

MARXIST REVIEW

THEORETICAL JOURNAL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST GROUP



no 3

10p

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY LENINIST ORGANISATION.

MARKIST REVIEW

SPRING '73. ISSUE No.3/

contents

THE LENINIST THEORY OF PARTY ORGANISATION.
CONNELLY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY.
CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE LENINIST PARTY.
ONCE MORE - TROTSKY ON IRELAND.

JAMES CONWAY. pI
D.R.O'C.LYSAGHT pI5
ERNEST MANDEL . p2I
JAMES CONWAY. p28.

Marxist Review is the theoretical journal of the Revolutionary Marxist Group (Irish supporters of the Fourth International). It is a discussion magazine and the views expressed in it by signed authors do not necessarily represent the positions of the Group as a whole.



THE LENINIST THEORY OF PARTY ORGANISATION

The question of organisation is a very important one for revolutionaries. Organisation has been correctly described as the link between theory and practice. Without a proper attitude to organisation it becomes impossible to translate theory into practice, and without a constant checking of theory against real practice, theory itself degenerates into irrelevant academic sophistry. "Organisation is the form of mediation between theory and practice" wrote George Luckas with some insight - "and, as in every dialectical relationship, the terms of the relation only acquire concreteness and reality in and by virtue of the mediation".⁽¹⁾ In this much at least, Luckas was right.

A lot is explained about the different tendencies on the so-called "far Left" by understanding this; it explains why they are unable to co-exist in one organisation despite their apparent similar political positions; why they multiply into innumerable little sects, proclaiming their own organisation as the one and true repository of genuine Marxism. This phenomenon is not such a great mystery as the sceptic would have it, when we grasp the exact significance of organisation. Luckas again puts his finger on it. "The ability of organisation to mediate between theory and practice" he says "is seen most clearly by the way in which it manifests a much greater, finer and more confident sensitivity towards divergent trends, than any other sector of political thought and action".⁽²⁾

Given the numerical lack of strength on the "far left" and the inevitable operation of centrifugal forces within it, it is easy to understand how much more sensitive organisation is to even minor differences on strategy and tactics.

For any small organisation, and that includes miniscule groups with a handful of members, to groups several thousand strong, the problem of intervening in the class struggle i.e. of relating to practice, because of physical factors, is enormous. This in turn, means that the pit falls in developing theory are more numerous and treacherous than they would otherwise be. And finally it means that the problem of organisation, as a mediator between theory and practice has a dimension all of its own. As much as for the mass organisation which because of its size, automatically has certain organisational difficulties, the small group has its problems also. The tendencies towards bureaucratism or voluntarism, towards centralism or federalism, towards homogeneity or amorphousness, although generated by different factors are no less strong.

For this reason it has been obligatory on all small groups despite the limited size of their infrastructure (or more correctly because of it)

to pay particular attention to organisation. A very fruitful discussion on this subject has been going on in the amorphous new revolutionary vanguard which has emerged to the left of the traditional reformist parties since the second world war. A wealth of new material has been produced in the process and old and half-forgotten names have gained a renewal of popularity. Many attempts are being made to revive or re-interpret, former stalwarts such as Luxemburg, Gramsci, Trotsky and even Robert Michels. (3) But nonetheless the name of Lenin continues to outshine the rest. Today, perhaps, more than ever, a real attempt is being made by the new revolutionary vanguard to assimilate and apply his theories. From the ex-Castroist currents in Latin America to the Official Sinn Fein in Ireland, an effort is being made to create organisations "on the Bolshevik model".

THE STALINIST ECLIPSE

But, of course, for political currents like these, having no solid Marxist tradition, the task of interpreting Lenin is very great. So enormous is it, that it is hard for some people even to begin to see the problems involved. This leads very often to an unconscious imbibing of widely circulating bourgeois-stalinist distortions of Lenin.

Lenin never actually sat down and systematised his organisational views in one comprehensive and coherent work. What he has left us with however, is a theory moulded in a definite historical context; a theory which can only be fully grasped by sifting that context. Among other things this requires paying particular attention to Lenin's own voluminous writings. It will surely be admitted that one of the most striking things to emerge from such a study, is his own warning on how to interpret the theory and method of democratic-centralism.

For one thing he warned against a simplistic ahistorical approach which would reduce the "application" of democratic-centralism to an act "of praying to an icon in a corner" (4) (Does this not ring a bell for some latter day super-Leninists?). At the Fourth Congress of the Communist International in 1922, he spoke on this very subject. He referred to the long thesis on party structures which had been passed at the previous congress and while he agreed with them formally, he cautioned, that formal acceptance was entirely insufficient. Above all he cautioned the non-Russian delegates about their inexperience. He expressed the view that they had voted for the thesis without actually studying them. The only way to really understand and assimilate the Bolshevik organisational experience, according to Lenin, was to take it in its Russian context (5).

That is the obscure paradox of the statement in the thesis he refers to, which says that in building their organisations "the parties in different countries must adapt to the historically determined peculiarities of the country concerned" (6). It is clear that in order to do this one must study the historically determined peculiarities of Russia so that it is possible to see the specific adaptation of Russian Bolshevik democratic-centralism. Lenin's fear was that an inability to distinguish between what was accidental and what was essential in Bolshevism would lead to schematism, dogmatism, or what today has become known as "orthodoxy".

R.M.S.

S.L.L.

As it turned out, his worst fears were fully justified. The first place the Russian experience was dumped overboard was Russia itself. Because of the strategical role of the revolutionary party in the dictatorship of the proletariat, it was the first institution to be attacked by the nascent bureaucracy. It proved no easy task, since a real Bolshevik structure contains a built-in resistance to political and organisational degeneration and disintegration, as the repeated Stalinist purges testify in a negative way. But perhaps one of the most important conditions for the eventual Stalinist victory over the Party, apart from the objective factors underlying the growth of the bureaucracy, was the rapid influx of unexperienced people into its ranks. As early as 1922, only 2% of the party membership had actually been in the party before the revolutionary events of 1917 (7). Even while Lenin was still alive this caused many problems which he recognised and sought to rectify by shedding the more backward apolitical elements. In a major offensive in 1922 for example, up to 24% of the party membership was either forced to resign or was expelled. (8) But of course after Lenin's death, Stalin quickly restored the balance through the infamous Lenin levy. And his right-hand man, Molotov, never spoke a truer word when he said that "the development of the party in the future will undoubtedly be based on this Lenin enrolment(9)".

On the basis of an unexperienced membership which knew practically nothing of the history and traditions of Bolshevism, Stalin was able to "smuggle in" (to use a favourite expression of his own) a completely bastardised version of what the Bolshevik party should be. He summed up his concocted version of the Leninist party by describing its "style in work" as a cross between "the Russian revolutionary sweep" and "American efficiency" (10). How and where Lenin picked up "American efficiency" is not explained). The bureaucratic nature of this formulation shines through on its own.

Once the Leninist conception of the internal party structure had been crushed in Russia, it was an easy task to expurgate it from the non-Russian Communist parties. This needless to say was in large measure due to the fact that Lenin's earlier warning had gone unheeded. The "orthodoxy" which became the hallmark of Sycophants like Togliatti, Thalman and Thorez. paved the way for the strangulation of any Leninist conceptions which might have taken root. On top of that the Stalinist-Soviet machine moved in and carried out a thorough "cleansing" operation. It is worth reading Ruth Fischer, who was a leader of the German Communist party, for a detailed description of how Stalinism physically uprooted, crushed and obliterated all the revolutionary and Leninist traditions of the non-Russian sections of the Third International (11). In places where independence of Stalinism was too strong, as was the case of the Communist Party of Poland, which had supported Trotsky, entire layers of the leadership were lured to their deaths before the firing squad, and their party disbanded (12).

It is only when one realises the magnitude of the offensive and "counter revolution" against Lenin, that one can comprehend how deeply the real Leninist theory of organisation has been buried and the amount of effort that has replaced that of Lenins'.

But it was not a desire for "American efficiency" which motivated Lenin.

Of course that is not to say that he did not demand efficiency; he did. But organisation and efficiency were identical for him and so it would have been tautological to pose one as the means and the other as the end. Instead Lenin, as always, started from the standpoint of the class struggle and it was the problem of relating to this struggle, which was his chief consideration when he came to the question of organisation. Put another way: it was the recognition of organisation as the link between theory and practice, which led Lenin to attach so much importance to it.

A look at the objective situation in which he began to develop his organisational theories, testifies to this. The RSDLP was born in the lull before the storm. The period of 1894 to 1898 during which its foundations were prepared saw the consolidation of the Russian working class and the beginning of its struggle against capitalism. It was at this point that Marxism became a social movement. But the structure of the RSDLP was yet very frail and the storm of economic discontent that broke out in 1898, and found its mighty climax in the whirlwind of 1905, tore it asunder again. The unity of the party dissolved under the pressure of police repression and the unevenness of the struggle itself. The party not only stagnated but lapsed back into its pre-1898 days, when it was nothing but a collection of autonomous committees and groups. A dialectical misfortune one could say, since the impulse of the workers struggle might have been expected to reinforce, rather than render the only movement which represented the historical interests of the proletariat.

The upshoot of all this, was a paralysis of Russian Marxism, thus preventing it from seizing the leadership of the growing struggle. And as we can see from his early writings/^{from} the crevice which was widening between the RSDLP and the class struggle, that Lenin approached the problem of organisation "The immediate task of our movement" we find him saying "...is to call for the establishment of a revolutionary organisation capable of uniting all the forces and of guiding the movement not only in name but in practice." (14)

So it was not so much his recognition of the need for organisation but the way in which he saw this need, which was the distinctive feature of Lenin. This is seen by contrast with the Menshevik Martov, who also agreed with the necessity of organisation, but who conceived of it, not in the context of the class struggle, but in the context of pure administration. This introverted conception was summed up by him when he described organisation as a "fly-wheel" which sets the party in motion. (15).

Religion
in ?
Evolution

It is important to understand the way in which Lenin saw organisation because it has a direct bearing on the methods of organisation he adopted. As we can see, he had a dynamic view of organisation as something acting on the class struggle. His opponents on the other hand, had a static, introverted view more suited to the bureaucrat than the revolutionary. Organisation to them was only an internal matter of the Marxist vanguard and not a relationship between the vanguard and the class. Such a passive view was bound to lead to adaptation, since if the revolutionary organisation does not assert itself - the class struggle will. And the class struggle in its most elemental form, is so extremely uneven, diverse, and punctuated, it is only capable of throwing up a federated, disorganised, movement,

spontaneously. Herein lies the secret of the Economists and Mensheviks gravitation to federalism and Lenin's firm insistence on centralism.

POLITICAL CENTRALISM

A common distortion of Lenin's concept of centralism is to divorce it from its political content. Thus we get the juxtaposition of centralism and democracy. This distortion is, of course, entirely misleading. The subject matter of the debate in which Lenin participated on this question was not: super-centralism -v- democracy and moderate centralism, but centralism -v- federalism and anarchy.

To comprehend the full meaning of this, we must turn to the context of the debate.

As we have said above, the RSDLP, since its foundation in 1898 had been a federation of local groups which functioned autonomously. The RSDLP was therefore not a separate entity, but merely an arithmetical sum of its various groups - something less than a united front. Lenin's aim was to transcend this situation and create a real party, which united and subordinated these groups within it. The method he envisaged to accomplish this, was completely in accord with the dialectical method and was based on the principle: the whole is greater than its parts; and its corollary: the part is subordinate to the whole. "A single party and consequently a centralised one" was how he put it. (16) In practice therefore he called for a structure where local organisations would be subordinate to a centre, and where lower party organs would function under the leadership of higher party organs. In short he believed that it was necessary to begin by "building the party from the top downwards." (17)

Perhaps this formulation and approach seems bureaucratic. Indeed Lenin described it as such, in ironical parenthesis, for he knew that his formalistic and empirical opponents would be incapable of grasping that this was the only way to build an integrated organisation actively rejecting bureaucratism.

The idea of building the party from the bottom upwards, the apparently democratic procedure, is actually only an ideological reflex of bureaucratism. It is conditioned by the fact that bureaucratic cliques, by their very nature tend to become exclusive and restricted in size and are consequently faced with the threat of being swept away on the first major impulse of mass action. Accordingly the bureaucracy is forced to widen its base as far as possible, to draw in behind it every backward and dilettantish element; to create a mass "democratic" organisation which in reality is only a shell. The membership despite all their apparent rights, are not functioning parts of the whole (are only "platonian" members, to us an incisive characterisation of Lenin's) but merely a rubber stamp for the activities of bureaucracy. As Robert Michels perceived "the party in which the circle of the elite is unduly restricted, or in which, in other words, the oligarchy is composed of too small a number of individuals, runs the risk of being swept away by the masses in a moment of democratic effervescence. Hence the modern party, like the modern state, endeavours to give its own organisation the widest possible base and to attach to itself in financial bond, the largest possible number of individuals" (18). In this way organisation is transformed into

the mode of existence of the bureaucracy, which becomes like a worm in an apple, and ceases to be an organ of the class struggle.

"Mechanism becomes an end in itself"

Despite this, it is always necessary to be on guard against the bureaucratic connotations of Lenin's theory precisely in order to combat any attempt to use it as a cover for bureaucratism.

The "building of the party from the top downwards" does not help to mechanically do away with bourgeois individualism, or different forms of political opportunism, nor conversely does it mechanically create a common will leading to smooth operations, "American efficiency in style of work" etc. Such an interpretation stands Lenin's concept on its head. In actual fact for Lenin, a "common political will" in the form of a party programme is an absolute prerequisite for centralism. He repeatedly warned that cohesion could not be introduced by administrative methods. "Such unity cannot be decreed", he said "It cannot be brought about by a decision, say of a meeting of representatives (20) And parallel with his emphasis on centralism, went an equal insistence on the need for ideological homogeneity and a party programme.

This intertwining of centralism and a common party programme is apparent in Lenin's writings from an early stage. For instance in the series of three articles for Rabochaya Gazeta (21) of 1899, which seem to be his first written thoughts on the subject, he begins by stressing the unifying cohesive force of a programme in an article entitled "Our Programme" and then follows up with "Our Immediate Tasks", where he deals in a general theoretical way with organisations, questions and he concludes with an article entitled "Urgent Questions which deals in a practical way with such questions. The connection between the two things was obviously already established in Lenin's mind and he took the opportunity of his essay on A Draft Programme of Our Party, written in the latter half of 1899, to develop the theme "From comrades active in Russia we have heard the opinion expressed that at this particular moment there is no special need to draw up a programme; that the urgent question is one of developing and strengthening local organisation" Naturally Lenin disagreed with this opinion, his view being that it was necessary to transcend local organisation and create a centralised party. And this he insisted "is a step for which a programme is necessary". (22)

Early in 1900 with the publication of Iskra his views were made public for the first time and here he spelt out the connection between party and programme. "To establish and consolidate the party means to establish and consolidate unity among all Russian Social-Democrats". But, he warned "such unity cannot be decreed, it cannot be brought about by a decision". Instead "In the first place, it is necessary to work for solid ideological unity which would eliminate discordance and confusion...." And "this ideological unity" he continued "must be consolidated by a Party programme" (23) It is clear from that in Lenin's concept of centralism the bureaucratic desire to promote homogeneity and discipline is completely absent. Although centralism and ideological unity condition and reinforce each

other, ideological unity is clearly the only foundation upon which centralism can be layed.

DISCIPLINE

There is another problem associated with what we have just been discussing and it is often a sore point with populist-type organisations moving towards a Leninist position. That problem is the need for discipline. And it is a problem which is all the more prominent, especially (in all honesty) if their turning towards Lenin is a product of stagnation and decline; if they have the illusion that the Leninist method of organisation can improve their position on a purely administrative level. But, of course, it is not a problem confined merely to these organisations; it is also experienced by many small dogmatic sects where a tendency to organisational neurosis and demoralisation, manifested in a cyclical fall of in commitment, is constant.

*What about
consequences?*

Just as it is wrong to think that centralism can be introduced by administrative methods, so it is wrong to think that discipline can be "tightened up" merely by introducing new organisational procedures. Discipline, among other things, means the negation of bourgeois individualism. Bourgeois individualism itself is the negation of individualism in general, since the unilateral freedom of one person is founded on the restriction of the freedom of everybody else. (Example: if the employer takes the surplus social product in the form of profit, then his workers cannot take it in the form of increased wages). Discipline, therefore, necessitates a different concept of freedom; one which at once allows for the full development of the individuals potential but without restricting the potential of others. This may appear as an attempt to develop a method whereby one can eat one's cake and keep it. But it only appears so because we have been conditioned by a society where individual freedom is a reflex of individual ownership of the means of production, which because of the mechanism of capitalism implies competition and struggle against all other individual owners of the means of production.

This new freedom can only be gained in the struggle to change the present (i.e. the capitalist order in which we presently live) which is the negation of freedom. This is the very object of the Marxist programme, hence it is in common struggle with other Marxist militants around this programme that the individuals potential gains full scope and that he is consequently free to commit himself. Only from this self-commitment on real discipline be forged within the revolutionary organisation.

A double-edged obstacle here confronts an organisation like the Official Sinn Fein. Firstly for historical reasons, members are not attracted on any precise programmatic basis, but rather because of the general revolutionary traditions of Republicanism, which are practically the only revolutionary traditions of the country. This means that recruits are in no way prepared for a common disciplined struggle. Secondly, the Officials still cling to the eclectic aims of traditional Republicanism, which is the nearest thing they have to a programme This excludes the

possibility of developing a common will to action within the organisation. This is born out negatively by the fact, that, when decisions are taken, it falls to the lot of an exceptional few to carry them out in practice. Here we have the exact symptoms of the "indiscipline" from which the Officials are manifestly suffering.

The lesson here is clear: discipline is not an administrative problem but a political one. And there is a warning inherent in this: any attempt to deal with a general problem of discipline in an administrative way will unleash centrifugal forces and reinforce bureaucratic tendencies. Centrifugal forces are guaranteed to be unleashed because they are already inherent in a situation where an organisation is not bound together by a coherent programme, and all that is required to set them free is some administrative insensitivity. And bureaucratism will be reinforced because the leadership is permitted to perpetrate "legitimate injustices" - "legitimate injustices" in the sense that the fault of indiscipline lies not with the individual alone but with the movement as a whole, and thus both leaders and ranks, punishers and punished are equally guilty of the crime. *a bit liberal!*

DEMOCRACY AND CENTRALISM

When Lenin warned against a formal acceptance of democratic centralism without gaining an understanding of its dynamic in the Russian context, he was, in effect, saying that genuine democratic-centralism, while being a conscious application, must also evolve as a process. Put another way this means that the revolutionary party functioning in accordance with the Leninist concept of organisation, can only be forged in struggle.

This incidently throws an interesting side light on the nature of sectarian grouplets, that have littered the history of our movement, especially in Ireland. Because they prefer to function within the limits of what they define as the class struggle, they never become involved in the real struggle and hence democratic-centralism always remains for them a set of abstract rules and regulations which are imposed on the organisation. This leads inevitably to the "regime of despotism" which is such a familiar characteristic of all these groups.

Lenin's idea of building the organisation in struggle, of course, has nothing to do with the economist concept of "organisation-as-process", which simply means that the revolutionary organisation miraculously springs up during the course of the class struggle. This in particular was Rosa Luxemburg's failing. She was not against a centralist organisation as many of her latterday followers like to believe. In fact, she frankly admitted that there was strong tendency to centralisation in the entire labour movement, which she was unopposed to. But she saw this not as something conscious, but rather as a product of the centralising tendencies of capitalism itself. "This tendency springs from the economic make-up of capitalism which is essentially a centralising factor" (24) she wrote.

The corner stone of her approach consisted in the maxim "The unconscious

comes before the conscious" (25) But the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious is much more complex than she imagined. As is clear from the context, Luxemburg used her formulation not merely as an historical truism but also as a shema for solving immediate problems. In doing so she reduced their dialectical relationship to a purely temporal one. Such an evolutionary concept prevented her from seeing how the unconscious and the conscious fuse in the actual struggle.

It was Lenin's ability to grasp this complex relationship which was at the core of his organisational concept. (26) As he saw it, the party (the conscious), demarcates itself from the class (the unconscious) but only in order to assimilate its essence and reacting upon it become its essence. Thus the process is: first the unconscious, next the conscious and then the dialectical interaction in which the conscious begins to permeate the unconscious. Thus we see the real meaning of the old definition of the party as the "conscious spokesman of the unconscious process" (27).

A good example of the intricate relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, between the party and the class, is given by Trotsky from those crucial five days of the February Revolution, when the inexperience and spontaneity of the urban masses seemed to lead inexorably, towards a major clash with the Czarist troops. (28). Such a clash would have resulted in the crushing of the revolution at its birth. While the masses had been failed in leadership, from above, by both the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks, the rank and file Bolsheviks, who were naturally an inherent part of the upsurge gave exemplary leadership from below in their individual capacity and averted the impending clash. Thus when commentators refer to the spontaneous nature of the February Revolution, they overlook that complex relationship between the conscious and the unconscious, by which what seems to be unconscious, is actually determined by a maximum of consciousness.

It is essential to understand this, in order to understand the relationship between democracy and centralism in Lenin's theory of organisation. It is only the tempering of centralism with democracy that ensures this link between the conscious and the unconscious, which in effect means the leadership of the class by the Party. The Leadership organ of the party is the embodiment of the party over and against its individual parts --that is the significance of centralism for Lenin and this is why lower party organs are subordinate to higher ones and not the other way round. But it is only through its individual parts, "the peoples tribunes", that the party projects its will, which is the historical will of the class, and actually becomes "the conscious spokesman for the unconscious process" (Thus Lenin stood firmly against any centralism which led to exclusiveness of leadership, independent or above the rank and file of the party. The policies and decisions of the leadership, even in conditions where elective procedures were non-operative, had to be firmly and honestly based on the experience of the ordinary party members. Trotsky expertly captured the spirit of Lenin's concept when he wrote that "leaders are often impatient in seeking to remove the obstacle in the path of the party's activity. In such cases, the party can and must correct the precipitatedness of the leaders, since it is not only the leaders who educate the party but the

party as well which educates the leaders. Herein lies the salutary dialectic of democratic centralism" (29).

Lenin was driving at just this when he wrote: "This brings me to a highly important principle of all party organisation and all party activity : while the greatest possible centralisation is necessary with regard to the ideological and practical leadership of the movement and the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, the greatest possible decentralisation is necessary with regard to keeping the party centre (and the party as a whole) informed about the movement and with regards to responsibility to the party." He makes this plain when he writes a little further on that "This decentralisation is an essential corrective to it" (30) Thus for Lenin the only centralism permissible is that which enables the rank and file to control and educate the leadership.

This principle of centralisation and decentralisation is summed up concretely by him in yet another principle. "We define it as unity in action, freedom of discussion and criticism" (31) he wrote. It is the action of the party which brings it into contact with the masses, and this contact can be retained, strengthened and deepened only on the condition that the experience of this action becomes the guideline for the party leadership in the formulation of its positions. But this experience can only be assimilated by the party as a whole and not merely by its central organs. Consequently there is an absolute need for full and open internal discussion especially amongst the rank and file in which this experience is distilled. Only after this party metabolism, so to speak, can the leadership take the final product and get on with the job of presenting the will of the party as the will of the masses. Thus we see that for Lenin in his concept of the party as the conscious articulator of spontaneous process, there is an organic connection between centralisation and decentralisation, unity in action and freedom of criticism — in a word : there is an organic unity between democracy and centralism in his concept of democratic centralism.

FACTIONS

But to say that democracy in the form of freedom to discuss and criticise is necessary, does not exhaust the matter. Even Stalin could boldly proclaim this necessity. Every difference is a contradiction and contradictions in accordance with the laws of the dialectic must work themselves out in struggle. Therefore discussion and criticism must not be seen merely as an "exchange of ideas" but where necessary, as a clash of views. From the standpoint of internal party organisation, it is precisely the difference on this which separates Stalinism from Leninism. This is manifested in the attitude to factions. Stalin adopted a categorically hostile attitude to the formation of "independent" ideological groupings within the party, and he elevated this hostility to the level of a principle. "The existence of factions is compatible neither with the party's unity, nor with its iron discipline" (32) was his formulation.

As against this, Lenin adopted a much more flexible position. Generally speaking he was in favour of factions. Thus when he was arguing against federalism in the party, he was careful to stress that he was not opposed to factions. Speaking "On the place of the Bund in the RSDLP" (33) for example he said "As it is, there will always (our emphasis) be different groupings in the party, groupings of comrades who do not think quite alike on questions of programme, tactics or organisation; but let all like-minded members join in a single group...." And later on, commenting

more generally on the question of discussion and criticism he wrote: "When we have a Party programme and a Party organisation, we must not only hospitably throw open the columns of the Party organ for exchanges of opinion, but must afford those groups which from inconsistency support some of the dogmas of revisionism, or for one reason or another insist upon their separate and individual existence as groups, the opportunity of systematically setting forth their differences, however slight these may be. Precisely in order to avoid being too harsh and stiff-necked... towards 'anarchistic individualism', it is necessary in our opinion, to do the utmost, - even if it involves a certain departure from the tidy patterns of centralism and from absolute obedience to discipline, - to enable these groups to speak out and give the whole party the opportunity to weigh the importance or unimportance of these differences and determine just where, how and on whose part inconsistency is shown". (34)

It is clear from this that Lenin did not see the departure from "the tidy patterns of centralism" leading to the disruption of centralism but on the contrary to its strengthening.

But it was not only in theory, but also in practice, that Lenin adopted this flexible attitude. Beginning with the differences in the Iskra group at the second conference of the RSDLP in 1903, the history of Bolshevism is one of ceaseless internal struggle, in which various groups, tendencies and factions fought over every "question of programme, tactics or organisation". No less than fifteen important factions can be counted in the twenty years of the party's existence. And it was in the course of the conflicts surrounding the formation of these factions that some of the more unique and distinctive features of Bolshevism were given such an incorruptible and uncompromising form — hostility to social-democratic opportunism, internationalism, the permanency of revolution in backward countries, the strategy of constructing a socialist economy and reinforcing the dictatorship of the proletariat in backward countries, to mention but a few. Can anyone doubt that it was the vigorous, healthy and even bitter struggles within the party that made Bolshevism the most persistent defender on a world scale of the historic interest of the working class on all these issues? Bolshevism without these internal struggles would not have been Bolshevism, and in this we see the facile nature of the pseudo-scientific attempts to depict Bolshevism as the father of monolithic Stalinism.

But while factions have their positive side, it would be wrong to glorify them as a virtue. There are obvious dangers. As Trotsky pointed out: in any serious factional struggle the interests of different classes assert themselves. (35)

Just as in the class struggle the conflict of these interests tends towards the disruption of societies equilibrium, so too within the party unity in action can be disrupted by the clash of factional interests. Once that happens the faction ceases to be an integral functioning element of the party and in actual fact becomes a separate party. In that case the revolutionary party is forced to adopt a hostile attitude and just as it demarcates itself from other class parties it is forced to draw a clear line between itself and its disloyal opponents through expulsions.

Given the negative factors involved in factions it would nonetheless be disastrous to try and place a restriction on them in advance. Even where disruption or a split is the final outcome we cannot look back with hindsight and say that the struggle should not have been permitted in the first place. If we take for example one of the very few instances in the history of Bolshevism in which the outcome of factional struggle was a split - the Recallist dispute - we can still see many positive achievements not the least of which was the formation of a real leadership within the party. In addition most of those who were expelled obviously learned something in the course of the three years struggle since the majority of them found their way back into the Bolshevick camp before 1917. (36)

The strangulation of the Bolshevick party itself during the mid-twenties is a fearful warning against any attempt to judge the effects of factions a priori. Both Lenin and Trotsky favoured the move to clamp down on factions within the party in 1921 because of the general precarious state of affairs. Of course it must be pointed out that they did this with reluctance and only as a temporary measure. Moreover while the organisation of free discussion and criticism through factions was forbidden they continued to stress the need for the organisation of free discussion and criticism by the party in the form of special journals for dissenters, more opportunity for debate etc. It was only later on when Lenin and Trotsky both attempted to form a block against the threat to the party from the bureaucracy that the magnitude of their error became apparent.

THE RELEVANCE OF LENIN TODAY

To understand the unity of Lenin's theory of organisation as we have tried to outline it above, is to see immediately its universal and continued relevance. An inability to grasp this unity always leads to the familiar rationalisations: democratic-centralism was permissible, even necessary, in a repressive, backward country like Russia, but in advanced capitalist countries with bourgeois democracy it is not practical. Or; Lenin worked out his theory over seventy years ago - a lot has changed since then. Salvaging their conscience with these meagre excuses, many revolutionaries inevitably proceed to pick Lenin's brain for ingredients to make their own "paupers broth" a little tastier. They take from him what they feel they need - this rule, that regulation. They debase democratic-centralism to the level of a lifeless schema - like a stone from which chips may be knocked without impairing the unity of the chips or the remnant, and not like a living body from which limbs cannot be torn without destroying both the limbs and the body.

The idea of taking bits and pieces from Lenin makes as much sense as the

idea of grafting on limbs to a stone in the hope that it will walk. It fails to see how the methodology of democratic-centralism is related to the class struggle. Where ever there is class struggle the methodology of Lenin is relevant. In conclusion therefore, it is necessary to stress the unity of Lenin's theory of organisation. It is the only way that we can comprehend its importance for all revolutionaries in the class struggle today. It is only by taking it in its unity that it can have any contemporary relevance at all.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- (1) George Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, p 299. Lukacs was a young communist philosopher who tried to Hegelianise Marx and posed a number of important problems in the process. Later he renounced his deviations for Stalinism. He participated in the short lived Hungarian Soviet of 1919 and the 50s was active in the workers upsurge against the bureaucracy.
- (2) *ibid*.
- (3) C/F Richard Hyman . Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism. Pluto Press 1971.
- (4) Lenin.. Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution. Collected Works Vol 33 p.431.
- (5) *ibid*
- (6) Thesis on the Structure of Communist Parties and the Method of Work and Content of their Work, in Documents of the Communist International 1919 to 1934. Oxford University Press 1956. Jane Degras. (ed). Vol I p. 257. These thesis written by W. Koenen, a German Communist were submitted to the Third Congress on July 16 1921. Koenen admitted that they had been drawn up hastily and consequently they were referred to a special commission for discussion. They were subsequently re submitted on July 12 and adopted unanimously without discussion.
- (7) Isaac Deutscher .. The Prophet Unarmed. Vintage Books 1959. p 213
- (8) E.H. CARR The Bolshevik Revolution. Vol I Pelican 1971 p213
- (9) E.H. CARR. The Interregnum. Pelican 1969. p 363.
- (10) Stalin The Foundations of Leninism . Foreign Language Press 1965 p 118.
- (11) Ruth Fischer. Stalin and German Communism. Cambridge 1948. See in particular chpt 23 p499 to 514. Fischer tells us how the cohesion of the party was destroyed; local district and regional organisation being disbanded and reformed on a completely different basis; how the Soviet bureaucracy bought over whole layers of the Party-- of 125000 members in 1927, 4,300 were paid officials(!) and Fischer estimates that as many more were also in receipt of some money from Moscow; how in 1926 the Lenin School was opened in Moscow where the leadership of the Party were re educated.
- (12) Isaac Deutscher. Russia China and the West. 1953 to 1966. Pelican 1970 p44 to 45 Deutscher himself was a member of the Communist of Poland.

- (13) A.G.Meyer. Leninism. Prague University Series 1968 p98.
- (14) Lenin. Where to Begin C.W. VOL 5 p 20.
- (15) Theodore Dan. The Origins OF Bolshevism Seeker and Warburg. 1964 p 245. Dan was one of the foremost leaders of Menshevism.
- (16) Lenin. Our Immediate Tasks.C.W. VOL 7 p 218.
- (17) Lenin. One step forewards , Two steps back. C.W.VOL 7 p. 206.
- (18) Robert Michels. Political Parties .The Free Press 1957 (original 1915). p. 198. Michels was a left wing German socialist economist.
- (19) Ibid . This is the organisational counterpart of Bernsteins Famous war cry "the movement is everthing the final goal nothing."
- (20) Lenin. Declaration to the Editorial Board of Iskra CW.VOL 4 p 355.
- (21) Rabochaya Gazata (Workers Gazetta) was adopted as the central organ of the RSDLP in 1899. The paper was suppressed before Lenins articals could actually be published. The articles mentioned are ib Vol 4 of Lenins collected works.
- (22) Lenin. A Draft Programme of Our Party. CW. Vol 4 P230
- (23) Lenin . Dfclaration to the Editorial Board of Iskra. CW Vol 4 p337
- (24) Rosa Luxemburg Speaks. ed. Mary-Alice Waters. p116
- (25) ibid. p121
- (26) Accordi ngly the Thesis on the Structure of Communist partys...etc. says: "Sucessful leadership presupposes moreover the closest contact with the proletarian masses. Without such contact the leaders will not lead but at bestonly follow them. These organic contactw are to be sought in the Communistparty organisation through democratic centralism "Degras op cit p258
- (27) Lenin. One Step Forward Two Steps Back.CW Vol 7 p247.Martov first used the phrase but its correctness was filly accepted by Lenin
- (28) Trasky. History of the Russian Revolution. VolI. p109ff
- (29) Trotsky. Writtingsoof Leon Trotsky (1935-1936) p25.
- (30) Lenin. A Letter to A Comrade on Organisational Tasks CW Vol 6 p248-9.
- (31) Lenin. Party Discipline and the Fight Against Pro-Cadet Social Democracy CW VolIII p320.
- (32)
- (32) Stalin op cit p114.
- (33) Lenin Speech on the Place of the Bund in the RSDLP.CW Vol6 p487.
- (34) Lenin Letter to Iskra CW Vol7 p116. (35) Trotsky In Defence of Marxism. n77. (36) R.V. Daniels. The Conscience of the Revolution. P25.



CONNOLLY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

In the experience of the Irish working class, the role of the Leninist party has not been great. That this has been so is no accident any more than was Russia's development of such a form of organisation and its enjoyment of that organisation's success. The comparative causes of Russia's achievement and Ireland's failure lie in the two countries' different levels of economic development. The highly socialised, (if not, relative to total population, large) Russian proletariat was more suited to develop its socialist consciousness than was the working class of Ireland. The latter's most socialised elements (in Ulster) had their division of skills reinforced by the religious issue. As a whole its members lost their natural leaders on the emigrant ships. The Russian working class produced the Bolshevik Party; its comrades in Ireland could not (until faced with the example of October 1917) advance beyond the I.T.G.W.U. and the Irish Citizen Army. Except for brief periods, the Irish worker could not look for revolutionary leadership to any vanguard political body, whether for his own island alone or for both the British Isles.

This last point is relevant. In Connolly's time, all Ireland was part of the single State of the United Kingdom. There was the possibility that a revolutionary party might develop to lead the workers of both Britain and Ireland. Such a development would have been in line with the organisational strategy of Bolshevism, which Trotsky summed up as follows; "whereas in nationally homogeneous states the bourgeois revolutions developed powerful centripetal tendencies, rallying to the idea of overcoming particularism, as in France, or overcoming national disunion, as in Italy and Germany - in nationally heterogeneous states on the contrary, such as Turkey, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the belated bourgeois revolution released centrifugal forces. In spite of the apparent contrariness of these processes when expressed in mechanical terms, their historical function was the same. In both cases it was a question of using the national unity as a fundamental industrial reservoir. Germany had for this purpose to be united, Austria-Hungary to be divided. Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg - for that famous paragraph nine of the old party programme which formulated the right of nations to self determination - that is, to complete separation as states. In this, the Bolshevik Party did not by any means undertake an evangel of separation. It merely assumed an obligation to struggle implacably against every form of national oppression, including the forcible retention of this or that nationality within the boundaries of the general state. Only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities.

"But that was only one side of the matter. The policy of Bolshevism in the national sphere had also another side, apparently contradictory to the first but in reality supplementing it. Within the framework of the party, and of the workers' organisations in general, Bolshevism insisted upon a rigid centralism. implacably

warring against every taint of nationalism which might set the workers one against the other or disunite them. While flatly refusing to the bourgeois states the right to impose compulsory citizenship, or even a state language upon a national minority Bolshevism at the same time made it a verily sacred task to unite as closely as possible, by means of voluntary class discipline, the workers of different nationalities. Thus it flatly rejected the national-federation principle in building the party. A revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument for its creation. An instrument ought to be adapted to fashioning the product; it ought not to include the product. Thus a centralised organisation can guarantee the success of revolutionary struggle - even where the task is to destroy the centralised oppression of nationalities." - History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. III p.p. 40-41, Sphere Books Ltd. London, 1967. (Present writer's emphasis).

"In contrast to this, it is a good idea - following the method of contrasts - to compare it with the policy of the Austrian social democrats. Bolshevism based itself upon the assumption of an outbreak of national revolutions continuing for decades to come, and instructed the advanced workers in this spirit. The Austrian social democracy, on the contrary, submissively accommodated itself to the policy of the ruling class; it defended the compulsory co-citizenship of ten nations in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and at the same time, being absolutely incapable of achieving a revolutionary union of the workers of these different nationalities, fenced them off in the party and in the trade unions with vertical partitions." Ibid P. 59, emphasis as before.

"History has provided an incomparable checkup of the two policies on the national question. Whereas Austria-Hungary, whose proletariat was educated in the spirit of a cowardly halfway policy, went all to pieces under a formal shake-up, and moreover the initiative in this process was taken in the main by the national sections of the Social Democratic party, in Russia on the ruins of Czarism a new state composed of nationalities has been formed, and has been closely welded together both economically and politically by the Bolshevik Party.

"Whatever may be the further destiny of the Soviet Union - and it is still far from a quiet haven - the national policy of Lenin will find its place among the eternal treasures of mankind." Ibid P. 62.

THE STILLBIRTH OF UNITED KINGDOM BOLSHEVISM.

Though less dramatic, the national policy of the revolutionary left of the British Isles before October 1917, may be as much as that of the Austro-Hungarian Social Democrats, an example of how not to go about it. The only Labour political organisation that tried to bridge the Irish Sea was the petit bourgeois and reformist Independent Labour Party. For the remainder, so far were circumstances from those of Czarist Russia, that it was a sign of progress rather than otherwise for Socialists to form separate organisations for Britain and Ireland - not only in the political, but also in the industrial sphere. This was shown by the fact that in forming the I.T.G.W.U., James Larkin was not only breaking from British but from bureaucratic control. By his act he created the nucleus of what would be the leading pace-setter in industrial action in the British Isles for years to come, even after 1918. In the British Isles, the situation was an early manifestation of what was to prove a frequent international occurrence through the twentieth century; the undeveloped working class of the colony, advancing and outpacing the ancient metropolitan proletariat.

That this was so was due to the British worker's position as employee of the world's first industrial capitalism. From this they were able for a long time to enjoy the benefits (puny in relation to capital's ; grandiose compared to their foreign comrades') of their country's monopoly position. Lenin summed up the effects of this :-

"1. a section of the British proletariat becomes 'bourgeois'; 2. a section of the proletariat allows itself to be led by men bought, or at least paid, by the bourgeoisie." Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, p.103.

This result developed in Britain and (if anything, more) amongst the Protestant workers of North East Ireland. Amongst the workers elsewhere in Ireland, matters developed much more slowly. Partly this was because the British super-profits were spent on subsidising the more numerous peasants' purchase of their farms. Partly it was because the modern Irish Trade Union movement developed after that of Britain. Without the industry of the other islands, its workers were either skilled artisans and unskilled transport employees; workers in heavy industry, the vanguard of labour in countries where it existed, was conspicuous by its absence outside the North East. The organisation of the Irish unskilled was, then, first placed in the hands of the British unions with their growing bureaucracies, and with only pitiful interest in Ireland. From 1907, it was run by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in opposition to the United Kingdom labour-bureaucracy. The I.T.G.W.U. was, as events were to show, an unsatisfactory and inadequate opponent of the Labour Pakers in the long run. It certainly could not advance the cause of workers' power beyond the limits of a "One Big Union". Nonetheless, its circumstances made it an inevitable development and the best that could be done by the labour movement of the U.K.

The imperfections in the two wings of the U.K. labour movement, the rise of the British proletariat, the world's first industrial country and the lack of development of the Irish working class movement, meant that a Bolshevik type party was if anything more vital than it was in Russia. It also ensured that such a party could not be developed without the example of the original.

These two facts affected decisively the greatest of the Marxists in the islands : James Connolly. Connolly's theoretical pre-eminence is undoubtedly connected with his back round among the Irish emigrants of Edinburgh, in effect, giving him a foot in both Irish and British working classes. Nonetheless, even he could not create (or learn the need to create) a political unit of the cadres of both these classes that could lead them to victory in the class war. In fact, Connolly's whole approach to the question of the political organisation of his class was an empirical one centred on his personal contacts. As will be seen, he had a rudimentary idea of what is termed Democratic Centralism, though he saw it mainly as means to keep his group at a minimum efficiency, rather than to help develop this efficiency to even higher levels.

In this empiricism, Connolly's attitude to the territorial extent of his organisation, fitted naturally. His first attempt (and his only one in Ireland) to set up a distinct vanguard party was the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896. This was an entirely Irish body, as its name reveals. As far as he had a British perspective, it was through his personal connections with the British Social Democratic Federation, and, later, the Socialist Labour Party.

With his successive disillusionments with the independent socialist parties, and his adherence to the the new industrial unionism (of the I.M.M. & the I.T.G.W.U.), Connolly's cross-channel political links became still less formal. By the end of his life they were restricted, practically, to his articles in the paper "Forward"

In this matter, he has been criticised correctly enough both by the ultra-Stalinist B.I.C.O. in its policy statement No. 4 (Party Organisation in Ireland & Britain pp 7-8, 1971.) and by Stewart Crehan of the ultra-sectarian "Trotskyist" Socialist Labour League (in their then journal "The Newsletter" of May 18, 1968). Without a doubt, his failure was one of decisive importance to the socialist movement in the U.K. All that can be said in his defence is that he was not alone; nobody else tried to build a revolutionary party for that area. It can be argued reasonably then that even had he seen the need for a U.K. Bolshevik, he would have had extreme difficulty in convincing any of the sort of people necessary to such a movement that such a need existed.

But had he been able to do so, it is equally clear that history would have changed for the better. The Easter Rising might not have occurred, and had it occurred, it would certainly not have had the same effect it did have. With an immediate all-British strategy Connolly would not have needed to concentrate on one national issue. But this could have been offset by the victories of the workers of Britain and Ireland, the avoidance of the defeats that they suffered in actual history and their eventual seizure of power. The trouble (and it is very big trouble is that all this is conjecture. In fact, the real economic and social divisions between the workers of Britain and Ireland (far greater than those between the Russian workers and any equivalent working class in the smaller Russian nationalities) made such a party a practical impossibility. When the lessons of the October Revolution were available to be learnt, the time for a Bolshevik section for the whole U.K. was already passed; the national difference between Britain and Ireland had developed into the latter's liberation struggle.

BOLSHEVISM : INTERNATIONAL OR ONLY BRITISH-IRISH ?

This fact must be remembered when considering recent revivals (or, rather introductions) of the idea of a single Bolshevik Party for the British Isles. Until 1968, the self-styled "International Committee of the Fourth International" practiced such a strategy, its British section the Socialist Labour League, or aiming to cover both Britain and Ireland. However, for the last five years, it has left Ireland to a separate section: the League for a Workers' Vanguard. Meanwhile, theoretically, a more serious defence of the continuing relevance of the organisational form concerned has been presented by the British & Irish Communist Organisation, most recently on its adoption of its present name in November 1971. Its statement is entitled "Party Organisation in Ireland and Britain".

In considering the arguments of the B.I.C.O. (and the previous practice of the I.C.F.I.) it is necessary, too, to consider the developments since Connolly's time, not only nationally (the separation of the state machines of Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and the autonomisation of the Northern Irish state) but internationally. For the fact is that since Bolshevism began and since the U.K. labour movement was, as has been shown, handicapped in developing it, a further limitation has been given the principle. Bolshevik Internationalism cannot logically be confined within single states. Its principle requires nothing short of a world-wide

organisation. This was shown first by Lenin and the Bolsheviks when they led the most advanced elements of international Social Democracy out of their state groups and into a new, Bolshevik, Third International. True, orthodox communists (Trotskyists) insist that Stalin's conversion to the will-o'-the-wisp "Socialism in one country", led inevitably to a degeneration of the democracy in this Democratic Centralist International till it could be ended and started again at the first of the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. But they do not see this as an argument against Bolshevism per se. Rather, they maintain: "The International is dead; Long live the International" They are currently working to build a fully developed Bolshevik Fourth International. The practical difficulties in this are real; they cannot be accepted as reasons for permanently confining party development within state or other regional limits.

Part of the difficulty with the B.I.C.O.'s theory of organisation is that the principle of internationalism over and above the British Isles is treated in much the same casual manner as Connolly dealt with the actual question of the Party. In a debate with fellow adherents of (Marxist) of "Socialism in one country", the idea was put that the B.I.C.O.'s arguments for a British and Irish group (literally that Ireland is a British neo-colony and its state power is in reality a part of Britain's) could be extended to a single group for the British Empire. The Organisation replied (Party Organisation pp 10-11) by remarking on the practical difficulties (distance, travel restriction, language, labour mobility, economic separation) in the way of such a unit. The trouble is that, at least the first three of them could have been used as arguments against the original Bolshevik Party. The arguments for the principle of party unity in Britain and Ireland do not stop either at the English Channel or the Atlantic Ocean, or at the boundaries of those bits of map marked Imperial Rel. Nor indeed, does it limit itself to the borders of the states of the E.E.C. Despite the sneers of the B.I.C.O. at the traditional Marxist concept of Imperialism, it does mean that the struggle for revolution must be waged on an international scale. Britain controls the economy of Ireland. But, then, the U.S.A. dominates the economies of Britain, of the other European States, of the capitalist countries of the world, (except Japan - and this empire is tied militarily). To fight for a socialist society in the British Isles alone is even more stupid than to fight for such a thing in Russia alone (at least Russia had greater resources.) Any workers' state needs the support of the workers of the world; and this is too important to be left to spontaneous combustion.

But if revolution in the British Isles will be most effective if supported by the revolutionary actions of workers elsewhere, this does not mean that it must be organised in a single section for the whole region. The Leninist concept is not one of nationally limited revolution (though struggles against national oppression must be supported by the Bolsheviks). But nor is it one decided organisationally (as the B.I.C.O. would have it: Party Organisation p.6) by trade relationships, citizenship rights, or even inspection of armed forces and supply of munitions. The terms for territorial action are those of the borders of the immediate state power that is to be smashed. In the last resort, Britain can inspect the Irish Army, it has a monopoly of its ammunition, but though it sets certain limits, the decision of how to use the forces and arms within those limits lies not with Ted Heath, but with An Taoiseach. As long as he is ready to serve British Imperialism ultimately, Britain won't interfere however much it may feel impatient (as it did until last year no doubt) with his methods of doing so. If British Capitalism fell, Irish Capitalism could survive relatively easily, no doubt backed

and blessed by American capitalism. The constitutional forms that the B.I.C.O. dismisses contemptuously (Ibid. pp 5-6) express a political reality that divides state power in the British Isles as it does not between England and Wales and Scotland.

But, then, why a 32 county section? Surely the B.I.C.O. is correct when it says (Ibid. p 5) "If only the constitutional form of the state is taken into account, it leads to a United Kingdom party, which includes Northern Ireland, and a party of Southern Ireland". Superficially perhaps, it is correct, but here too we are dealing with a political reality, and one that was not unknown to the Bolsheviks. The Northern Irish Protestants had their own state power until 1972. If the current crisis ends without a Proletarian Revolution, they will enjoy it again. Their subordination to Britain was noted more in the economic than in the military or the political fields. As far as the mechanics of state power was concerned, the Unionists had a free hand to 1969, and a considerable influence to 1972. Logically then, it might be concluded that the correct form of organisation would be that of the Stalinists up till 1970; one Communist Party each for the Six and the Twenty Six Counties.

Here again, there is a snag; the relationship of forces in the Six Counties means that a Workers' Republic Of Northern Ireland with any real authority over that territory could exist only, as a catalyst for Revolution on a larger stage. The smashing of Orange power will be as necessary a part of the Irish Revolution as will be the destruction of all more directly clerical power of all denominations. Northern Ireland (not just its Parliament) is an expression of Orange power; any successful revolution will sweep it away. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Ireland will cover all 32 counties, whether by themselves, or as part of a greater proletarian unit of the British Isles, Europe, or as we intend, as soon as possible the whole world.

It is these facts that decide our territorial basis of organisation.

(To be concluded)



CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE LENINIST PARTY

(The following is a speech made by Ernest Mandel, Secretary of the Fourth International, on the occasion of Lenin's centenary.)

The only way we can live, and pay tribute to Lenin's contribution to the history of mankind, is by being revolutionaries and Lenin had that in common with Marx: - he understood the necessity of unity between theory and practice on a very high level of theory and a very high level of practice, revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. So instead of making here this evening an agitational speech, and telling you all about what you already know - Lenin's theory of imperialism and Lenin's concept of state and revolution - I will try to dwell on what is by far his most important contribution to the development of Marx theory, to the development of a theory which actually discovered some gaps in the writing of Marx and Engels, some non-developed parts of that theory.

In discussing the theory of revolutionary organisation I shall try to raise the analysis and the understanding of that theory to a somewhat higher level than is done generally in disputes regarding that theory, which still go on sixty years after What is to Be Done has been written, and as it will still go on probably for many years. I think if I concentrate on what I could call the theoretical roots of Lenin's theory of organisation. I will also contribute to underlining and stressing his practical activity. Because that practical activity is today understood in the light of the Russian revolution, understood in the light of the creation of the Third International, understood in the light of the development of the Russian workers state and the creation of revolutionary Marxist organisation such as ours outside of the control of the ruling bureaucracy there. This continuity is in the first place essentially the continuity of this theory of organisation. Many people see Lenin's theory of organisation in the first place as some technical gimmick; they see it as some rule, some solution of having a functioning organisation, Lenin's theory of organisation, is not by any means an amalgam of a number of organisational rules; its roots are much deeper. It is concerned with much more important, much more keen questions, central questions to the very concept of a socialist revolution, and of self-emancipation of the working class, and it is about these deeper roots of Lenin's theory of organisation that I would like to make some comments.

LENIN'S THEORY OF ORGANISATION AND TWO CONTRADICTORY THEMES IN MARX.
IN reality, what Lenin's theory of organisation is about is essentially a theory of working class consciousness, of the development of class-

consciousness; of the absence of a regular and even development in the working-class consciousness. We have to understand this theoretically, we have to try to match this theory against contending concepts and theories which were developed fifty or sixty years ago, and from which we can draw a historical balance sheet today; and we have to match them also in the light of historical experience, in light of empirical evidence which has accumulated over the last period. Now we could start with two very contradictory statements which are to be found in Marx's writing, which logically lead to very very different types of organisational concepts.

One exposition of the development of class consciousness: of the problems of class consciousness which can find in the writings not only of the young Marx, but also of Marx and Engels of later years (although they became modified later, but which you still find in them) is its development more or less automatically out of class struggle. You have then a syllogistic type of reasoning: capitalism is torn, unavoidable torn, by class struggle. The working class and the capitalist class have fundamentally historically different interests, and they clash. These clashes lead to fights and out of these fights (you will find the formulae in several writings of Marx and of Engels) unavoidably working class consciousness develops, that is to say that at a certain point in these fights, the workers organise first the trade unions and then the political parties, and then they become conscious of their interests as a class and they fight for self-emanicipation. This is one line of reasoning and this line of reasoning was true of the writings of Marx and Engels. Partially at least this concept ends in a certain concept of "social democratic" mass parties (which I will come back to after a few minutes) as we knew them at the end of the 19 th and the beginning of the 20th century.

But then you have another line of thought, of analysis which also runs through Marx's writings, especially the more mature Marx, which leads to rather opposite conclusions: and it is the concept that in every society which is a class society the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class, and of course if it is a meaningful sentence this cannot be dealt with as meaning that the ideology of the ruling class is the ideology of the ruling class, because that would not be a sentence at all - that would just be tautology. What Marx means when he says the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class is that, of course, the ruling ideology is the ideology of all classes, and not only of the rulers themselves. And it is not difficult to understand that these two lines of reasoning lead to a very different conclusions, because if it is true that the ideology of the working class under stable capitalist society is bourgeois, or petit bourgeois then it obviously does not follow that it is sufficient to assemble the workers somewhere - anywhere on the conditions of beginning class struggle, to have them develop more or less automatically a socialist class consciousness to combat the capitalist class. You then approach the question as a much more complex, much more complicated problem, and then the whole type of reasoning which is at the basis of Lenin's theory of organisation can be understood perfectly. Let me say immediately that this type of reasoning was not invented by Lenin, that it was worked out much earlier by Kautsky and other

Austrian social democrats. You can find it in the original homeland of the Austrian social democracy so called in the manifesto which was adopted in 1889, and you can find it very clearly, I believe, in some of the later writings of both Marx and Engels. I will give just one example, a very striking example, because it has the very words which were later so strongly used to reproach Lenin when he used them many years later.

UNEAVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT OF WORKING- CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

On January 1st 1870, Marx wrote a circular letter for the First International concerning a problem which is still on the order of the day today - the problem of working- class consciousness in Britain - and he says that some people, the later anarchists, the people who were at that time inside the First International reproached us for our contacts with the trade-union movement inside the general council of the First International. They do not understand why we maintain these sort of relations; but, says Marx, the British capitalist press understand very well what we are trying to do; we try to introduce into this movement of the British working class revolutionary socialism, revolutionary socialist consciousness. Now these very words you will find in Lenin's What Is to Be Done: that is, the introduction from outside of revolutionary socialist consciousness into a class that obviously did not have that consciousness. Anybody who wants to study English history will accept that the English working class of 1870 did not have a revolutionary socialist consciousness, so this attempt, conscious attempt, made by Marx was taken up and used by the early social democrats, and it is from that source that Lenin took some of these rather provocative sentences in "What Is to Be Done" for which he has been attacked so many times. So what this is all about is the development of class consciousness. Now, we can try to avoid seeing the problem, and try to avoid finding a road to solving it, by saying either that there is no problem, or that it has been solved, and that is an easy position. Because it is also rooted in Marx's theory, we can say that during a revolution, working- class consciousness jumps forward by leaps and bounds and can even overtake - at most time does overtake -- the consciousness even of revolutionary organisations; and then you can give examples that in the Russian revolution of 1917 the revolutionary workers of Petrograd were in advance of the Bolshevik apparatus, that in the Spanish revolution of 1936 the revolutionary workers of Barcelona and other towns were in advance of all political organisations, which is generally true. I will not dispute this interpretation, but as I said before, this does not solve the problem of how to make the revolution under conditions of late capitalism.

The problem is how you work for that revolution: whether the only thing for you to do is to sit and wait till this revolution comes and then working class consciousness will make suddenly tremendous leaps forward. Once you understand especially that revolutionary situations do not occur every day, every month or every year, you are faced again with the problem as it was posed by Lenin: you have a working class which in general does not have an automatically socialist political class consciousness, which cannot have an automatically socialist political class consciousness given the conditions of life under capitalism, and which will have different and varied forms of progress towards class consciousness, developing

one time, discontinuing at another time, moving in different geographically layers; different regions, different factories, certain trades as opposed to others, and so on and so forth. I think that it is undeniable that this concept of the combined and uneven development of class consciousness of the working class corresponds to historical reality of the working class. The example of England is probably the best one to analyse the mistakes which the young Marx makes - very big mistakes. There is a writing of Marx's of 1845 which has a famous paragraph which was quoted later by the Mensheviks against Lenin in a very foolish way, because they did not see that Marx had been wrong, completely wrong. It is a paragraph describing what is happening in Western Europe, around 1840, in England, in France, and in Germany, and he says there: "Well, we see how capitalism creates a class that has only misery and burdens on its back; it is such a class that you need in order to overthrow all types of private property, of exploitations", and so on and so forth. All things which are of course evident, and the paragraph ends by saying: "and we see before our eyes how the British...." (he also says French and German workers; I won't go into that; but the British -- that is what strikes one as exceptionally difficult in this type of reasoning) "...we see how the British workers are drawing all the necessary political conclusions out of that situation ". That was written in 1845. Forty years later when Engels wrote about the English working class around 1885, he did not write a thing like that, he quoted what Marx was saying a few years before, "that the British working class has essentially bourgeois political concepts; the working class itself is bourgeois". Well, it is a bit of an exaggeration, I would not go along with this extreme statement: but it is obvious that forty years after this over-optimistic estimation of Marx, the British workers were not drawing revolutionary socialist conclusions out of their proletarian existence.

and if we look at the story 100 years later or 120 years later this is even more obvious. It is obvious that this type of reasoning which draws an immediate straight line from conditions of existence to consciousness is as wrong today as it was then. I also think that if we look in a more objective way at historical evidence we must accept that the uneven development and irregular movement of class consciousness proves itself nearly everywhere. I will give a striking example from France; you can give many other examples of the same type, but this was extremely striking because it was in such a short time that you had a switch in the attitude of the French working class between the months of May, 68 and June when they went to the elections. And many people tried to interpret one in the light of the other, as we have heard here a few months ago when we had a debate with Monty Johnston (see Marxist Review no. 1.) they tried to interpret the attitude of the workers during the general strike by their attitude during elections. The whole argument is very old. We have heard the same thing in the beginning of 1919 in Germany: there were tremendous revolutionary movements setting up workers councils, setting up soviets, going near to the border of a socialist revolution in the months of November, December, January 1919; in February you had general elections the social democrats got 43% of the votes, bourgeois parties got the rest,

and the small votes cast in favour of the revolutionary tendency were completely insignificant. But does this mean that these workers who were arming themselves, who were engaging in revolutionary battles in the streets and having demonstrations of 3,000 and 4,000 people, were in reality not revolutionaries? No, it does not mean that. It means that working - class consciousness develops exactly in this way, as Lenin saw it, and as I said before, in Uneven and irregular movements. That it can make big leaps from one extreme to another in rather a short time, that it can make big spurts forward and then come back again after that, and that as long as you look at the disorganised class in general, you can have your hat turned by contradictory indications which vary if not from day to another, at least from month or from one year to another. How does this happen? Well, we can have several explanations for this uneven and irregular development or working class consciousness,

The first, of course, which is by far the most important, is that masses of people do not learn from reading, masses of people do not assimilate experience and consciousness through reading or individual study. They assimilate experience and consciousness from action and a permanently developing class consciousness has as its pre-condition a permanently active class, and a permanently active class is in contradiction with the very nature of capitalist society. It is by the nature of capitalist society that workers are forced to sell their labour power in order to survive, and therefore they cannot be on a permanent strike, and they cannot be on a "permanant" revolution. They cannot make strikes and revolutions every day because if they did that they would starve.

So this discontinuous nature of working - class action determines the of working class consciousness. It is only in big spurts of actions that you have a big leap forward of consciousness, and it is inevitable that after such a big spurt forward of action you have a retreat once this action has not led to a revolutionary result. Just in passing, that is the reason that the missing link between the way in which class consciousness develops and the key rule of a revolution to push that class consciousness forward in a very quick way, because what characterised the revolution in opposition to normal every - day circumstances with business as usual, with day-to-day life under capitalism, is that in a revolution people become very active, and permanently active. You have demonstrations nearly every day, you have meetings nearly every day, which completely disrupt normal life, that is, normal integrated life in bourgeois society; and because of that reason, consciousness can come forward, leap forward much, much quicker than under day-to-day stable conditions.

The second reason, material reason, or if you want, materialist reason for this uneven, discontinuous and irregular development of class consciousness is rooted in the composition of the working class. The working class has a history like every class, and the history of the working class reflects itself in its stratification. You have the families of the working class who are themselves descended from the urban workers, since for several centuries at least, in certain parts of the world, not in all parts (and from that point of view England and my own country, Belgium, are probably amongst the most privileged ones), where you have

had actual long traditions of urban working class, of urban wage earners, for many centuries. You have other parts of the working class who are descendants of rural semi-proletarians, for a much shorter period; and you have other layers of the working class who are descendants of the petty commodity producers, that is to say, land owning peasants, self-producing farmers or small craftsmen, small artisans, small tradesmen. You have workers who are only recently urbanised as against workers who have been workers for a long period, and if you combine this historical result, the result of the history of the origin of the working class, in its relation with the ideological and cultural stratification, then you have layers of the working class who are still today under the powerful grip of, for instance, churches. I think of the Catholic church in countries like Italy or Belgium (the Flemish part of Belgium) . You have parts of the working class who are under ^{the influence} of other ruling-class ideological currents and institutions. You have the other side of the spectrum, parts of the working class whose parents and even grandparents were already organised in the trade union movements, in the socialist movements in the social democratic movements or in other working class tendencies. If you combine this ideological stratification, and if you inject into that another element of which, of course, generally Marxist do not like to speak so much, but which is unfortunately a fact: that you have also individual differences, that you have certain people who have a natural reaction to revolt against injustice and you have other people who are more passive when they are faced with oppression and injustice. When you combine all these social, ideological and individual differences, you will understand very clearly that it is not the problem of great theory and complicated metaphysical thought to see that parts of the working class consciousness, political class consciousness, and revolutionary socialist class consciousness. There have been some striking sociological enquiries made during the last years which confirmed this in a very clear way in the recent history of the international labour movement.

SOCIOLOGICAL ROOTS OF BOLSHEVISM

THERE is an eminent English sociologist (left, fake left, if you really want to go into that definition) called David Lane, who has written what is to my knowledge the first sociology of Menshevism and Bolshevism... but of course there are not so many facts which can be assembled on this subject. But from the facts which he has assembled from all possible sources, a very striking difference arised; it seems that the great majority of industrial workers in towns with rather long industrial traditions big towns with big factories, were Bolsheviks. The stronghold of the Mensheviks, who had a great number of the workers, and talking of the period 1902 and 1910 and 1918 - the Mensheviks had their strongholds in small type industry, in industries which are by definition not in big towns, like the mining industry or the oil industry. In discussing the dictatorship of the proletariat you will find in "State and Revolution" a single line about the leading role of the Party as against the Soviet. It's nonsense, because that leading role was conceived by Lenin as a result of political authority, as a result of capacity for convincing workers, but not as something ~~is~~ which has to be imposed by censorship, by violence or by repression against the mass of the people. I say that this concept which is one of a truly workers rule and workers state, is Lenin's concept.

How can you really reconcile with this, caricature of Lenin concerning the Party as substituting itself for the work : class or for the masses? If you try to make an objective synthesis between what Lenin wrote about the Party, and what Lenin wrote about workers' councils, about Soviet power and about workers' state; you will have to admit that for him the existence of a revolutionary party, the authority of a revolutionary party, the leadership capacity of that revolutionary party, was not only not counterposed, but a precondition for a development of working-class self-activity and working class consciousness, without which the Party could never have developed to such a degree. And here we also can make a historical comparison, because history has answered that question about substitutism, that accusation made against Lenin. Compare workers' councils in different parts of the world, because we have already seen them in different parts of the world. Compare them in the Russian towns where you have the Bolshevik majority in 1917 --1920, and compare them with workers' councils which we saw in other parts of Russia where you had the Menshevik majority. Compare them with the workers' councils in Hungary or in Spain and tell the truth, where did they last the longest, where did they show the highest degree of working class initiative: where did they show the possibility of lasting for a long time, and enabling the workers to have the maximum of self-expression and self-activity? where you had a Bolshevik Party as their leadership or where the workers were relatively unpolitical, they were under the sway of anarchist tendencies. Never before in history have we seen so much self-activity, so much self-organisation and so much initiative of workers, as in the Russian workers' councils, in the Russian Soviets, under Bolshevik leadership between 1917 and 1920 --1921. That is the historical answer to this question. Of course we can say afterwards it fell down, but what caused it to swerve downwards was the activity of the workers themselves. The root of the degeneration of the Russian revolution is not a plot by the Bolsheviks; not even a plot by Stalin. The root is the growing passivity of the Russian working class as a result of all historical circumstances which we know- hunger, isolation, defeat of world revolution, decimation of the workers-that is the real historical root. The rule of Stalin, the power of the bureaucracy, is the consequence and not a cause of this phenomenon, so the only thing you can say is that when you don't have an active working class, you can't have self-activity of the workers or Soviets. This is rather self-evident, but what history has not shown, what it has not shown anywhere, is that the existence of a strong revolutionary vanguard party, which is a real working-class party, which has real roots in the working class, and which has gained its authority by its political capacity, is in any way whatsoever an obstruction, or an obstacle, on the road of self-organisation and self-activity of the working class.

In that sense when we say that Leninism today, that the continuity of Leninism today, lies in the Fourth International, we are conscious of the fact that by wishing, by wanting, by trying to build a revolutionary organisation, revolutionary parties, a revolutionary international, we in no way conflict or impede the road of growing working-class activity, self-expression and initiative, but on the contrary, as we have already shown on a small scale in the case of France, we only create better conditions for a high level of self-activity, self-organisation and initiative.



TROTSKY ON IRELAND

"Trotskyism has become theoretically irrelevant to the Irish working class movement. The political level of its opportunism has fallen so low that new ground is no longer broken in exposing it."

So thought a contributor to Irish Communist no. 39, theoretical journal of the British and Irish Communist Organisation. However, forty five issues later the Irish Communist is still "exposing" this irrelevant body of theory. And, as Jack Lane in no 49 proves, the B.I.C.O. is still "breaking new ground" in the process. In his attempt to defend his original mistakes in criticising Trotsky (I.C. no.80) Lane now converts them into absurdities, some of which are unparalleled in the neuritic history of the Irish left.

The National Revolution in Ireland

The first part of his rejoinder has two prongs. Firstly he makes a pedantic criticism of our terminology concerning the basis of the national revolution and its tasks. What we meant was quite clear. Even Lane understood it. We simply said that Trotsky believed the Irish bourgeoisie incapable of leading the national revolution to success in Ireland, but that he by no means implied that the national revolution was obsolete. It had nearly changed in such a way as brought the working class to the fore as its chief agent. As we noted Trotsky actually said that the national revolution in Ireland had in practice become an uprising of the workers.

Lane doesn't care to discuss the accuracy of this prognosis. Instead he prefers to give us a lecture on semantics, teaching us the difference of similarity between the words Basis and tasks. He flatters himself!

His second criticism is in the same vein, ^{but} slightly more political. A distinction is made between the national tasks and the bourgeois democratic national tasks of the revolution. The former includes merely the struggle for self-determination. It is reactionary and the working class has no interest in fighting for its fulfillment. The latter includes "the land being owned by the peasants and the establishment of bourgeois democracy". According to Lane these latter tasks had been accomplished even before 1916. Consequently it was ridiculous for us or Trotsky to speak about carrying out the national revolution in Ireland.

the most conservative and reactionary segments of the Irish bourgeoisie were more radical on this than our Stalinist critic. But that should surprise nobody.

Finally let us note in passing that no such assembly exists in Ireland even to the present day. Because of the division of the country, supported and reinforced by British imperialism, the assembly in the South represents only one portion of the country. The Irish bourgeoisie, not to mention the working class and small farmers still have no representative institution and this is one of the underlying factors of instability in the Northern situation.

Once More on Lenin.

In defending Trotsky we also had to challenge some distortions made of Lenin's position. Lane claimed in effect that Lenin condemned the 1916 rebellion as reactionary in content and welcomed it solely on the basis that it came at an opportune moment in the international conjuncture which weakened imperialism. We showed from Lenin's writings that while he recognised the international significance of the Easter revolt he also saw its positive side in being the latest climax in the generations-old struggle against British imperialism.

Lane does not attempt to refute this. As usual he shies away from the real question by introducing a quibble. We mentioned in our defence of Trotsky that the B.I.C.O. is forced to distort Lenin in order to disguise their comprador theories on the national question in a shroud of Marxist orthodoxy. We wrote:

"All these amazing revelations are but a part of the B.I.C.O.'s attempt to rewrite history in order to make it fit in with the two nations dogma. In view of some of the more bizarre positions of the B.I.C.O. it comes as no surprise that they should try to establish that even Lenin took a stand against "bourgeois Catholic nationalism".

Instead of criticizing the real point we were making Lane takes up this incidental remark and tries to make great capital out of it. He inflates about three pages with chunks of quotations from Lenin which are directed against Irish bourgeois nationalism.

But even within the limits of this diversionary ploy Lane is dishonest. He neglects to mention that what Lenin and present-day Marxists meant by Irish bourgeois nationalism is not what the B.I.C.O. have in mind when they speak about bourgeois Catholic Nationalism. By the latter the B.I.C.O. mean the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination which they consider reactionary. Lenin on the contrary supported this right. When he spoke against Irish nationalism, or any nationalism for that matter, he spoke only against its negative aspects such as clericalism and glib sentimentalism which of course are highly dangerous. It was because of this difference in interpretation that we placed the words bourgeois Catholic nationalism in inverted commas.

But to get back to our original point let us stress that we do not and did deny the importance of the Irish rebellion as contributing to the disintegration of the power of imperialism. There is no use in Lane going on about it. He is preaching to the converted.

The real question which he should answer is whether or not Lenin saw the revolution in Ireland as a National revolt and whether or not he considered it progressive in itself. We have answered both these questions in the affirmative. He, on the other hand confuses the matter by counterposing the international dimension of the revolt to its national dimension. Lenin's whole point, however, in referring to the international significance of the Easter uprising was to show that struggles for national self-determination still had a vital and explosive content in themselves.

If we look at the pamphlet "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up" in which Lenin wrote his famous piece on Ireland we will see that he was polemicising precisely against those who held that the struggle for self-determination was reactionary and obsolete.

Opening the section on Ireland he wrote:

"The views of the opponents of self-determination lead to the conclusion that the vitality of small nations oppressed by imperialism has already been sapped, that they cannot play any role against imperialism, that support of their purely national aspirations will lead to nothing" (our emphasis)

Lenin then proceeded to show how the world was "learns away the outer wrappings, sweeps away the obsolete and reveals the underlying springs and forces" and exposes the full potential of the national struggle. He chose Ireland as an excellent example of this;

So Lane is looking at the picture upside down in fact. It was not to expose the "reactionary" nature of the struggle for self-determination but in order to show its revolutionary potential, that Lenin place Ireland in an international context.

NATIONALISM AND SYNDICALISM

Lane did admit in his original critique of Trotsky that his characterisation of Irish working class consciousness as "oscillating between nationalism and syndicalism was "fairly accurate". But no sooner had he done this than he began to carp about Trotsky's failure to indicate how to get rid of "at least one of these" (nationalism presumably)

Lane obviously considered syndicalism to have some positive content. By trying to show how nationalism and syndicalism did not appear eclectically in the consciousness of the working class but grew out of the same soil of imperialist exploitation, we endeavoured to emphasise the positive nature of both aspects.

Typically, Lane displays a marked reluctance to discuss the problem we posed. Instead he prefers to deal in abstractions which allow him room for manoeuvre. And to cover up the weakness of his approach he throws in a

few bits of invective which his own petit bourgeois mentality imagines must surely touch us to the quick.

To show how syndicalism and nationalism are mutually exclusive Lane does not bother with our concrete analysis but takes the example of the American syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World. There is no difficulty in showing that the I.W.W. combined militant trade unionism (for in essence syndicalism is little more) with a vigorous anti-nationalism. Thus syndicalism and nationalism form an antagonistic contradiction based on the antagonism between labour and capital.

In other words they can never be complimentary, or "form a dialectical contradiction as entities in themselves" (to use a bit of Lane's own high-faluting gibberish)

This is a classic example of sterile abstraction. It forgets that the world is divided into oppressor and oppressed nations. The I.W.W. existed in an oppressor nation. The contradiction between capital and labour took a "pure" form. Moreover, not only was the American working class not nationally oppressed but its bourgeoisie oppressed the workers of other nations and other national minorities within the United States. Hence it was quite natural that American revolutionaries should combine syndicalism with anti-nationalism, or more correctly anti-chauvinism.

However in an oppressed country the working class is not only oppressed by its own bourgeoisie but by that of another country as well. Thus the contradiction between labour and capital produces a conflict between a nationally oppressed working class on the one hand and imperialism and its clients on the other. The working class in this situation is even more oppressed than its own bourgeoisie, and consequently has a definite interest in national self-determination as the starting point of democracy and equality. For this reason, despite the loudest protestations of Lane that "there is not and never can be a dialectical contradiction between nationalism and syndicalism as entities in themselves", just such a contradiction existed in the consciousness of the Irish working class. Or does Lane forget that he initially agreed with Trotsky's view on this?

Syndicalism and nationalism in Ireland, as an oppressed country, both have a progressive and revolutionary content which represent an historical gain for the Irish working class and which must be sublated by the Marxist Movement in Ireland. Lane is horrified at the suggestion that nationalism has anything to offer the working-class.

"There is no element whatsoever (H.E.) in Nationalism which can be retained", he declares "Nationalism is a thoroughly bourgeois, anti-working class movement (?) It is opportunist to put it on a par with syndicalism and give the impression that they both "belong" to the working class and can be of equal use to it"

This indignation over the soiling of 'pure' working class consciousness is touching coming from a Stalinist!

There was a time of course when the B.I.C.O. held the exact opposite position;

when they capitulated on their knees before the worst aspects of nationalism, they held that those workers who were influenced by the "fairy tales" (as they put it) of Irish nationalism could "engage in progressive politics- bourgeois politics!" That is to say that, for the working class to embrace reactionary bourgeois nationalism was deemed to be at least a step forward.

On the general theoretical plane their grovelling before bourgeois nationalism was no less conspicuous. Lenin insisted that Marxism differentiated itself from mere bourgeois nationalism by its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination but in its refusal to support seperation which did not strengthen the class struggle of the workers. The Marxist approach was distinguished in that it dealt with self-determination from the point of view of the proletariat and the struggle for socialism rather than from the stand point of bourgeois interests. Thus Lenin wrote! "Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight for any kind of national development- Of course not." And he continued "The development of nationality in general is the principle of bourgeois nationalism... The proletariat, however, far from undertaking to uphold the national development of every nation, on the contrary, warns the masses against such illusions, stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations, except that which is founded on force or privilege".

The B.I.C.O. rejected this refreshing and frank declaration of working class principle. They started not from the interest of the working class and its fight against capitalism but from the interests of the bourgeoisie and its efforts to expand national capitalism. They refused to defend the working class position by standing "for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse" and by welcoming "every kind of assimilation of nations",. Instead they gave expression to the bourgeoisie's hostility to free intercourse and assimilation. They denounced the Marxist view that the international division of labour created by capitalist development undermines the national foundations of capitalism and calls for the greatest co-operation in production among nations. (As long as this does not lead in national oppression) As against this they insisted that "It is only by defying , by obstructing, by going against the international division of labour", by setting up strong national barriers within which it will not be allowed to operate, that these (underdeveloped -J.C.) countries can develop".

All along the line, as we can clearly see, it was solely the desires, needs and aspirations of bourgeoisie which dictated the B.I.C.O. position on the national question. Please note that these are the people who today brand us Trotskyists, against whom they originally hurled all this nationalistic junk, as "nationalists who masquerade as Marxists" Ah well; never mind....Its just Stalinism.

As Ehgles once remarked, every doctrinaire mistake when rigerously persisted in turns into an opposit, and equally doctrinaire mistake. The B.I.C.CO.

opportunist on the national question is a living confirmation of this. Because the interests of the bourgeoisie is the yardstick they used to judge the right to self determination. They now oppose not only the reactionary aspects of nationalism but even its progressive ones. Today British Imperialism and its compradore allies in Ireland want to reintegrate Ireland into the United Kingdom the better to exploit the working class. The logic of the B.I.C.O. views leads them to support this. Once the rationale of their existence was to struggle against Trotskyism and its internationalism; now their whole existence is determined by the struggle against Trotskyism and Catholic (Irish) nationalism. All nationalism is now reactionary (except of course Protestant "nationalism" ie. imperialist jingoism)

Just as the original position of B.I.C.O. had nothing to do with Marxism so their new position has nothing to do with Marxism either. Their present theories are banal abstractions which mask the imperialist oppression of countries such as Ireland. The denial of the progressive elements of the nationalism of an oppressed country is nothing short of espousing the "social imperialism" which Lenin long ago exposed. A distinction must necessarily be made between the nationalism of an oppressor nation and that of an oppressed nation" wrote Lenin in one of his last documents

...; All those who, like Lane deny any progressive content in the nationalism of the oppressed should ponder the reasons behind such a distinction. Speaking in general terms Lenin already gave the key to this distinction. He explained that "the Elements of democratic and socialist culture are present, if only in rudimentary forms, in every national culture, since in every nation there are toiling and exploiting masses, whose conditions of life inevitably give rise to the ideology of democracy and socialism"(emphasis in original). As capitalism grows more senile and decadent these progressive elements become more obscured by the more reactionary features of nationalism. But the decay of capitalism also intensifies the oppression of small nations as a result of which their nationalism retains the progressive elements in relatively crystalline form. Thus Lenin pointed out repeatedly that "the bourgeois nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed against oppression and it is this content which we unconditionally support"(emphasis in original). That is why, when addressing the new communist cadres from the East, he told them: "You will have to base yourselves on that bourgeois nationalism which is awakening, and cannot but awaken, and which has its historical justification".

There is no need to further emphasise the conditioned attitude of Marxism towards nationalism. What is required now is that we should outline those elements of Irish nationalism which Marxists are duly bound to assimilate. They are:

- (1) The understanding that the development of the Irish people towards a new future can take place only by throwing off the yoke of British imperialism.
- (2) That this cannot be done while the country remains divided. Undoubtedly the B.I.C.O. will argue that this in fact is the most reactionary feature

of Irish nationalism because it represents the desire of the Southern bourgeoisie to oppress the Protestant "nation" and the Protestant working class in particular. But this objection is rather shallow, since British imperialism itself now agrees that some form of unity, if only within the United Kingdom, is essential if Ireland is to develop even as a neo-colony.

(111) The understanding that in the last analysis armed struggle and revolutionary action are the only methods of defeating and routing imperialism. These are the aspects of Irish nationalism which even to this day retain a progressive nature. Without assimilating them the Labour movement in Ireland cannot take the road to socialism and the emancipation of the working class.

This shows us the meaning of Lane's smug accusation that the aim of the R.M.G. is "to keep the workers under the influence of nationalism and thereby subserviant to the political power of the bourgeoisie" His real aim is to belittle the revolutionary traditions of the Irish people and prevent the emergence of a real movement against British imperialism in Ireland.

Title: Marxist Review, No. 3

Organisation: Revolutionary Marxist Group

Date: 1973

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit 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.