. This powerful but volatile all-class alliance, popularly known as the Land League, is generally credited with dealing landlordism its fatal blow – and did achieve a certain measure of land reform. But many within the movement believed that the agitation had the potential to achieve a much more fundamental transformation of society, and were bitterly disappointed with the outcome of the Land War.

The political organisation that gave clearest expression to the radical aims of the agitation was the Ladies Land League. The contradictory motives and aspirations of different sections of the land movement were most sharply focused in the struggles of that organisation. Regrettably, their part in the struggle has been largely overlooked, under-researched and misrepresented in almost all the histories of the period. It is, in fact, *impossible* to gain a full understanding of the Land War without an awareness of the women's experience.

What little research that has been done on women's involvement contains its own bias – tending to concentrate exclusively on the mostly upper and middle class women of the Ladies Land League. The peasant

women, who from the beginning of the agitation were at the forefront of the struggle, have been especially obscured. They fought the land war on a daily basis as protesters against evictions, participants in boycotting campaigns and as members of the Ladies Land League.

The driving force behind the women's organisation was Anna Parnell, the sister of Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell. At the height of the Land War she was as much a household name as her brother, though far more radical.

Her memoir of the Land War and her involvement in the Ladies Land League, *The Tale of a Great Sham*, is a blistering critique of the Land League and its leaders. It provides a unique history of the period, quite different from other contemporary accounts. It was considered 'unpublishable' in her lifetime.

The late 1870s in Ireland was a dangerous and uncertain time for the peasantry. An economic depression in Britain coupled with the virtual collapse of the agricultural market and successive bad harvests meant that many tenants were unable to pay their rent. A disastrously wet summer in 1878, during which no turf could be cut, led to increased distress. Landlords continued to raise rents and evict those who could not pay. When the potato crop failed in 1879, the spectre of famine loomed ominously over the country. The situation of those living along the country's Western seaboard was particularly acute. They faced starvation, eviction and emigration.

The government at Westminster did nothing to relieve the people's distress. With the Famine of the 1840s still in living memory, the peasants of Mayo began to organise mass meetings and resistance to evictions and rack-renting.

Radical Fenians like Michael Davitt began to promote the strategy of "The New Departure" – an alliance between local agitators, the republican Fenian movement and the moderate nationalist Home Rulers to combine the fight for land reform with that for Irish independence. The more conservative Home Rulers like Charles Stewart Parnell were hesitant. They were frightened at the idea of 'uncontrollable elements' in the mass movement and had little sympathy for the idea of social revolution. But Parnell agreed to head the organisation – albeit reluctantly.

The new movement rapidly gained momentum. Massive land meetings were held and tensions ran high throughout the country. Peasant women led protests against evictions, protests that often developed into pitched battles between tenants and armed eviction parties. Many women were injured, imprisoned and killed as a result of their involvement in these

struggles. Despite this, they were absent from the public platforms and decision making process, though they were not formally excluded from the ranks of the Land League.

By the end of 1880, the landlords had obviously learned a lesson or two – evictions dropped dramatically. In many parts of Ireland, the Land League became the effective government, giving the impoverished tenants and landless labourers a voice and a sense of their own power. Parnell gave his famous speech at Westport, Co. Mayo: "Keep a firm grip on your homesteads... do not allow yourselves to be dispossessed as you were in 1847".

The differing aims within the leadership soon became apparent. The most radical elements within the movement saw peasant proprietorship and Irish independence as the ultimate aims of the agitation. There were calls for an all out rent strike. The Fenian leadership saw the fight against the landlords as an intrinsic part of the struggle for Irish independence. Parnell, on the other hand, supported land reform for entirely different reasons. He believed that agrarian strife could be ended by land reform through acts of parliament. Then, he hoped, the landlord class would no longer have any quarrel with Home Rule, greatly strengthening the Nationalist position.

At the organisation's national conference at the end of 1880, the Parnellites won out and the League expanded to include bigger farmers. These new supporters soon forced compromise on the movement.

Instead of an all out rent strike, the policy of 'rent at the point of a bayonet' was introduced. The tenant would hold out from paying an 'unjust rent' as long as possible and only pay when the tenant was about to be evicted, while the Land League pledged to pay all legal costs incurred in the delay. The result of this misguided policy was that the landlord could relax in the knowledge that he would eventually get his rent, and evict those who were unable to pay. This is the essence of what Anna Parnell described as the 'sham' of the League:

One estate that was not paying rent, but going into Land League houses when the evicting 'army' arrived, would have constituted a much more alarming object lesson to landlords than 50 estates paying 'Rent at the Point of a Bayonet.'

The Land League was making a lot of noise about bringing landlordism to its knees, but their policy was in fact doing the opposite.

Meanwhile, William Gladstone and the Liberal party had come to power in the general election in March 1880. Their response to the agitation was to pour troops into disturbed areas and, in March 1881, introduce a Coercion Act that allowed for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of suspected agitators. This was to be followed by a Land Bill granting some measure of reform.

It was only in response to the imminent suppression of the Land League at the height of the 'rent at the point of a bayonet' campaign, that the idea of a women's League came to the fore. Ladies' organisations were, at that point, exempt from the ban. Michael Davitt was virtually the only member of the leadership to support the idea initially. Parnell and the others thought that such a move would invite ridicule. It was, indeed, a unique idea at the time. Women in 19th century Europe were totally disenfranchised and denied political power. The Ladies Land League was reluctantly brought into being by the male leaders in January 1881. Anna Parnell, a devoted nationalist from an early age, became the General Secretary of the new organisation. She summed up the significance of the LLL very well in one of her early public speeches –

You know that a Ladies Land League, or any kind of political organisation amongst women, is a novelty in Ireland... it is being tried on account of a crisis in Irish history. There is one feature in this movement which is lacking in all the movements that preceded it: The responsibility of carrying this movement to a successful issue depends for the first time, on the people themselves... a great deal of future success depends on the women.

The LLL was intended to be a largely charitable body that kept up a semblance of the organisation while the men were in prison. But no-one had reckoned on the sterling leadership and political will of Anna Parnell and her colleagues. By May 1881 the LLL had 320 branches, and by July the number had risen to 420. It was some time before the women realised the full implications and inadequacies of the Land League's rent campaign. When they did, they set about reversing the policy and substituting it with a genuine resistance to rent by supporting evicted tenants.

In order for this policy to work it was necessary to ensure that the tenants and their families did not suffer unduly. The LLL provided accommodation in the form of Land League huts and other practical assistance. They also took part in boycotting, to ensure that nobody stepped in to take the place of the evicted tenants. They believed that the

combination of these policies would force the landlords into submission through loss of income. Anna Parnell wrote in *The Tale of a Great Sham*:

We found that there did exist places in Ireland where the tenants were capable of a real resistance to rent... if the Land League had not run away from its own public platform, it might have achieved a great success, which would have changed the whole history of Ireland from 1880.

In August 1881, the movement was dealt a considerable blow with the passing of a Land Act by the British parliament. Land courts were set up to adjudicate fair rents, but as tenants who were in arrears and leaseholders were excluded, the Act split the peasantry along class lines. Instead of refusing to support the land court outright, the Land League decided to "assess the act by test cases". The effect was disastrous. Historian Margaret Ward comments that

The Land Act exposed the class contradictions in the all-class alliance of the League – those who abandoned their farms would not benefit from the Act, and the large farmers refused to forfeit any gains. The only groups to continue to have confidence in the League – perhaps because they had to – were the small peasantry and the landless labourers.

The Land League was suppressed and its leadership imprisoned in October 1881, as a period of uncontrolled coercion began. Thousands were arrested and imprisoned without trial. Sympathetic newspapers were banned. The LLL struggled on, supporting evicted tenants and clandestinely publishing and distributing the League paper, *United Ireland*. The number of agrarian 'outrages' carried out by elements within the desperate tenantry soared. The women's organisation was accused of inciting the violence now so widespread in country areas. On 16 December 1881, the Ladies Land League was also banned.

Thirteen members of the LLL were arrested and imprisoned under ancient statutes designed to curb prostitution, rather than being arrested as political prisoners like the men. Still, the women fought on, receiving little or no support from their male counterparts who Anna said "found fault with everything we did".

In September 1881 Charles Stewart Parnell wrote from Kilmainham Jail that the movement was breaking fast and that it was politically

fortunate that he had been arrested. He was anxious to make a deal which would allow him to abandon land agitation and pursue a more straightforward parliamentary career. He was furious at the militancy of the women's organisation and wanted to put an end to their activities as soon as possible.

In what can only be seen as a cynical attempt to keep up a fiction of continued militancy, Parnell and the rest of the imprisoned leaders issued a No-Rent Manifesto on 18 October 1881. They did so against the advice of the radical members, who knew such a proposal was unrealistic in the extreme with the mass movement in such decline. It also burdened the women's organisation with an impossible task. Anna Parnell was furious -

The men wanted the women to be a perpetual petticoat screen behind which they could shelter, not from the government but from the people!

C S Parnell began secret negotiations with the Liberal government. The result was the Kilmainham Treaty of 1882 and Parnell's subsequent release from jail. He agreed with Gladstone to end the disturbances in exchange for certain amendments to the Land Act, fairer dealings on the question of rent arrears and the release of the prisoners. The dominance of the landlord class in Ireland was over, but the League had failed its most needful supporters - the poorer peasants and agricultural labourers. The radical members of the League, including Anna Parnell, were outraged that the deal fell so far short of the movement's original aims of peasant proprietorship and national independence.

The women's organisation wanted nothing more to do with the League, telling Mr Parnell that he should have stayed in prison. But they were reluctantly persuaded to stay on for a short while, to help clear up the League's financial and other affairs. Then, in a what must have seemed to the women a final act of treachery, C S Parnell accused them of extravagance and cut off their funds. In October 1882 he set up a new organisation, the Irish National League, that was to function mainly as an electoral body for the Irish parliamentary party. Women were excluded from membership. It would be many years before Irish women were to participate as independently and openly in Irish political life again.

When the first histories of the Land League came to be written at the end of the nineteenth century, Anna Parnell was portrayed as a wild and irresponsible fanatic who incited violence at every opportunity and was only prevented from leading the country to ruin by her brother, Charles. The women of the LLL were described as 'harridans' and 'bloodthirsty'.

Most subsequent histories have followed suit. Though a small number of modern historians have made attempts to remedy the situation, Anna remains a little known and misunderstood figure.

After the dissolution of the LLL, she broke off all contact with her brother. She was living in obscurity, under an assumed name, in Ilfracombe, Devon when she accidentally drowned in 1911.

The manuscript of *The Tale of a Great Sham* was left in the care of the noted trade unionist Helena Molony. It disappeared during a police raid and was considered lost. It was found in 1959, but remained unpublished until 1986. It is currently out of print.

## The Hidden Connolly

*Over eighty years after his execution, a huge amount of the writings of James Connolly remains unavailable to the general reader, having never been republished in the meantime. The recent publication of a selection of these articles goes some way towards remedying the situation, but the gap is still a large one. Red Banner will attempt to fill that gap somewhat by regularly publishing some of Connolly's 'lost writings'.*

*We begin with some articles from the early years of Connolly's Workers' Republic. In an open letter from the paper's first issue, Connolly sets out his stall. And in an early example of his weekly 'Home Thrusts' column, written under the appropriate pen name Spailpin, Connolly moves across a range of subjects with his characteristic sense of humour.*

### **An Open Letter to Dublin Castle<sup>1</sup>** [Workers' Republic, 13 August 1898]

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN AND HONOURABLE BOARDS, — To-day you occupy the seat of power. You are the "constituted authorities," and knowing as I do that our advent in however humble a manner on the political horizon will be to you a matter of some slight interest, I hasten to address your honourable Lordships to let you know the whyfor and whereof of our coming. I am sure your lordships and honorable Boards will hear patiently what I have to say. At least if you do not you certainly ought, for I know you have the time at your disposal, there being no need for you to worry about your daily bread, as the industrious though "vulgar crowd" whom you so kindly condescend to govern see to it that you are all provided with bread and a great many other things besides: in quantities that are much more than sufficient. I have always noticed my honorable lords and gentlemen when occasions have arisen that seemed to you to require it, your solemn instructions and advice to the "vulgar crowd" one of whom I am, have always been issued commencing with the word whereas, and thinking perhaps you understand a statement better when so begun, I therefore follow your honourable lordships' example. If I did otherwise I *might* err, but of course everyone knows that what is done by your lordships *must* be right, and if they do not so understand, your lordships can easily convince them, having at your disposal all the necessary legal and other machinery for that purpose. In saying so I am, perhaps, referring to a fact,

to remind you of which is rather disagreeable, but you cannot at least pretend that you have been slow to use this convincing machinery when opportunity or necessity occurred. Now to my statement.

### WHEREAS:

It has been found, and is a matter of everyday experience, that within the shores of Ireland poverty, misery, degradation, slums, overwork and underpay [lies in store] for those of the workers who succeed in selling themselves into the slavery of some member of the capitalist class, and unemployment with all its attendant evils of degradation, misery and contempt for those who suffer when their effort to do so is unsuccessful. Constantly recurring famine in the agricultural districts, overcrowding and general wretchedness in the towns. A population steadily dwindling, driven from the land by grasping landlordism and huddling together in the towns, either to be used as a means of keeping down the wages of those already there in the interest of the landlord's twin brother, the capitalist exploiter of human flesh and blood, or crossing the ocean to some other land, there to swell the ranks of slavery; there to become victims of the cursed system sought to be escaped from here. And whereas further, it is manifest these things do not exist without a cause, and as your lordships profess to be unable to find it, it behoves the masses of the people to do so, they being the parties most interested, as they are the sufferers.

It is right I should admit that your lordships often apply palliatives and soothing measures generally to this terrible social evil, this festering sore on the back of humanity. That is all you profess to be able to do; indeed you are never tired of asserting it is all *can* be done. It is true also these soothing measures often allay the pain just as the pain from a rotten tooth is allayed by the application of some so-called "cure". The tooth, however, still continues its course of decay, and again and again imposes upon its possessor the natural penalty of allowing its continued existence, until the evil becoming unbearable, the sufferer at length decides to remove the cause by means of the care and instruments necessary for that purpose; or in other words, my lords, to completely remove the cause of discomfort by means of what your lordships would term "sudden revolution," if applied to social or political matters. The palliatives do not *remove* the cause of pain, they only *temporarily abate* its force. Just so is it my lords with the economic system of society to-day.

Capitalism, or in other words the private ownership by a small minority (your class, my lords) of the land and all other things necessary to the life of the community, is the curse, the terrible sore. The great table of nature is abundantly spread, overflowing with luxuries as well as necessaries of life.

Your class are in possession; the other class, now commonly called the proletariat, possess nothing but their own ability to labour, their lifelong occupation is the work of producing. They produce all that exists. Your class then, as the law says, "fraudulently appropriates to your own use" almost all they have produced. You get all the luxuries and the best of necessaries, their share is the refuse; that is, the plainest and coarsest of everything and often not enough of these. Things, my lords, at which, if placed before you, your aristocratic noses would turn up in a manner more eloquent than words. *They* have never respite or ease from the work of producing and distributing. *Your* only occupation is gambling with each other on the different stock exchanges to see which of you shall become possessed of a greater share of the results of the workers' toil. This is capitalism. This is what you so highly extol as the competitive system of modern society. It is truly a competitive system, but working in different directions according as the individual belongs to the possessing or unpossessing class.

The members of your class being in possession, and therefore certain of the first fruits, have, as I said, only to gamble with each other (that is, compete) for a larger share of the total. But the unpossessing class being certain of nothing, compete with each other in an endeavour to live upon the lowest possible quantity in order to obtain the right to work, and therefore live at all.

You never hear of the unpossessing class competing with each other to see who will obtain the most; oh! no. No more than you ever hear of the possessing or capitalist class competing to see who will obtain the least. These are the beauties of the competitive system; blessings on it, why should we ever try to get rid of it?

It is true though, we do want to get rid of it, and it is with this object, what you would call the "red spectre of socialism" is spreading itself over every country where the system exists. We will have in its stead the co-operative, or National ownership of the land and industries necessary to everyday life. Originally, my lords, your class obtained possession by fraud; to-day you retain it, partly by fraud and partly by force. The time is at hand, however, when an educated democracy will control and permeate the organizations of force, then your fraud, your cant and humbug will be of no avail.

The private property system is the festering sore on the back of humanity to which I have alluded. Notwithstanding your constant palaver and soothing measures, the pain and sting is becoming more and more unbearable. Palliatives will not do, the cancer must be cut out. My lords,

when the people so decide it will be cut out, and the mission of Socialist propaganda is to educate the masses up to the point necessary to have the operation of removing the cancer carried out scientifically and successfully.

SAOIRSE.

### Home Thrusts

[*Workers' Republic*, 22 October 1898]

I am a great admirer of the British Army.

Probably you have noted that trait in my character, as manifested in my writings. I do so dote upon the gallant red-coated gentlemen who promenaded our streets at night, and enrich the vocabulary of our servant girls with their choice expressions.

It does my old heart good to see the principal streets of our cities lined with young buxom Irish girls, fresh up from the country, leaning upon the arms of "the soldiers of the Queen." It does.

And then to see the "bould sodger boys" on a review day, marching gaily out in all the pomp, pride and circumstance of glorious war to the Phoenix Park, there to learn the quickest and most scientific way of cutting the throats of the brothers, fathers, or other relatives of the Irish girls with whom they were cavorting around the previous evening. Ah, it is a stirring sight.

Yes, a stirring sight. It stirs my blood, and if the majority of our public teachers were not the double-dyed hypocrites they are, the blood of all Irishmen and women would long ere this have been so stirred at the sight that the Irish girl who had so far forgot her dignity as to consort with those hired assassins would find herself ostracised as completely as a leper.

Then people would begin to believe in our desire for freedom. But our Home Rule leaders and journalists have so emasculated our patriotic movements that in the minds of thoughtful men patriotism has become a mere synonym for humbug.

We find Sir Charles Beresford<sup>2</sup> – who blatantly declared his readiness to lead the forces of Orangeism in rebellion if Home Rule was granted – praised as a patriotic Irishman by our *Irish Independent*, because being hard up for recruits, he addressed a few fulsome compliments to Irishmen as sailors.

We find Sir Herbert Kitchener, who presided over the cold-blooded slaughter of 10,000 Arabs (including the wholesale murder of the wounded)<sup>3</sup>, frantically hailed as an Irishman by the whole Irish "patriotic"

press, because, forsooth, he was born in Kerry, though his father was an Englishman.

Not that I believe it makes much difference where a man was born.

The one thing certain about it is that no sensible man can take a pride in being born an Irishman. What had he to do with it that he should be proud?

He did not carefully sketch out beforehand the location in which he desired to be born, and then instruct his mother accordingly. Whether he was born in Ireland or in Zululand, in the Coombe or in Whitechapel, he most certainly was not consulted about the matter. Why then, this pride?

The location of your birthplace was a mere accident – as much beyond your control as the fact I was born so beautiful was beyond mine. Hem.

And you don't see me putting on airs.

Let me see, what did I start with? O, yes, the army. My opening remarks were inspired by reading in the papers an account of the hanging of the seven men concerned in the death of two British soldiers at Candia, Crete.

These seven men were hanged in due process of law, and the hangman's work was performed by *amateurs selected out of forty-nine men of the Highland Light Infantry, who had volunteered for the purpose.*

"Hangman's Light Infantry" would describe them better.

Now then, ye Irish youths, hurry up and join the noble British Army, and in course of time – by strict attention to duty and obedience to your superiors – you may arrive at the honour and dignity of being promoted to the post of – hangman.

I hope the War Office will strike a medal in commemoration of this glorious achievement.

I wonder if any of those volunteer hangmen were Irish. If they were and somebody will kindly furnish their names I will gladly publish them. Or make a gift of them to the Home Rule newspapers.

The names of such heroes ought not to rot in oblivion. They ought to be emblazoned side by side with the Sirdar<sup>4</sup>. Joint products of British military chivalry.

Rudyard Kipling would now be in order with a poem glorifying his soldier hero, Tommy Atkins, in his new capacity. I would suggest the poem be entitled:–

"Thomas Atkins, Esq., Soldier – and Hangman."

It is to be hoped this regiment will be quartered in Dublin on its return. Surely that would cause a slump in the value of red-coats on Brigid's night out.

The Ballinrobe baton-charges<sup>5</sup> suggest reflection. In the first place it is well to remember that on the occasion of the jubilee baton-charges in Dublin<sup>6</sup>, when not a dozen or so as at Ballinrobe, but over 300 persons were treated in hospital for bruises inflicted by the police, the *Freeman's Journal* said next morning that:– "The Dublin Metropolitan Police are to be heartily congratulated on the tact and temper they displayed last night."

The same journal holds no such language over the far more trifling affair in the West. Why? Was it because the anti-jubilee procession in Dublin was organised by the Socialist Republicans, and the Ballinrobe meeting was organised by the politicians?

Again when the Duke of York visited Dublin four meetings of the Socialist Republicans were forcibly suppressed by the police, and no *Dublin newspaper denounced this infringement of the right of public meeting.*

Had the meetings in question been summoned by any of the Redmonds or Dillons<sup>7</sup> or by shrieking patriots of the William O'Brien<sup>8</sup> type the wide world would have heard of it, but as it was only Socialists who were interfered with, the Home Rule journalists entered into a conspiracy with the Castle to represent Dublin as effusively welcoming the Royal Duke.

One thing I would ask our friends in the West to note. The *Weekly Freeman* devotes a large part of its space to catering for the Constabulary, giving Constabulary news and information on how to enter the Constabulary. Probably among the men who broke your heads at Ballinrobe were men who owed their position in the Constabulary to the advice to aspirants given by the *Weekly Freeman*.

Wednesday's papers contain reports of evictions in Tyrone and Tipperary. Union of classes, you see. Home Rule Ideal.

The only Union I see in the business is the Unions we pay rates to support<sup>9</sup>, and which, unless things alter, I see waiting at the end of life's pathway for a

SPAILPÍN.

#### NOTES

1. Dublin Castle was the seat of the British administration in Ireland.
2. British naval officer and Tory politician.
3. At the battle of Omdurman in 1898, when resistance to British rule in Sudan was crushed.
4. The commander-in-chief of the British army in the Middle East (Kitchener) was known officially as the Sirdar.

5. A United Irish League meeting in Ballinrobe, Co Mayo, had been proclaimed, and the police attempted to prevent it taking place, but a large crowd successfully defied the ban.

6. Police launched an attack on those protesting against the diamond jubilee of the British queen in 1897.

7. John E Redmond and John Dillon were leaders of the Home Rule party.

8. Leader of the UIL.

9. The Poor Law Unions.

## The myth of *Michael Collins*

Brian Hanley

Neil Jordan's film *Michael Collins* has been an outstanding commercial and popular success. Since its release in autumn 1996 huge numbers of Irish people have seen it either in the cinema or on video – and its success has prompted a plethora of Collins books and encouraged discussion of the War of Independence, the Treaty and the Civil War. What's more, Jordan's portrayal of Collins as tragic hero, and his interpretation of the events leading to the Treaty and Civil War has had a profound effect on popular perceptions of this key period in Irish history.

Before its release the film was the subject of bitter criticism on the grounds that it would encourage support for republicanism today. The real objection of the main proponents of this viewpoint – such as Eoghan Harris and Ruth Dudley Edwards – was that to show that resistance to British rule in Ireland had occurred at all was to upset the revisionist orthodoxy that in fact the majority of Irish people had little objection to being governed by a foreign power. Despite the virulence of their arguments the public reaction to the film meant that they were effectively marginalised. Dudley Edwards' claim that the 1916 rebel leaders were treated quite well by their captors seemed ludicrous when most of us know that they were shot by them.

Among more serious Irish historians *Collins* was greeted as a welcome starting point for encouraging awareness of the 1916-23 period. While most pointed out inaccuracies in the film's treatment of certain characters or events, there seemed to be a sense of relief that this film would not, after all, lead to mass recruitment into the ranks of the republican movement. All in all it seems *Michael Collins* has succeeded in uniting all strands of Southern nationalist opinion.

And therein lies the problem. While Jordan has created a fine, exciting account of the 'troubles' he has also made a film which encourages ideas about the period which have increasingly become historical and political orthodoxy in the South.

In *Michael Collins* the IRA fight a more or less clean, honourable struggle against an enemy which is portrayed almost like cartoon villains. No civilians die as a result of operations which go wrong, no one is killed by mistake, no informers are executed. The reality was of course different. The majority of crown forces casualties between 1919 and 1921 were Irish policeman, not British soldiers. Many were ex-policemen, World War I

veterans, or local people suspected of informing. Others died when their houses were raided for guns, or in crossfire. Indeed in one five-month period of the war 46 civilians died and 163 were wounded in IRA operations. They were the unfortunate, but inevitable, casualties of a war waged by an ill-equipped underground army against the might of the British Empire. But had the film portrayed this it would have led to some discomfort among Southern politicians and newspaper editors of all hues, fond of commemorating Collins or Liam Lynch, or thundering editorially that the 'good old IRA' would shudder at the 'atrocities' committed by today's version.

Central to *Michael Collins* is the view that by mid-1921 the IRA was on the verge of defeat, and that Collins had no choice but to accept the deal the Republicans were offered through the Treaty. To oppose it would have meant certain destruction as Lloyd George carried through his threat of 'immediate and terrible war'. Those who did oppose the treaty are depicted as either young tearaways, like the Four Courts garrison, or as personally jealous of Collins, like Harry Boland and of course De Valera.

That the IRA was facing defeat is debatable. In May 1921 the British chief of staff General Nevil Macready argued that a conclusion of the war was vital by October of that year as his army was psychologically exhausted. The IRA had claimed important victories in the countryside and withstood the Black and Tan terror. They were not short of funds – De Valera had raised \$5,000,000 in the US in 1920. By May of 1921 the first Thompson submachine guns were arriving in Dublin from the US, and these would have given the IRA a distinct advantage in ambush situations. (They were to be used only once, in an attack on British troops in Drumcondra.) But of course wars are not just fought by military means. Would public opinion in Britain, already weary of the 'troubles' in Ireland, tolerate another huge escalation? The reports of British brutality in Ireland had caused embarrassment in Britain and outrage in America. Could the British government have launched another wave of terror without care for world opinion? Ireland was, after all, not some distant colony, away from the gaze of the world, but a country on the doorstep of Europe, under constant attention from the US. There is no doubt that elements in the British establishment such as Churchill and Bonar Law were eager to renew hostilities. However, whether they would have been certain of victory is questionable.

The implicit message of the film is that personal motives on De Valera's part played a large role in the descent into civil war. Returning from the US, he whispers, "we'll see who's the Big Fella now". De Valera

is portrayed as weak, cowardly and jealous in contrast to Collins' strength, bravery and selflessness. Similarly, Harry Boland, although presented sympathetically, is shown to be pushed over to the anti-treaty side by Collins' wooing of Kitty Kiernan. This portrayal of De Valera undoubtedly strikes a chord with many young Irish people. The memory of the bleak social conservatism and poverty of De Valera's Ireland has led many to rightly reject the old image of 'Dev' as almost a secular saint. Indeed a strong tendency exists to see the pro-treaty forces as forward-looking and progressive, while the anti-treaty side are reactionary and conservative. This is taken to its extreme in a recent book, *1922 – The Birth of Irish Democracy*, whose author, Tom Garvin, sees the anti-treaty forces as fascist, compares them to the counter-revolutionary German Freikorps, and claims that the violence of the Free State government was necessary to prevent dictatorship. (It seems only fair to point out that Eoin O'Duffy, future leader of Ireland's fascists, the Blueshirts, fought on the pro-treaty side – while several anti-treaty IRA men were to fight on the republican side in Spain.) Jordan himself is undoubtedly influenced by the memories of his youth in De Valera-dominated Ireland. However the politics of De Valera himself, and the state he later led, should not blind us to the wider social forces involved in the civil war.

The pro-treaty forces received the backing of conservative Ireland, from the large farmers and the middle classes right through to the Catholic Church. These elements were happy with the attainment of a Free State and anxious not to allow any greater social upheaval. For many of the Irish rural poor and urban workers greater hopes were aroused by the War of Independence. One cannot understand the role the Church played in Irish society until recently without reference to its support for the pro-treaty forces. Its reward was a whole list of concessions (including the banning of divorce) under the first Free State regime. That most of the anti-treaty side were Catholics and many, like De Valera himself, conservative did not absolve them of excommunication and denunciation from the pulpit.

An insight into how fluid and contradictory the situation became can perhaps be garnered from the following statement from an anti-treatyite: "If we break the power of the Church in this country we will have done a good thing for Ireland." Peadar O'Donnell perhaps, or Liam Mellows? Actually it was Seán Lemass, later Fianna Fáil minister and taoiseach. Of course when Fianna Fáil took their place within the establishment they bowed to Maynooth's edicts. However there was much more involved in the anti-treaty side than the impression given by *Michael Collins*.

The unfolding events in the north, with Collins on the one hand arming the IRA, and on the other conducting peace talks, are missing from the film. To deal with them would require another article, but one incident from 1922 is instructive of the attitude of some on the pro-treaty side to northern nationalists. As hundreds of Catholics fled south to escape from pogroms, Arthur Griffith denounced the IRA for aiding them – “It is not our policy and we are the government”, he announced. With Collins’ death the pro-treaty side showed even less interest in the fate of the minority in the six counties.

While the film shows the civil war as a great tragedy we get no sense of the force used by the Free State to put down the anti-treaty forces. The execution of 77 republican prisoners, the Ballyseedy massacre when republican prisoners were tied to a landmine and blown to pieces, the brutal conditions they endured in Kilmainham and Mountjoy jails – none of these have any place in the movie, while British atrocities are graphically shown. To be fair, however, many of these incidents occurred after Collins’ death which forms the film’s conclusion.

*Michael Collins* will continue to inform discussion on the treaty and civil war period. But this is therefore all the more reason for a critical look at its treatment. The treaty and subsequent Free State victory in the civil war were a triumph for conservatism and no amount of Collins idolatry should be allowed to get in the way of this fact.

# *Red Banner*

*a magazine of socialist ideas*

*SUBSCRIPTIONS*  
*£5/US\$8 for 2 issues*

*Please send articles, letters, requests for subscriptions and  
for extra issues to sell to:-*

*Red Banner*  
*35 C Gloucester Street South*  
*Dublin 2*

**Title:** Red Banner, No. 1

**Date:** 1997

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

*The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.*