# THE IRISH QUESTION

## A Socialist Analysis

A "WERELDSOCIALISME" PAMPHLET

# INTRODUCTION

CAPITALISM IS THE SOCIAL SYSTEM within which the Northern Ireland crisis is happening. It is ordinary wage and salary workers who are getting killed and wounded, beaten and terrorised over an affair which is no concern of theirs. A superficial glance might suggest that the conflict is about religion, about the Protestants oppressing the Catholics and the Catholics fighting back. But this is not really so. A deeper study will show that this religious antagonism is a reflection of past economic conflict between two sections of the capitalist class in Ireland.

The capitalist system is based on the ownership and control of the means of production by a section only of society. As a result those in the non-owning class can live only by selling their mental and physical energies for a wage or salary to those who monopolise the factories, farms, shipyards, offices and other places of work. Capitalism is thus a class society in which two main classes compete over the possession and use of the means of production: the owning capitalist class and the non-owning working class. The great majority of people are members of the working class, which includes not just factory workers but all who are compelled to work for a wage or salary. In highly industrialised Britain over 90 per cent of the population are working class. In not quite so industrialised Northern Ireland the proportion is a little less.

Capitalism cannot work other than as a profit-making system in the interest of those who monopolise the means of production. Under capitalism these means of production are used, not to serve human needs, but to produce goods and services to be sold on the market with a view to profit. The workers who produce this wealth are only paid the equivalent of enough to keep them and their families as efficient producers. Everything they produce over and above their wages is surplus value, the source of profits for re-investment in their exploitation and for the consumption of the capitalist class and its State machine. Since capitalism is based on the exploitation of the working class it does not serve their interest. Nor can it be made to. Only the establishment of world socialism, as will be explained in the final chapter, is in their interest.

The historical approach of this pamphlet is that of the materialist conception of history, pioneered by Marx, which sees productive activity as the basis of human society and social change as the outcome of changing methods of production bringing to the fore new classes to challenge, politically and ideologically, the rule of those whose power was derived from previous, now out-dated methods of production.

We will, we hope, be excused for delving somewhat into Irish history because without some knowledge of this it is quite impossible to gain a proper understanding of what is happening in Northern Ireland today --and its utter futility from a working class point of view. So we begin by examining the system of land tenure on which the old "Protestant Ascendancy" rested and then look at the uneven development of capitalism in Ireland in the 19th

century before going on to deal with the current political scene.

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# LANDLORDISM IN IRELAND

BEFORE THE ANGLO-NORMAN INVASION of 1169 the people of Ireland lived under a system of society which, though unequal, had yet to reach the stage of a centralised State with a ruling class of hereditary landowners. Ireland was inhabited by a number of more or less powerful clans, whose chiefs were continually competing for political control of the whole island. But by this time no such stable Irish State had been established, though Irish society was clearly evolving in this direction.

What the Norman barons try to do was to establish feudalism in Ireland: to turn themselves, and any Irish chiefs who supported them, into feudal landholders. But the Irish clan system, though declining, was far from defeated. It placed two great obstacles in the way of feudalism. First, it did not recognise private property in land, land being regarded as the common property of the whole clan whose members including the chief only enjoyed temporary private use of whatever had been allocated them. Second, the clan chief was not a hereditary ruler but an elected official of the clan. It is true that the chief was generally chosen from the same ruling family but it was just as likely that a chief would be succeeded by his brother or his nephew as by his eldest son; it depended on who the clansmen felt was the best man for the job.

The social struggle in Ireland throughout the period of the Middle Ages was between these two social systems. The Anglo-Norman barons enjoyed some success and the Church and some Irish chiefs did embrace feudalism. On the other hand, many of the barons, and even of the settlers living in the English colony around Dublin called the Pale, themselves became Gaelic-speaking and accepted clan customs, as repeated complaints and edicts against this show.

By Tudor times England was becoming a trading and sea power, a potential rival to Spain. In these circumstances Ireland, as a big island to the west of England and to the north of Spain, assumed great strategic importance. The English government decided to settle the Irish question once and for all. In 1541 Henry VIII was declared to be King of Ireland as well as of England. Previously English kings had merely been Lords of Ireland. The significance of this change was that it made Ireland and all its inhabitants, including the clans and their chiefs, subjects of the English king and his laws.

In the second half of the 16th century the English government decided to colonise Ireland in the same sort of way as it was then colonising the eastern seaboard of North America. This policy, called "plantation", involved dispossessing the then occupiers (who in Ireland, it should be noted, included the descendants of the Anglo-Norman barons and the English medieval colonists as well of those of the original Gaelic clansmen, not to mention the Danes and the pre-Celtic population) and selling the land to "undertakers" on condition that they let it to new colonists from

England. It didn't work, mainly because the undertakers found it more profitable to let the land to the Irish.

Ulster at this time was the most socially backward part of Ireland being a stronghold of the clan system and Gaelic culture. In 1595 most of the northern Irish clans rose in rebellion but after a devastating war which left Ulster starving and depopulated were forced to surrender in 1603. One of the terms of the settlement was that the clan chiefs should become English-style landowners. This they accepted for a while but after four years, as their lands dwindled, they gave up and left for France. This "Flight of the Earls" represented the end of Gaelic culture in Ireland, since with the former clan chiefs went the bards and others who had given the language some prestige. It also opened the way for the plantation of Ulster.

Already towards the end of the 16th century colonists from Scotland had settled in East Ulster, in Antrim and Down (those who settled in the glens of Antrim, incidentally, were Gaelic-speaking Catholics from the Western Isles, whose descendants are Catholics to this day), so these two counties didn't need to be planted. Most of the rest of Ulster was settled by colonists, mainly from Scotland but with a minority from England and all Protestants of one kind or another. This was to be the one successful plantation of Ireland, a fact which was to have immense significance for the future economic and political development of Ireland.

But Ireland's troubles were not yet over. For the remainder of the 17th century Ireland was to be a battlefield for the rival factions in the English bourgeois revolution and civil war. In 1641 the dispossessed clansmen of Ulster rose in a bid to regain the land of their fathers. They were led by Catholic ex-landowners whose ambition was to replace the new Protestant landowners as exploiters of the Irish peasantry. While the English civil war raged the movement spread to the rest of Ireland and was able to make some political headway, but by 1649 Cromwell was free to deal with Ireland and to try to prevent it once and for all from being used as a base for royalist counter-revolution. Thousands of ordinary Irish peasants were slaughtered or sold into slavery in the West Indies or driven into the barren west of Ireland under the slogan "Hell or Connaught". The Royalist, mainly Catholic,landowners were dispossessed and their lands handed over to Protestant adventurers and former Cromwellian soldiers.

The Cromwellian settlement established the social system which was to last in Ireland till the end of the 19th century: the land became the private property of an English, Protestant, and often absentee, landlord class who let it to resident middlemen and agents who in their turn robbed the Irish peasants of everything but enough for their bare subsistence.

The Catholic landowners were to make one more bid to regain their lands and the political power that went with it. When the Catholic King James II was expelled by the English parliament for trying to usurp its authority he sought the help of the French king, Louis XIV,

whose puppet in fact he was. Once again the strategic importance of Ireland came to the fore. When James, with French help, landed in Ireland and the Catholic landowners rallied to him, the English parliament sent their newly-appointed king, William of Orange, to meet the threat. William defeated the Jacobite forces at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 on what is now July 12. To this day the Twelth of July is a public holiday in Northern Ireland but, in view of the place the Battle of the Boyne has assumed in Orange mythology, it is curious to note that William's victory was celebrated in Rome by pontifical high mass! European politics being what they then were, the Pope had made a defensive alliance with William of Orange(when ruler of the Netherlands) and others against Louis XIV of France.

William's victory confirmed the Cromwellian settlement and was soon followed by the enactment of "penal laws" which deprived Catholics of all civil and political rights and barred them from acquiring land. Catholics were also subject to other penalties which were so severe that they were never really enforced. This, too, shaped the future course of Irish politics for it meant that when a Catholic middle class emerged, as it did in the course of the 18th century, its struggle for political power would take on the form of a struggle for removing discrimination against the Catholic religion, so helping to identify Irish Nationalism and Catholicism.

The Irish peasant was in a miserable position. Though legally a tenant he was really little more than a feudal serf. Typically, an absentee landlord let his land at a fixed rent to a resident middleman who, living on part of the estate, sub-let the rest of it in very small holdings to the peasants. In order to get money to pay the rent (and tithes to the established Protestant Church of Ireland) the peasant worked on the middleman's land, who thus in effect got his land farmed for nothing. To all intents and purposes, the peasant worked for the middleman in return for a potato patch. Nor did the peasant have any incentive to increase the productivity of his holding. As soon as the middleman saw that the peasant was producing more than his own bare subsistence he increased the rent so appropriating for himself the fruits of the peasant's extra effort. There was no security of tenure: the peasants could be and were evicted at the will of the landlord or his middleman.

Evictions became common whenever the profits to be had from cattle-raising or sheep-farming were greater than the profits to be had from growing corn, because grazing required much less labour than tillage. In fact from the 17th century onwards the tendency, more rapid in some periods than in others, was away from tillage to grazing so giving Ireland the appearance of a chronic overpopulation problem. But Ireland never was overpopulated in relation to the amount of food that could have been grown to feed its inhabitants, only in relation to the farming activities its landlords found the most profitable.

On his back the Irish peasant carried not only the landlords and their middlemen and agents but also the Church of Ireland and its clergy and the whole corrupt State administration centred on Dublin Castle. Between him and his exploiters raged a continual and

violent class war. The peasant's only protection was the secret society whose members would act against the evicting or rent-raising landlord by harming his cattle or burning his buildings or even by killing him. The landlord and his State replied in kind, killing, hanging or transporting any peasants they suspected of being a member of a secret society. It would be no exaggeration to say that the land of Ireland had been acquired for the landed aristocracy by violence and was only held for them by violence.

In Ulster the peasants were not in such a bad position; they were the tenants they were supposed to be rather than completely down-trodden serfs. This was because, being motivated by the Protestant ethic, they were more independent-minded and less easy to intimidate than the demoralised Catholic ex-clansmen. Even so, they too had their secret societies to protest against such matters as compulsory road-building and tithes. In the course of struggles in the 17th and 18th centuries they had managed to achieve what was later known as tenant right. Under "Ulster custom", as the practices they had forced on their landlords were called, they had security of tenure, rents fixed for a reasonable period of time and the freedom to sell their tenancy including any improvements they themselves had made to the land. Ulster custom thus gave them an incentive to increase their productivity and allowed them to accumulate some savings, a very important factor in explaining why capitalism developed around Belfast in the 19th century instead of stagnating as in the rest of Ireland. And the Ulster tenant got his money to pay the rent, not by working on his landlord's farm but by weaving linen on his own handloom.

During the Napoleonic War Ireland had an assured market for its corn and, though this boom collapsed in 1812, Ireland's virtual monopoly in the supply of corn to England was restored by the 1815 Corn Laws. So that until the repeal of these laws in 1846 the tendency from tillage to grazing slowed down. Peasant unrest, however, persisted. During the 1820's it was diverted from the land question towards Catholic Emancipation, the somewhat grandiose name given to the proposal to allow wealthy Catholics to become Members of Parliament, magistrates and army officers on the same terms as wealthy Protestants and which did nothing to lessen the exploitation of the peasants. But in the 1830's a mass campaign against the payment of tithes to the Protestant Church of Ireland grew up which ended with the passing of the 1838 Tithe Commutation Act, in the first political victory of the Irish peasants over their English landlords.

In 1841 the population of Ireland was 8 million. Ten years later it was 6 million. Basically what happened during the 1840's was the collapse of the old abstentee landlord/middleman system of exploiting the Irish subsistence peasant. A number of factors brought this about. First, the failure of successive potato crops, the subsistence food of the Irish peasant, which resulted in the Great Famine that killed about a million people. This is sometimes, more accurately, called the Great Starvation since while the peasants of Ireland were dying food continued to be exported. The Irish peasant needed food but had no money to pay for it so, in accordance with the law of capitalist economics which still operates today, they were left to starve and die. Second, the Repeal of the Corn Laws in

1846. These laws had, as we saw, been introduced in 1815 and put a tariff on imported corn so as to protect the landlords of Britain, who since the Union of 1801 included the landlords of Ireland. This repeal, effective from 1849, destroyed Ireland's virtual monopoly in the supply of corn to England and gave the green light for the resumption of the trend away from tillage towards grazing. Evictions followed, made easier by the Irish Poor Relief Act of 1847 which said that no relief should be given to anybody with more than a quarter of an acre of land. The starving peasants were made to give up their holdings as a condition for getting some relief. The resulting "surplus" population was forced to emigrate, to the slums of Britain, America and Australia. Which accounts for the loss of the other million in the Irish population in the 1840's.

Since the old inefficient agricultural system had collapsed the obvious solution, from a capitalist point of view, would have been to create the legal framework within which a more capitalistically-oriented agriculture could develop. To enact, in other words, the sort of tenant right enjoyed by some of the peasants of Ulster, what was later called the Three F's, viz., Fixity of Tenure, Fair Rents and Freedom of Sale. And during the 1850's an all-Ireland campaign for this, uniting Catholic and Protestant peasants North and South, did grow up. The English government even introduced a Bill to provide for tenant right, but it was thrown out by the House of (Land) Lords. The most parliament did was to pass an Act providing for the compulsory sale of the estates of bankrupt landlords. In the main these estates were bought up by the money-grabbing middlemen and by Catholic usurers or "gombeen men", neither of whom had any scruples about clearing their newly-acquired lands of peasants so that they could be used for raising cattle to export to England. This, providing meat and butter for industrial Britain, came to be Ireland's economic role during this period (and, to all intents and purposes, still is). But the changeover from being England's granary to England's cattle ranch and dairy farm meant massive evictions and emigration so that by 1880 the population of Ireland was down to only 4 million.

Naturally the peasants resisted, this time by legal as well as illegal methods. For the local secret societies were beginning to be replaced by an open national political movement such as had been the Tenants Right League of the 1850's. Already in the 1840's the peasants had found in James Fintan Lalor an able theorist of agrarian revolution. Lalor called not just for tenant right but for the ending of landlordism altogether by the nationalization of the land and the letting of it out for tillage to peasant families. This was to be the programme of the formidable Land League of the 1880's whose activities introduced the word "boycott" into the English language and convinced the Anglo-Irish landlords that sooner or later they would have to withdraw --but that if they were going to withdraw it should be on their terms, with generous compensation rather than outright expropriation by an agrarian revolution.

The 1867 Reform Act, which gave the higher paid worker in the towns the vote, further shifted the balance of political power in Britain from the landed aristocracy towards the industrial

capitalists. The new Liberal government brought in a number of measures which weakened the aristocracy's position in Ireland. In 1869 the Protestant Church of Ireland (which not even a majority of Irish Protestants supported) was disestablished and in 1870 a very tentative step towards tenant right was taken. Full tenant right had to wait till 1881 when the then raging land war made it clear to even the most stupid Tory landlord that agrarian revolution would be the only alternative to not granting this reform.

But the Tory landlords turned out to be not at all stupid. In 1885 the then Tory government introduced the first of a series of Land Purchase Acts which allowed the peasants of Ireland to buy their holdings with government help. The basic scheme was that the government bought out the landlord giving him compensation in the form of interest-bearing bonds while the tenant paid the government a fixed annuity to cover interest and repayment of the loan. These Acts, culminating in the 1903 Act, were so successful that by 1921 Ireland was largely a country of peasant proprietors. The Cromwellian settlement which had imposed an English landlord class on the backs of the Irish peasants had finally been liquidated. The important political consequence of this was that it meant the Anglo-Irish landlords were no longer so bitterly opposed to Home Rule for Ireland as they had been when it would almost certainly have spelled agrarian revolution. The leadership of the campaign against Home Rule fell instead to the industrial capitalists of Belfast who were opposed to Home Rule for quite different reasons, as will be explained in a later chapter.

# THE RISE OF THE IRISH MIDDLE CLASS

IRELAND WAS ALWAYS overwhelmingly a peasant country in which the main class struggle was between the peasants and the landowners who mercilessly exploited them. Nevertheless, Ireland was also a trading country insofar as it exported agricultural products such as corn, cattle and wool. As such market relations spread so a third force entered the Irish social, and political,seene: a class of merchants and small businessmen and their hangers-on like lawyers and non-conformist ministers, whose wealth was not based on landowning but on trade and industry, a class properly called at the time "the middle class" because, socially and politically, it stood mid-way between the landed aristocracy and the mass of exploited peasants. Born in the 1700's, this class grew to maturity in the 19th century, but split into two rival sections bitterly opposed, from the point of view of their own material interests, over the economic policy which should be pursued once it had ceased to be a mere middle class and had come to replace the English landed aristocracy as the ruling class in Ireland.

Almost as soon as it had established a new landed aristocracy in Ireland in the middle of the 17th century, the English government began to antagonise their new colony by passing laws which discriminated against Irish trade. Wool exports were restricted by the 1663 requirement that Irish exports should be carried in English ships and in 1666 cattle exports to England were banned. This discrimination was not confined to Ireland but was applied also against England's other colonies, including the thirteen along the eastern seaboard of North America. In Ireland, as in America, discontent built up (indeed much of the discontent in America was fanned by the thousands of Ulster Presbyterian tenants who fled Ireland in the face of social and religious oppression). When the American colonies declared their independence in 1776 and sought French help against an English re-conquest, the Irish colonists saw their chance. They organised their own militia, the Irish Volunteers, ostensibly to resist a possible French invasion of Ireland. In 1779 the all-Protestant Dublin parliament, backed by the armed force of the all-Protestant Irish Volunteers, was able to force a weakened English government to remove its discrimination against Irish trade. Three years later, in 1782, the Irish Volunteers were instrumental in forcing the English government to grant the Dublin parliament the right to make its own laws for Ireland, so inaugurating a twenty-year period of Home Rule, often called "Grattan's Parliament" after the Irish politician who had led the fight but who was never in fact to hold office under it.

Like its counterpart in England, the Irish parliament was largely a "house of landed proprietors" and just as corrupt. The franchise was restricted to Protestant property-owners and many MP's were simply appointed by the local landlord. Home Rule for Ireland between 1782 and 1801 was Home Rule for the Irish Protestant landlords or the Protestant Ascendancy as they, and their established Church of Ireland, came to be known. The small Protestant middle class, based mainly in and around Belfast, who had supplied the backbone of the Irish Volunteers was not satisfied; they wanted a democratic reform of the Irish parliament and, later, under the impact of the French

Revolution, a full bourgeois revolution to establish an independent Republic in Ireland. To achieve this they sought an alliance with the even smaller Catholic middle class and found an able exponent and leader in Theobold Wolfe Tone, the descendant of a Protestant Cromwellian settler. In 1791 he founded the Society of United Irishmen, a body which sought to unite the Protestant and Catholic middle classes to overthrow landlord rule and establish political democracy in Ireland. Tone himself believed that this aim could only be achieved with French military help but this, due to various set-backs never came in time to aid the abortive United Irishmen uprising of 1798. The rising, which like all political upsets in Ireland took on the features of a peasants' revolt, was easily and brutally crushed. Wolfe Tone was captured and committed suicide during his trial, so becoming Irish nationalism's first Republican martyr.

To resist the pro-middle class United Irishmen a section of the Protestant landlords organised in 1795 in Armagh, an Ulster county evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics, a body called the Orange Society pledged to defend "the king and his heirs as long as he or they may support the Protestant Ascendancy"(at this time, and so in this context, the term Protestant meant a supporter of the established Anglican church and did not include Presbyterians and other dissenters as they were called). The Orange Order was originally a pro-landlord and exclusively Anglican body, though in the course of the 19th century its character was to change.

Since, in view of the Napoleonic war, Ireland's strategic position had become particularly important the English government decided that the best way to protect itself against a French invasion via Ireland was to re-unite Ireland with the rest of Britain. The Protestant Ascendancy were not too happy about this, which after all meant a sacrifice of their political power, and the Dublin parliament had to be bribed into voting for its own abolition. The Act of Union which came into force in January 1801 made Ireland an integral part of a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The period of Grattan's Parliament had been a period of prosperity for nascent Irish manufacturing industry but this was almost completely wiped out in Britain's first industrial depression, that of 1825. Later Irish nationalists were to blame this on the Union with Britain. This explanation, which was meant as a justification for the Nationalists' policy of protecting irish industry by tariffs, does not hold water. Irish manufacturing industry, mainly textiles, had been based on hand looms not power-driven machinery. The application of steam power to textile production would have placed Irish industry at a disadvantage anyway compared with British industry because it did not have ready access to the necessary coal and iron. Irish industry would have gone to the wall in the face of British competition even without the Union.

Besides, in Ulster the textile industry did recover from this set-back. This was not accidental and is to be explained by the fact that in Ulster, thanks to Ulster custom, the industry had been based on the tenants and their handlooms while in the South it had merely been the side-line of a few commercially-minded landlords. When the crisis came these landlords cut their losses and invested the capital they could save elsewhere. For the Ulster tenant there was no such choice; he had

to keep on weaving however low the price he got. This low price the Ulster tenant weavers were prepared to accept was the main reason why the textile industry recovered there. It was an incentive for capitalists to set up businesses there rather than in Lancashire or south-west Scotland where the weavers expected higher wages or higher prices for their work.

From then on the Belfast region shared in the general 19th century industrialization of Britain. In the 1820's machine-production was introduced into the linen industry and, with the construction of a new harbour, Belfast began to become an industrial port. Shipbuilding was introduced in 1853 and around it grew up subsidiary industries such as rope-making and general engineering. By the 1890's Belfast was the third largest port, by trade, in Britain and in 1911 had the biggest shipyard in the world.

The easy sea route to Clydeside and Liverpool made the Belfast region a part of Britain's industrial North. Not only had Belfast benefited from the Union; it had become an integral part of industrial Britain. Its middle class, now well on the way to becoming fully-fledged industrial capitalists, was an integral part of the British middle class and, like them, Nonconformist, anti-landlord and, until 1885, Liberal.

In the South industry stagnated where it didn't decline and the middle class remained a class of lawyers, moneylenders, small contractors and agricultural suppliers. Understandably, they were not so keen on the Union. One of the promises held out by the English government to get Catholic support for the Union had been so-called Catholic Emancipation. Since Grattan's Parliament had already given Catholics the vote on the same terms as Protestants, this merely meant allowing Catholics to become Members of Parliament, army and navy officers, magistrates and higher civil servants and State officials. The failure to enact it irked the Catholic middle class since this deprived them of a share in political power. To achieve this Daniel O'Connell set up the Catholic Association, a mass political movement which, with the help of the priests, channelled peasant discontent to further the ends of the Southern, and Catholic, middle class. In doing this O'Connell set the pattern for Irish Nationalist politics in the rest of the century: exploiting peasant discontent to gain political concessions for the middle class.

In 1828 O'Connell was elected MP for Co. Clare but could not take his seat in the House of Commons. A deal was arranged between him and the British government: Catholic Emancipation in return for the disenfranchisement of "the 40 shilling freeholders", the very Catholic peasants who had voted for O'Connell. O'Connell agreed and in 1829 the Catholic middle class of Southern Ireland took the first step on the road which, nearly a hundred years later, led to them becoming the ruling class of the Southern, agricultural part of Ireland.

After his "success" over Catholic Emancipation, O'Connell (who thereby, for some unknown reason, earned the title of "The Liberator", and who was also an opponent of trade unions and

factory legislation) raised the demand for Repeal,i.e., the repeal of the 1800 Act of Union and the re-establishment of Home Rule for Ireland. In 1780 this had meant the rule of the Irish Protestant landlords; in 1840 it would have meant the rule of the mainly Catholic Irish middle class. But not all Repealers were Catholic; some Protestant landlords and even middle class people were prepared to go along with this demand. In fact, when after O'Connell's death in 1847 his movement fell under the control of a group of bigoted Catholics who earned themselves the nickname of "the Pope's Brass Band", some of its members, mainly Protestants, broke away and argued a more intellectually presentable Nationalist case under the name of "Young Ireland". They even staged, in the revolutionary year of 1848, a farcical "rising" which ended in them being exiled.

# THE HOME RULE CRISIS

THE MODERN IRISH HOME RULE MOVEMENT was founded in 1870 by a Protestant landlord and lawyer, Isaac Butt. A former Tory, he had come to the conclusion that the only way to save landlord rule in Ireland was to prevent the increasingly democratic English parliament from making laws for Ireland. He attracted the support of a few other landlords but mainly of the Catholic middle class who after his death in 1879 were soon to elect as their leader another Protestant landlord and businessman, Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell, however, was no Tory sympathiser; he wanted Irish Home Rule and would stop at nothing (short of an agrarian revolution,that is) to get it. He organised the disruption of the business of the English House of Commons; he pretended to support the Land League and its land war (like O'Connell exploiting peasant discontent for middle class ends) and in 1885 he formed an electoral pact with the Tories as he thought they would be more inclined than the Liberals to let a Home Rule parliament set up tariffs to protect infant Irish industries.

In a speech at Arklow in August 1885 during the election campaign Parnell, as reported in The Times of 22 August, declared:

> Without a Parliament with full powers for Ireland we can do nothing for her in the way of reviving her industries(cheers). Without a freely elected National Assembly, with power to control all the affairs of Ireland and with power to protect her struggling industries (cheers), in fact, it is my opinion as a practical man, whatever that opinion may be worth, that it is impossible to revive our native industries...We are met face to face with this fact --that we find ourselves in the commencement of our industry confronted by the competition of England, with her perfect system of manufacture, with her trained population, and her vast possession of capital and wealth, and we know well that the English manufacturers and the English traders are so unscrupulous that they will compete against and trample under foot any struggling Irish industry in order that they may thereby earn more for their own industries (cheers).

To raise the demand for protection for Irish industry was a fateful political decision, though it was quite in accordance with the material interests of the relatively weak middle class of the South of Ireland. To the industrial capitalists of Belfast, however, protection meant being cut off from the rest of Britain behind the tariff walls of an industrially-backward Irish State and fore-shadowed stagnation, decline and financial ruin. And it was hardly likely to appeal to the "unscrupulous English manufacturers" whose goods were to be barred from Ireland and who were an influential section of the Liberal Party.

Parnell's demand for protection, together with Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule the following year, was to transform Irish --and British-- politics. Up until 1885 the Belfast capitalists were

Liberals. In the 1868 election, the first under the newly extended extended franchise, the Ulster Liberals broke the Tory monopoly in Ulster by getting nine MP's elected; in the 1874 election they maintained this gain but in 1885, due to the Parnell-Tory pact, were wiped out. They never won a seat again.

The Ulster Liberals had always, for sound business reasons, been Unionists and Gladstone's Home Rule Bill of 1886 (even though it did not propose to grant an Irish parliament the power to impose tariffs) drove them into the arms of the Tories. Feeling themselves in a desperate position --and nothing makes a capitalist so desperate as the prospect of being cut off from his profitable markets-- they decided to play what the ambitious Tory politician Lord Randolph Churchill (Winston Churchill's father) called "the Orange card" in order to build up a mass political basis for opposing Home Rule and maintaining the Union.

Playing the Orange card meant stirring up Protestant sectarianism, a move which no doubt the Ulster Liberal capitalists found distasteful even if certain reactionary Tory landlords and ranting Presbyterian ministers did not. The Orange Order had fallen in disrepute and went into decline after the Union and became a stronghold of the most reactionary king-and-country Tory backwoodsmen. But, as Catholics and Protestants moved to the towns the old economic antagonism over farms and rents took the form of an economic antagonism over jobs and wages. 1857 saw the first major vicious sectarian riot in Belfast by then well on the way to becoming an industrial city. Originally the Orange Order was an exclusively Anglican Church of Ireland body, but in the first part of the 19th century dissenters too were admitted in response to calls for all Protestants to unite against the Catholic Threat, the Scarlet Woman of Rome, Old Red Socks and other such ignorant phrases. In 1836 after a parliamentary inquiry the Order had been banned (some Royal dukes had been found plotting to use it to prevent Victoria becoming Queen) and for most of the time after that its noisy and provocative parades had been banned.

Up until 1886, in other words, the Orange mob had, apart from a few ranting clerics, been leaderless. Playing the Orange card meant assuming the leadership of this mob. Which is what, in their desperate situation, the Belfast capitalists decided to do --with considerable success as it turned out. This move transformed the Orange Order from an instrument to defend the Protestant landed aristocracy of Ireland (which by this time, thanks to land purchase,was already on the way out) into an instrument to defend the industrial interests of the Belfast capitalists. Ulster's political Protestantism, and its attendant mythology, which survives to this day dates not from 1690 nor from 1795 but from 1886. After all, less than a hundred years before Belfast's Protestant middle class had been ardent Irish Republicans, another historical fact which like the Pope celebrating William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne Orange mythology conveniently forgets.

As it turned out the 1886 Home Rule Bill never got through the Commons let alone the Lords. A section of the Liberal Party representing most of the "unscrupulous English manufacturers" voted against the Bill thus bringing down Gladstone's Liberal government. These Liberal Unionists as they were called later joined with the Conservatives. The great

majority of Ulster Liberals were, as indicated, Liberal Unionists.

In 1892 Gladstone managed to get a Home Rule Bill through the Commons only to have it thrown out by the Lords. In the meantime Parnell had been driven out of the leadership of the Irish parliamentary party, which thereupon split into various rival and continually warring factions. Since the Irish Nationalist MP's no longer held the balance of power in the House of Commons Home Rule for Ireland ceased to be a burning issue for nearly twenty years. During this period the Irish Nationalist MP's came to represent the self-satisfied cattle farmers and ranchers who were quite content with Ireland's economic role as part of England's agricultural hinterland. They were not too worried about protection for nascent Irish industries and were prepared to accept any arrangement which would hand over political power in Ireland to them and their corrupt and clerical-influenced party machine.

The case of the would-be Southern Irish capitalist class was taken up instead by the intellectuals one of whom, Arthur Griffith, founded in 1905 a new political party, Sinn Fein. Believing that it was going to Westminster that had corrupted the Nationalist party, Griffith advocated a policy of abstention. Which meant not going to Westminster rather than not contesting elections. Griffith also advocated a "dual monarchy",i.e., that England and Ireland should be separate States but with the same king. But what was particularly significant about Sinn Fein was its economic policy. In his youth Griffith had been a supporter of Parnell and came to share his belief in the need for protective tariffs. As he said in his speech to the inaugural convention of Sinn Fein in November 1905:

> Protection does not mean the exclusion of foreign competition --it means rendering the native manufacturer equal to meeting foreign competition. It does not mean that we shall pay a higher profit to any Irish manufacturer, but that we shall not stand by and see him crushed by mere weight of foreign capital. If an Irish manufacturer cannot produce an article as cheaply as an English or other foreigner, only because his foreign competitor has larger resources at his disposal, then it is the first duty of the Irish nation to accord protection to that Irish manufacturer(Sinn Fein Policy, 1907 edition,p. 15).

With disarming frankness he went on to say of Ireland that "with the development of her manufacturing arm will proceed the rise of a national middle-class", and later:

> Under the Sinn Fein policy...no possibility would be left...for a syndicate of unscrupulous English capitalists to crush out the home manufacturer and the home trader (p.23).

The programme also demanded an Irish merchant marine, a consular service, a national bank and an Irish stock exchange. Truly has Griffith been called "the evangelist of Irish capitalism".

Sinn Fein, which was to be the party that led the successful struggle

for independance, did not make much headway until the bankruptcy of the Irish parliamentary party became quite obvious in the course of the first world war. Then support for Sinn Fein and its policy of abstention grew. A special convention in 1917 re-affirmed Griffith's original 1905 programme, including protection and an Irish stock exchange, only substituting the demand for a dual monarchy by the demand for an independent Irish Republic. Griffith was succeeded as President by Eamonn De Valera, a thorough-going Republican.

Both Griffith and De Valera had at one time been members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, set up in 1858 by exiles from the 1848 rising and Irish immigrants in America as a secret society dedicated to using physical force to overthrow British rule and establish an independent Republic in Ireland. Also known as the "Fenians" they had staged an unsuccesful rising in Ireland in 1867 followed by a number of bombings in England as they tried to release their prisoners. Kept alive in America it too gained support in Ireland as a result of the corrupt Irish parliamentary party, once again mainly from intellectuals.

After the 1910 General Elections the Irish Nationalist MP's once again held the balance of power in the British House of Commons. A deal was arranged with the Liberals: in return for Home Rule the Irish MP's would give general support to the Liberal government. But first the House of Lords had to be reformed. In 1911 its power to throw out bills passed by the Commons was reduced to the power to delay them for up to two years. Then in 1912 a third Home Rule Bill was introduced.

The Ulster Unionists realised that this time it would become law and that neither the Commons nor the Lords would save them. They resolved to implement their slogan "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right". Edward Carson, a Dublin Protestant lawyer, was called in to lead the Belfast capitalists' campaign to avoid being cut off from the rest of industrial Britain and its capitalist class of which they were an integral part. Contrast with the Sinn Fein policy on tariffs the view expressed by the President of the Belfast Chamber of Commerce (J. Milne Balfour) in his evidence in July 1911 to the Committee on Irish Finance. He was asked about the various types of Home Rule:

> Q. Would you feel strongly that you desire a type which would not give control of Customs to an Irish Parliament?
> A. Yes, certainly.
> Q. Do you attach great weight to that point?
> A. I do. I think that any attempt to set up an independent Customs in such a way as to enable the Irish Parliament to create a Tariff between Ireland and the United Kingdom would be a very dangerous thing. (Minutes of Evidence, Committee on Irish Finance, Cmnd. 6799).

"We must be prepared", declared Carson in 1911, "the morning Home Rule passes ourselves to become responsible for the government of the Protestant Province of Ulster". And he wasn't bluffing. In January 1913 the Ulster Unionist Council, composed of Ulster's prominent businessmen, politicians and landowners, decided to unite the various groups which had been formed to provide basic military training into one Ulster Volunteer Force and to place it under the command of prominent ex-Army

officers, including generals. Later it was decided to arm the UVF and in April 1914 the town of Larne was taken over so that a whole shipload of arms could be smuggled in. The previous September the Ulster Unionist Council had approved plans to set up a Provisional Government in Ulster should Home Rule come and its various members had been chosen.

There can be no doubt that these well-laid plans for a military coup to establish a provisional Ulster government would have been implemented had not the threat, and then the reality, of the first world war overshadowed the Ulster crisis. The Home Rule Bill was in fact passed, but suspended till the European war was over. But it never did come into force. The Belfast capitalists had made there point and, after the war, the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 provided for two Home Rule parliaments in Ireland: one for the six counties of North East Ulster and the other for the remaining 26 counties of Ireland.

The basic reason for the Partition of Ireland was the uneven development of capitalism there. East Ulster, with its mainly Protestant population, had shared in the general 19th century industrialisation of Britain and was in fact an integral part of industrial Britain. It depended on Britain for its new capital, its raw materials, its trade and its markets. Its main city, Belfast, was a grimey industrial town similar to Glasgow or Manchester. The South of Ireland, with its mainly Catholic population, remained largely agricultural and its towns were commercial rather than industrial centres. Its industrial development had hardly begun and was having a hard time starting in the face of British competition. The interests of fledgling Irish capitalism demanded an Irish government with the power to impose tariffs on foreign imports in order to protect its infant industries. This demand was diametrically opposed to the economic interests of the already established capitalists of Belfast who, under protection, would be cut off from the rest of industrial Britain behind the tariff walls of a mainly agricultural Irish State. They didn't want protection from British industry; they were a part of it.

None of the three Home Rule Bills actually planned to give the Irish Home Rule parliament the power to impose tariffs, but this demand had been raised forcefully by Parnell and Griffith, and the Belfast capitalists were shrewd enough to realise that Home Rule would be the thin edge of the protectionist wedge. But, politically, they were in a weak position: a majority of the people of Ireland and their MP's supported Home Rule. In order to gain a mass basis from which to maintain the Union the Belfast capitalists, in their desperation, had to play the Orange card, to exploit and stir up traditional Protestant anti-Catholic fears and prejudices. This they did from 1886 onwards with such success that they were excluded from the independent Irish State --with the power to impose tariffs on British goods, one of the provisions of the 1921 Treaty which ended the Anglo-Irish War-- set up in 1921.

This is the reason why Protestant-Catholic antagonism survived in Ulster while it died out in the rest of Britain. The two religions had become identified with the material interests of two antagonistic

sections of the capitalist class in Ireland, Protestantism with the big capitalists of the North and Catholicism with the smaller capitalists of the South.

With Partition, the political history of the two parts of Ireland differs but both governments, as we will now see, did have one thing in common: a consistent anti-working class and anti-democratic character.

# THE IRISH CAPITALIST REPUBLIC

JUST BEFORE HE WAS TIED TO A CHAIR and shot by a firing squad in May 1916 the injured James Connolly is said to have remarked, "the socialists will never understand why I am here". Well might he have felt guilty, from a socialist and working class point of view, about what he had done. For he was being executed for his leading part in the Easter Rising, an armed insurrection aimed at establishing, with aid from Imperial Germany, an independent, and unavoidably capitalist, Republic in Ireland.

Before the war Connolly, who was well acquainted with Marxist and socialist ideas, had been a prominent and successful trade union organiser. At the time of his execution he was the secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and "commandant" of its armed defensive force, the Irish Citizen Army. This had been formed in the course of the great Dublin lock-out of 1913 to protect union members from police violence and intimidation, but Connolly turned it into a Republican body. He himself was almost certainly admitted to the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood before being appointed commander of its forces in Dublin during the rising.

The IRB had no social programme and was simply dedicated to using physical force to establish an Irish Republic. The Declaration of the Republic which was proclaimed from the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin does, it is true, express a few democratic and reformist sentiments, but only in the vaguest terms. Its main concern was obviously "the Republic". In fact when only a few years later it came to adopting a definite social programme the IRB endorsed Arthur Griffith's long-standing policy of Irish capitalism. Connolly had died not for international socialism, not even for trade unionism, but for an Irish capitalist republic.

The Easter Rising, and the merciless execution of all its leaders, did have the effect of transforming the Irish political scene: the Nationalist parliamentary party rapidly lost ground to Sinn Fein. Taking their queue from the Ulster Unionists the Nationalists and Republicans too had formed an armed militia before the war. Called the Irish National Volunteers, prominent amongst its leaders were secret membres of the IRB. On the outbreak of the first world war the movement split, the great majority following the pro-war lead of the Nationalist MP's. It was the minority, who retained the name Irish Volunteers, that the IRB planned to mobilise for its 1916 insurrection but the plan misfired and only a few of its units actually took part. After the rising the Irish Volunteers were popularly known as the Sinn Fein Volunteers.

Sinn Fein, now republican, began to win by-elections at the expense of the Nationalist parliamentary party. In the 1918 British General Election Sinn Fein won a large majority of the Irish seats, 73 compared with 6 for the Nationalists and 26 for the Unionists. In accordance with their abstentionist policy, instead of going to Westminster, they met in Dublin in January 1919, declared themselves to be the parliament (Dail, in Irish) of an independent Irish Republic and appointed a provisional government under De Valera with Griffith as Minister of Home Affairs. This was no idle declaration since behind it stood the armed Sinn Fein Volunteers, to be renamed later that year the Irish Republican Army or IRA.

For two years a brutal war of reprisals and counter-reprisals waged between the IRA and the British Army with its notorious "black and tans" and "auxiliaries". A truce was arranged in December 1921 and negotiations for a peace treaty started. The British government offered the 26 counties of Southern Ireland political independence as "the Irish Free State", nominally subject to the British Crown, and they threw in the power to impose tariffs to protect Irish industry as an added concession. A majority of the IRA and Sinn Fein government accepted this; a minority including De Valera, regarding the Treaty as a betrayal of Republican ideals, did not. The new Free State government, with Griffith as Prime Minister, resolved to crush this minority and eventually did but only after a bitter Civil War which did not end till 1923 and which killed more people than the previous war with Britain. Although the IRA stopped fighting, they did not give up their arms. They hid them and continued to exist as an illegal underground organisation.

The new government settled down to governing Irish capitalism, in the interests of the bigger capitalists and big cattle ranchers who exported to Britain, and with callous indifference to the problems of the working class. "It is no function of government", one Minister once said when criticised about the level of unemployment,"to provide work for anybody". Strikes broke out as wages fell; trade union membership declined; poverty, ill-health, slums, unemployment and emigration continued. Independence, in short, had made no difference whatsoever to the position and problems of the working class. They had merely experienced a change of masters from the capitalists of Britain to the capitalists of Southern Ireland.

Civil liberties began to be eroded as Home Rule came to take on some of the features of "Rome Rule". In 1925 divorce was abolished. Until that time people living in Ireland had been able to get divorced on the same terms, strict as they were, as people living in England. This was stopped, and it applied to Protestants as well as Catholics. In 1929 a "Censorship of Publications Board" was set up which proceeded to ban the import and sale of books the Catholic hierarchy found offensive. Education in Ireland always had been denominational, but the new government made no attempt to set up non-sectarian State schools. Quite the contrary. It gave the Catholic Church a virtual free hand in the education of those whose parents were Catholics,i.e., the overwhelming majority of Irish school-children. The only price they had to pay for this was the cost of subsidising separate Protestant schools for the small Protestant minority. But the move that was to make the South of Ireland virtually a Catholic State --the 1937 Constitution-- was the work not of the pro-Treatyites but of their Republican opponents.

In 1926 De Valera led a group of supporters out of Sinn Fein, the IRA's political wing, after a small majority had refused to endorse his proposal to use the ballot-box and Free State parliament to try to establish (or restore, as he put it) "the Republic". Thus was founded Fianna Fail, now Ireland's normal governing party.

Fianna Fail inherited its economic programme from the original Sinn Fein, promising "to encourage native industries that minister to the needs of the people, to protect them by such tariffs, subsidies and

other methods as may be necessary". The new party also promised protection for agriculture and "to break up the large grazing ranches and distribute them amongst young farmers and agricultural labourers". Fianna Fail was in fact basically the party of the small farmer and its agricultural policy, which included increased tillage in place of raising cattle for export to Britain, opposed their interests to those of the big cattle farmers which the other government (whose political descendants are Fine Gael, the [illegible] Irish party) tended to represent.

Fianna Fail made rapid headway and by 1932 was the majority party, with De Valera as Prime Minister. The new government proceeded to do precisely what the Belfast capitalists had always believed a Home Rule government would sooner or later do: erect tariff walls behind which Irish manufacturing industry could grow. Indeed the declared --and quite unrealistic-- policy of Fianna Fail at this time was "a self-sufficing Ireland, an Ireland not dependent for its economic life on its external trade(Fianna Fail 1926-1951,p.8".

Steps were taken to emphasise Ireland's formal independence of Britain --the oath of allegiance was abolished; the Governor General sacked, and a brand new Republican constitution enacted-- none of which had any relevance whatsoever to the problems the working class of Ireland were facing in the midst of the Great Depression of the thirties.

The new 1937 Constitution was a peculiar blending of Irish Republican ideology and Catholic social and political teaching. It embodied all the aspects of "Rome Rule" which had come to the fore under the Free State. Article 44(2) --which survived until it was repealed by a referendum in December 1972-- proclaimed that "the State recognizes the special position of the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church as the guardian of the Faith professed by the great majority of its citizens". Article 40, making censorship constitutional, declared that "publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punished in accordance with law". And Article 41 (which still survives) baldly stated:"No law shall be enacted providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage". So pleased was the Vatican with these arrangements that they never bothered to draw up a formal agreement with the Irish government about the position of the Catholic Church as they have done with the governments of other Catholic countries. Nor has the Catholic hierarchy ever been bashful about interfering in politics, to denounce some harmless social reform or some luckless politician.

During the 1930's the IRA rapidly degenerated from a popular movement into the small gang of terrorists it is today. In 1936 the De Valera government banned it. When three years later the IRA launched its notorious bombing campaign in England (whose main achievement was the killing of 5 and the injuring of over fifty innocent workers in Coventry in August 1939) the Irish government took even more drastic action: it introduced the Offences Against the State Act which gave it the power to intern without trial members of any organisation it chose to declare "unlawful", which, together with the special position of the Catholic Church, was

the other great undemocratic feature of the Southern Irish State. It survives to this day.

Trade unions in Ireland too have had to suffer from more restrictive laws than in Britain. While Ireland was politically a part of Britain the law on trade unions was the same, though industrial conditions were different. Ireland was largely an agricultural country and, outside Belfast, its towns were commercial rather than industrial centres. Corresponding to this lower level of industrial development the leading Irish trade unions tended to be general rather than industry unions, as best typified by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union founded by James Larkin which is still the largest union in Ireland. In 1895 most of the trade unions operating in Ireland, including those with headquarters in England, set up an Irish Trade Union Congress which in 1912 decided to finance an Irish Labour Party. For years this was only a trade union pressure group trying, none too successfully, to get a few reforms of benefit to the working class and which, since the workers were till recently a minority of the population of Southern Ireland, never seriously aspired to be an alternative governing party for Irish capitalism. At present, however, and on two previous occasions, in 1948 and 1954, it has joined with the openly conservative Fine Gael and others in an anti-Fianna Fail coalition government, and so has taken part in running capitalism for the benefit of the Irish (and British) capitalist class.

In 1941 the Fianna Fail government brought in a Trade Union Act which largely anticipated, by thirty years, Britain's ill-fated Industrial Relations Act. Only trade unions which, in return for a financial deposit, had been granted a "negotiation licence" by the State were to continue to enjoy protection against claims for civil damages arising out of strikes; any other union which tried to negotiate over wages and working conditions not only lost this protection but was to be subject to continuing fines till it stopped. A further section allowed a majority union in a particular industry to claim sole negotiating rights for that industry on application to a special tribunal and subject to an individual ballot of the workers involved. This was later declared unconstitutional, but the rest of the Act remains in force.

The Irish Republicans, including the Fianna Fail government, had on nationalist grounds never liked "English" trade unions operating in Ireland and the third section of the Act that was declared unconstitutional was partly designed to drive such unions out of Southern Ireland. It did not work but for a while nationalism did split the Irish trade union movement. After Partition trade unionists North and South of the Border continued to be united in the Irish TUC, a sound arrangement since the Border was of no relevance to the working class in either part of Ireland. But after the second world war, under nationalist influence, the ITGWU split from the Irish TUC and set up a rival,and exclusively Southern Irish, Congress of Irish Unions. All-Ireland trade union unity did not come again for twenty years when the two rival centres united to form the present Irish Congress of Trade Unions(ICTU).

Up until 1922 social benefits in Ireland had been the same as in the rest of Britain, but afterwards lagged behind as mainly agricultural Ireland could not afford to pay (or would not have gained much

economic advantage from paying) the same level of benefits as industrial Britain. Indeed, paying lower pensions and benefits was one of the reasons given for the 1912 Home Rule Bill. The Primrose Committee set up to examine the financial implications of Home Rule was particularly concerned about "the extravagance and waste that results from too close an assimilation of the scale of expenditure in Ireland to that of Great Britain" and specially singled out the newly-introduced Old Age Pensions as an example. Paragraph 13 of their Report declared:

> It is impossible not to feel that, if the Government had had to construct a scheme of Old Age Pensions especially for Ireland, they would have devised a much less costly and a much less comprehensive scheme than the one now in operation. But the Act had to be framed to suit the conditions of the industrial workers of Great Britain, and, in consequence of the political connection, had to be extended, unchanged and unadapted, to a population whose conditions were widely dissimilar. If Home Rule had been granted to Ireland before the passage of the Old Age Pensions Act, it is very doubtful indeed if an Irish Parliament would have in that regard followed the example of Great Britain. So much has been almost in terms stated in public speeches by the leading Irish politicians. (Report by the Committee of Irish Finance, Cmnd. 6153).

The Committee conceded that current provisions should not be reduced, but insisted that an Irish Home Rule government would have to give priority to cutting expenditure below the level the British government had been forced to shoulder in Ireland, adding:

> From what we have said in Paragraph 13 it will be gathered that we regard Old Age Pensions as an item of expenditure on which reduction would be not only legitimate but desirable in the new conditions to be established in Ireland --of course in respect of future pensions only. (Report, paragraph 55).

So, from one point of view, "Home Rule" and "Independence" for Ireland was a way of saving the British capitalist class money on unnecessary social reforms. Social benefits in Southern Ireland are still less extensive than in the rest of Britain (including Northern Ireland) but the gap has been closing as Ireland has become more industrialised.

If anything, then, the working class in Ireland suffered --with less political democracy, a divided and more restricted trade union movement, lower social benefits-- from so-called independence which for them, as we said, was basically only a change of masters. But for the nascent Southern Irish capitalist class it meant the political power to legislate to further their own economic interests. This their governments did, through protection, during the period 1932-1959. Then, as protection became increasingly inefficient, the Fianna Fail government completely reversed its previous economic policy, took down the tariff barriers and invited outside capitalists to invest in Ireland. In 1965 an Anglo-Irish Free Trade

Agreement, providing for full free trade between the two countries after ten years, was signed, and since 1973 Ireland, along with Britain, has been a member of the Common Market (EEC).

When this process of full economic re-integration with Britain is completed Ireland will be back where it was before 1922 --and the thousands of young men wh sacrificed their (and other people's) lives "for Ireland" will be clearly seen to have died and killed merely to have got about thirty years of protection for Irish capitalist industry to catch up with the rest of Britain plus a few superficial political changes which, where they weren't for the worse, amounted to little more than "painting the pillar boxes green" as the popular saying accurately puts it.

# "A PROTESTANT GOVERNMENT"

THE ULSTER UNIONISTS were not too happy about the 1920 Government of Ireland Act for, although it provided for Partition, it clearly intended that this should only be temporary. Fortunately for them the Republicans in the South didn't think much of it either and stood by their January 1919 Declaration of Independence under which an all-Ireland Republican government had purportedly been set up. The 1921 Treaty, which ended the resulting Anglo-Irish war, made Partition likely to be much more permanent than originally intended and the Ulster Unionists settled down to govern their own six-county statelet.

The Belfast parliament at Stormont was not just a glorified county council; it had some real political power since it had at its disposal armed force: the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), a para-military police force along the lines of the old Royal Irish Constabulary which had been set up in the 19th century to help hold down the Irish peasantry. This was soon supplemented by a much larger force of part-time auxiliary policemen, also armed and all Protestants (the RUC at least had some Catholic members), called B Specials. These were in effect the successors of the pre-war UVF, an anti-Republican Protestant militia.

The Belfast parliament also had the power to legislate on law and order in the six counties and one of their first measures was to pass the Civil Authorities(Special Powers)Act of 1920. This notorious Act, which was renewed annually for some years before being made permanent, allowed the government to detain people and intern them without trial, to ban meetings and newspapers and --the clause one South African Prime Minister said he'd scrap all his own repressive legislation for-- arrest a person who does anything "calculated to be prejudicial to the preservation of peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland and not specifically provided for in the regulations". The immediate political problem which faced the new Unionist government was that a third of its subjects --the Nationalist, Catholic minority-- were opposed, sometimes violently, to its very existence and would have preferred to be governed by the newly-established Southern Irish ruling class in Dublin. They had to be subdued --by terror and intimidation. Already in 1920 there had been a vicious anti-Catholic pogrom in Belfast, when Catholic workers were driven out of the shipyards, their homes burned and their wives and children sent fleeing South. In other parts too of the about-to-be-established "Northern Ireland" Catholics were driven across what was soon to be the Border. After Partition the B Specials and the Special Powers Act were to be the permanent weapons of anti-Nationalist, anti-Catholic intimidation.

But not even this was a sufficient guarantee to the Belfast capitalists and their politicians in the Unionist party that some day by some means the Northern Nationalists might not succeed in re-uniting Ireland --behind the dreaded tariff walls. The normal rules of political democracy had to be set aside. Before Partition the British government had introduced proportional representation in Ireland, first for local and then for general elections. The Ulster Unionists never liked this for the very reason that it would give the Northern Nationalists representation in proportion to their

numbers. They resolved to abolish it at the first opportunity, and did --in 1923 for local elections and in 1929 for general elections. This paved the way for the further gerrymandering of local council boundaries, particularly in areas with Nationalist majorities such as the town of Londonderry and the counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone. Derry was the most notorious example: here a two-thirds Nationalist majority among the electorate was turned into a two-thirds Unionist majority on the council. This was not only because Derry had an important role in Orange mythology, but also --and more importantly-- because it was the centre of the Ulster shirt-making industry which, like Belfast heavy industry, was geared to Britain and its export markets. In fact at the time of the 1924 Boundary Commission the Derry shirt manufacturers specifically argued against being transferred to the Free State on the grounds that this would cut them off from their markets behind possible Irish tariff walls.

From some points of view Northern Ireland itself was one big gerrymander. The Belfast capitalists were primarily concerned with keeping the link between industrialised East Ulster and Britain, but were prepared to take in other areas so long as they had a Unionist, Protestant majority. The full nine counties of Ulster had a slight Nationalist, Catholic majority which was obviously unacceptable. But once Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan had been conceeded to the Free State the Unionists had a two-thirds majority in the remaining six counties, despite the fact that Fermanagh and Tyrone too had Nationalist majorities.

So, right from the start, Northern Ireland was corrupt from a democratic point of view. Not that the Unionist politicians who ruled continuously from 1921 ever bothered to pretend otherwise until a few years ago. Lord Craigavon, its first Prime Minister (who as James Craig had before the war been a leader of the planned Ulster Provisional Government with its armed UVF), openly declared in 1932, "Ours is a Protestant government" and in July 1934 told the Belfast parliament, "We are a Protestant parliament and a Protestant State".

Such sentiments were repeated by subsequent Northern Ireland Prime Ministers including Lord Brookeborough, the man who once boasted that he did not "have a Roman Catholic about my place" and who remained Prime Minister up until 1963.

One of the reforms introduced in Britain after the second world war was "one man, one vote" in local council elections. Previously only ratepayers and their wives had been able to vote while under certain circumstances a businessman could have more than one vote. The Ulster Unionist government in Northern Ireland chose not to implement this reform for the crude party-political reason that it would have enfranchised more Nationalists than Unionists. It was estimated that this left at least a quarter of adult men and women without a vote in local elections.

Local councils also had other opportunities to discriminate against Nationalists and Catholics. Certain jobs and houses were reserved for Protestants and particularly for supporters of the Unionist party.

The Catholic minority gave its political support to the conservative and clerical-dominated Nationalist Party who were often known as

"Green Tories" and, in Belfast and one or two other towns, to various Labour parties --"Irish Labour", "Republican Labour" and even on occasions "Northern Ireland Labour". The Nationalist Party lost much of its support at the 1969 Northern Ireland general election to various Civil Rights and Labour candidates who later formed the Social Democratic and Labour Party(SDLP), at the moment the main political party supported by the Catholic minority.

The Unionists retained the support of the Protestant workers and small farmers by continuing to stir up sectarian hatreds and fears. It was a measure of the backwardness of politics there that "REMEMBER 1690", "NOT AN INCH", "NO SURRENDER" and the like were, and unfortunately still are, powerful political slogans. The Unionists succesfully tricked the Protestant workers into believing that there was some special economic advantage for them in Northern Ireland being part of Britain rather than of Ireland. The Protestant worker came to believe that he was privileged as compared with his Catholic fellow worker and that any extension of civil rights to the Catholics would be a threat to his supposed privileges. This was a great illusion, but once which has retained mass Protestant working class support for Unionism (now split into various warring political factions but all agreed on maintaining the union with Britain). The average Protestant worker has never advanced to the limited-enough trade union and reformist consciousness represented by support for a Labour party. The Northern Ireland Labour Party, despite protestations of loyalty to the Crown and even of support for the Special Powers Act, has always remained a small minority party.

The Protestant worker never has been in any privileged position. He has always suffered from the working-class problems of poverty, slums and unemployment. And indeed it was only because of this that Unionist local councils were able to bribe a few of them with the occasional job or house in preference to a Catholic worker. One of the more pathetic Northern Ireland scenes has always been to see on the Twelth of July the Protestant slums of Belfast adorned with the unintentionally ironic banner, "THIS WE WILL MAINTAIN".

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland is largely an extension of that of the rest of Britain and is the one mass organisation which unites both Protestants and Catholics, though there are two "transport and general workers' unions" in the docks, one Protestant, the other Catholic. As in the South trade unions have suffered more legal restrictions than in Britain. The 1927 Trades Disputes Act, passed as a punitive measure after the British General Strike, still applies and on one occasion the Special Powers Act was used against trade unionists.

This situation --where a corrupt Unionist clique ruled continuously by lies and threats and, despite having majority support, undemocratic practices-- was accepted by successive Westminster governments, Labour as well as Conservative, until the whole system began to break down in 1968 and 1969.

As long as the Southern Ireland government pursued a protectionist policy the demand for a United Ireland, which most Catholics in the North supported, really was a threat to the business interests of the

Belfast capitalists. Accordingly, those interests demanded that the Unionists continued to stir up sectarianism as a means of retaining mass support for union with the British market. But when, from about 1960 onward, the Southern Ireland government finally abandoned protection and sought, and eventually got, free trade with Britzin (including Northern Ireland), the Irish Nationalism of the Catholic minority was not such a threat and the way was open for more friendly relations between Belfast and Dublin. This change was symbolised by the resignation in 1959 of De Valera as Prime Minister and his later election as figure-head President of the Irish Republic and the 1963 resignation of Brookeborough as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

De Valera's successor, Lemass, began to speak of the North as "Northern Ireland" instead of, as was previously obligatory in republican circles, "the six counties" thus conceding it a certain legitimacy. In the North the Nationalist MP's agreed to become "her majesty's" official opposition and Brookeborough's successor, O'Neill, authorised flags on official buildings to fly at half-mast on the death of Pope John in June 1963, a startling sight in a city like Belfast where the slum walls are daubed with the slogan "NO POPE HERE". In January 1965 Lemass travelled secretly to meet O'Neill in Belfast; the following month O'Neill slipped off to Dublin. In December the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement was signed. It appeared that the future held out the gradual disappearance of the sectarian bitterness which had been a feature of Northern Ireland political life since the 1880's, a hope seemingly confirmed by the failure of the 1956-62 IRA campaign against the North because of lack of support from the Catholic minority.

But this was not to be. The Unionist government could now without danger have abandoned its corrupt and undemocratic practices and O'Neill --the first Northern Ireland Prime Minister not to claim to be governing a Protestant State for a Protestant People-- did urge this. But it was no easy task for the Unionist political machine to suddenly turn off the hatreds it had so assiduously cultivated for the previous eighty years. In fact nearly every prominent figure in Northern Ireland life --judges and Church leaders as well as politicians-- is on record as saying, not so very long ago, what the Rev. Ian Paisley now does.

When a Civil Rights movement arose to demand the end of the various corrupt and undemocratic practices --the gerrymandering, the restricted franchise, discrimination over housing and jobs, the B Specials and the Special Powers Act-- the Unionist government reacted as it had done towards all previous opposition movements supported by the Catholics: it saw it as a threat to the existence of the Unionist statelet, as a Republican plot to be ruthlessly crushed. It was a fatal mistake which within four years led to the overthrow, by a British Conservative government, of fifty years of Unionist rule in Northern Ireland. In any event, almost the whole Civil Rights programme --with the exception of the repeal of the Special Powers Act, but even this would probably have been replaced by something less comprehensive but just as effective had not war broken out between the Provisional IRA and the British Army in February 1971-- had already been conceded.

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Belfast capitalists. Accordingly, those interests demanded that the Unionists continued to stir up sectarianism as a means of retaining mass support for union with the British market. But when, from about 1960 onward, the Southern Ireland government finally abandoned protection and sought, and eventually got, free trade with Britzin (including Northern Ireland), the Irish Nationalism of the Catholic minority was not such a threat and the way was open for more friendly relations between Belfast and Dublin. This change was symbolised by the resignation in 1959 of De Valera as Prime Minister and his later election as figure-head President of the Irish Republic and the 1963 resignation of Brookeborough as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

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# ALL SOCIALISTS NOW?

ACCORDING TO REPUBLICAN MYTHOLOGY, the Army Council of the IRA is the only legitimate government of all Ireland, both Northern and Southern Ireland being illegal regimes set up by British imperialism in 1920. The IRA claims authority to be the constitutional government of all Ireland on the basis of the British general election of 1918 and the subsequent ratification by the elected Sinn Fein candidates, meeting on their own in Dublin, of the Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916. The IRA sees its aim as to re-establish this Republic and to end the British military occupation of a part of its territory. This fantasy would be laughable were it not taken seriously enough by IRA "volunteers" to kill and wound innocent working men and women to try to realise their dream Republic.

Up until the past decade the strategy of the IRA was to use physical force to try to expel British troops from Northern Ireland. But, following the failure of their 1956-1962 campaign to remove the Border by physical force, their leaders began to re-think their whole stragey. The end result was a declaration in favour of "socialism" and a shift from an exclusive concentration on attacking the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland towards working for a "people's revolution" to establish "a united democratic socialist republic for the whole country". The IRA, accordingly, involved itself in tenants' struggles and strikes but, above all, in Northern Ireland, in the civil rights campaign. In effect militant, but mainly peaceful, agitation replaced the gun and the bomb. When the civil rights campaign ran into increasing violence from the para-military forces of the Stormont regime this perspective became more and more unpopular amongst many IRA members, especially in the North. Eventually, at the end of 1970 (and, apparently, with money from certain elements in the Irish government), the old-fashioned gunmen broke away and the IRA split into two sections, popularly known as the "officials" and the "provisionals" (both of course claiming to be the legitimate government of all Ireland).

The Provisionals are the backward-looking gunmen dedicated to ending by force of arms the British military presence in Northern Ireland. The Provisionals too pay lip-service to socialism but the basis of their support is crude Catholic sectarianism; they are in fact little more than an unprincipled murder gang killing innocent working men and women, Catholic as well as Protestant.

As for the Officials, their conception of a "united socialist republic" is somewhat vague, envisaging a combination of State and cooperative ownership and control of land and industry. In other words, a rather mild form of State capitalism. Needless to say, such a change would not benefit the workers of Ireland as it would still leave them at the mercy of the economic forces of world capitalism. The "independent Irish economy" the IRA talks about is a pipe-dream. Nowadays no one country can isolate itself from the world market. Certainly, it could erect protective tariffs and it could establish a State monopoly of foreign trade, but even so the forces of world capitalism would still operate to restrict working class living standards. The government of the Irish state capitalist economy (for that is what it would be) would find that in order to purchase the imports it needed to produce manufactured goods it would have to sell its exports at competitive

prices. Costs, including wages, would have to be held down achieve this. The plain fact is that the working class of one country cannot emancipate itself on its own: capitalism can only be overthrown on a world scale by the united action of the workers of all the industrialised countries.

This dream of an independent Irish state capitalist economy (misnamed socialism) is not held by the IRA alone. It is shared by Gerry Fitt, leader of the SDLP, by Bernadette Devlin, by the Communist Party of Ireland and by the various Trotskyist and Maoist groups which have sprouted in recent years. It goes under various names: the IRA, as we saw, call it a "united democratic socialist republic"; the People's Democracy "a thirty-two county socialist workers' and small farmers' republic"; Bernadette Devlin and the trotskyists call it a "workers' republic"; for the Maoists it's a "united people's republic"; and for Gerry Fitt it's a United Ireland based on "Connolly socialism".

In a sense Fitt is right. The origin of this mistaken idea does go back to James Connolly. Connolly is an Irish National Hero for having been executed after the Easter Rising in 1916. The fact that he took part in an insurrection, and an earlier period of militant syndicalism, has obscured the fact that at the time of his death Connolly was a reformist Labourite and Social Democrat. The Social Democrats of the Second International, insofar as they had some idea of Socialism, saw it not as a frontierless world community but rather as a federation of independent "socialist republics" which could be established independently at different times in the various different countries of the world. In other words, they did not reject the concept of "socialism-in-one-country". On the contrary, they embraced and propagated it. Connolly agreed with this error wholeheartedly. Ireland, he always argued, being a separate "nation", was entitled to its own separate "socialist republic" independent of Britain's.

Born in Edinburgh in 1868, he joined a local Social Democrat group and soon became an active speaker and writer. Moving to Ireland in 1896 he helped found the Irish Socialist Republican Party. Back in Britain again he was involved in the anti-reformist "impossibilist" revolt in the Social Democratic Federation which led to the founding of the Socialist Labour Party (whose founding congress he chaired) in 1903 and the Socialist Party of Great Britain in 1904. His writings from this period, though still confused on nationalism, come nearest to the socialist position, but moving to America he was soon swept away by the mistaken industrial unionist and syndicalist ideas of Daniel De Leon, the SLP and the IWW. In fact these ideas -- a call for One Big, composed of workers of all political persuasions united only to further their economic interests-- paved the way for Connolly to return to his earlier Social Democratic reformism. For, he must have reasoned, if non-socialist workers should join in One Big Union to further their interests on the economic field, why should they not also join in one big "Labour Party" to defend their interests on the political field? Connolly supported Debs, the candidate of the reformist Socialist Party of America in the 1908 Presidential election, and later became a paid organiser for that party. He returned to Ireland in 1910 determined to get the trade unions to form an Irish Labour Party along the lines of the one

established by the British unions in 1900. Success came at the 1912 Congress of the Irish TUC. An Irish Labour Party, committed on paper to nationalisation and gradually improving the workers' standard of living, was set up. Connolly had become a Labourite. Anyone who doubts Connolly's reformism and gradualism should read his Reconquest of Ireland written in 1914. This outlines a programme for the gradual take-over of Ireland's resources, natural and man-made, in the name of the people (the "reconquest of Ireland" of the title) and for the gradual improvement of working class living standards, through Labour Party control of local councils, through industrial unionism, co-operative societies and social reforms.

But Connolly was not simply a Labourite reformist; he was also a Republican and a Catholic Nationalist. When he moved to Belfast as organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1911 he identified himself with the Catholic section of the working class there, not only by supporting Home Rule and Independence but also by sending his children to a Catholic school (since he was married to a Protestant he would have been under no pressure to do this). As we have already noted, the 1916 Easter Rising in which he played a leading role was aimed at establishing, with help from Imperial Germany, an independent capitalist Republic. It had nothing whatsoever, not even in words, to do with Socialism or even, for that matter, with trade unionism or Labourism.

The fact that in the North of Ireland talk of socialism and calls for a "workers' republic" are acceptable amongst Catholic workers but are bitterly rejected by Protestant workers has given rise to the illusion that the Catholic worker is more class conscious than the Protestant worker. But this is an illusion. First, because those who talk of "socialism" really mean state capitalism. And second, because the key word is "republic", by which the average Catholic worker understands the capitalist State in the South to which he would much rather owe allegiance than the British Empire. For the Catholic worker too is a "loyalist", only to capitalist Ireland rather than to capitalist Britain. The socialist attitude is to oppose loyalty to any State and to encourage workers in all countries to realise that their problems are common problems that can only be solved on a world scale through the establishment of a world socialist community in which nation-States and their frontiers will have no place.

There are those who would counter this by saying that socialists should support "the right of the Irish people to national self-determination". But what is this high-sounding "right to self-determination"? And is it worth supporting anyway? We shall see in the next chapter that Marx and Engels supported independence for certain countries in the 19th century as a means of furthering and consolidating the growth of capitalism. This stance is open to criticism on the grounds of encouraging nationalisms which would later be a barrier to the spread of spcialist ideas, but at least Marx and Engels never tried to justify it by appealing to some abstract general right of nations to govern themselves. For they knew that there was no such right and that to invoke it was the mark of the romantic bourgeois revolutionaries of the period. Today, over a hundred years later, there is no excuse whatsoever for those claiming to be socialists or Marxists to use such language. Indeed, the fact that they do is a sign that they are neither socialists

nor Marxists, but anti-socialists spreading ideas that only harm the working class.

That there is any such entity as "the Irish people" with a common interest and a "right" to govern itself is a myth. The people who live in Ireland, like the people who live in all the other countries of the world, are divided into antagonistic classes, basically those who own and control the means of production (the capitalist class) and those who don't (the working class). Between these two classes there exists a class struggle which is held in check by the force of the State machine but also by the false ideas held by the working class. One of the more important of these false ideas is precisely the idea that all who live in a particular geographical area constitute a "nation" or a "people" with a common "national interest" against, or at least distinct from, those living in other geographical area. Nationalism is one of the means through which a ruling class gets its workers to submit to its rule.

Historically, nationalism --and high-sounding talk of the right to self-determination-- was the rallying cry of the rising capitalist class in its struggle for political power against former land-based or outside ruling classes. The nation-State is the ideal form of capitalist rule and is completely incompatible with Socialism and working class interests. The establishment of new nation-States merely means the substitution of one ruling class for another. Gerry Fitt, Bernadette Devlin, the IRA and the others are not socialists, but, whether they realise it or not, propagandists for the new ruling class that would emerge in the state capitalist Ireland they advocate.

Imperialism, at least in the sense used by such people, is also a myth. The idea goes back to Lenin who believed that the "super-profits" made out of colonial exploitation were used to bribe, through higher wages and social reforms, a section of the workers in the imperialist countries into supporting capitalism. He went on to argue that colonial independence, by depriving the imperialist countries of these super-profits, would precipitate a revolutionary situation because they would no longer be able to buy the support of their workers. This was why, said Lenin, socialists should support anti-imperialist, nationalist struggles.

This theory is wrong on all counts. The idea of the capitalists "bribing" their workers out of the super-profits of colonial exploitation is absurd. It implies that the wages paid to the workers in the imperialist countries do not represent simply the value of their labour-power but also contain a profit-sharing element; in fact that these workers actually share in the exploitation of the colonies. Which would have come as news to the poverty-stricken workers of Britain in 1914 or 1920. Further, colonial independence has not lessened the exploitation of the workers and peasants of the ex-colonial territories. It has merely meant a change of masters, from white-skinned to black-skinned rulers, and frequently also an intensification of exploitation as these new rulers use their newly-won State power to force the pace of capitalist development in their countries. Finally, colonial independence in the sense of independence of all imperialist powers

is impossible in the modern world. Ex-colonial countries merely have a choice of which Big Power to be dependent upon: capitalist America or state capitalist Russia.

But this theory is particularly inappropriate in the context of Northern Ireland as a few moments thought on the following questions will show: Do capitalist firms make super-profits in Northern Ireland? Do workers in Britain share in the exploitation of the workers of Northern Ireland? Would the separation of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom precipitate social revolution in Britain?

None of the parties and groups operating in Northern Ireland --from the various Unionist factions to the SDLP, from the Provisional IRA to the Protestant terrorist groups-- have anything at all to offer the working class there since none of them want to go beyond the framework of capitalism or state capitalism. Mere constitutional changes are obviously irrelevant since they don't even claim to alter the basic economic and social structure. On the surface, the proposals for state capitalism by various groups enjoying some support amongst Catholic workers seem more radical, but in fact they too would retain the basic framework of capitalism: the class monopoly of the means of production, the wages system, the production of goods for sale with a view to profit. They would merely organise it differently.

# MARX AND IRELAND

MARX SUPPORTED AND ADVOCATED INDEPENDENCE for Ireland, a fact which is sometimes used to try to justify Socialists today supporting the demand for the establishment of a united Irish Republic. Two points can be made here. First, what Socialists should do in the 1970's does not depend on what Marx may or may not have done in the 1860's. And second, the circumstances which led Marx to support Irish independence no longer exist.

Marx did support Irish independence but he did so primarily because he thought it would hasten the completion of the democratisation of the British State.

After the failure of the European bourgeois-democratic revolution in 1848 Marx dropped out of active politics and devoted his time to the economic and historical studies which led to the publication of his Critique of Political Economy in 1859 and of the first volume of Capital in 1867. In 1865, however, he again became actively involved in political struggle through the International Working Men's Association, or First International. His general stategy was the long-term one of gradually preparing the working class to win political power for Socialism. This involved Marx not only in supporting trade unionism but also in advocating various democratic and social reforms.

At this time the bourgeois democratic victory over feudalism was far from complete even in Britain, then the most industrially developed country in the world, and on the continent of Europe what progress had been made was continually threatened by three great feudal powers, Russia, Austria and Prussia. In these circumstances Marx considered it necessary to support not only direct moves to extend political democracy but also moves which he felt would weaken the feudal powers of Europe. For instance, he supported Polish independence as a means of weakening Tsarist Russia. His support for Irish independence was for the same sort of reason: it would, he thought, weaken the position of the English landed aristocracy.

As he put it in a letter dated 9 April,1970:

> Ireland is the bulwark of the English landed aristocracy. The exploitation of that country is not only one of the main sources of the aristocracy's material welfare; it is its greatest moral strength. It, in fact, represents the domination of England over Ireland. Ireland is therefore the great means by which the English aristocracy maintains its domination in England itself. If, on the other hand, the English army and police were to withdraw from Ireland tomorrow, you would at once have an agrarian revolution there. But the overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland involves as a necessary consequence its overthrow in England. And this would fulfil the preliminary condition for the proletarian revolution in England (Marx and Engels on Ireland, 1971, pp. 292-3).

It is important to note that Marx's stategy on Ireland was concerned with furthering the establishment of political democracy in England.

It was not an anticipation of the Leninist theory of imperialism referred to in the previous chapter according to which independence for colonies will help precipitate a socialist revolution in the imperialist countries, though it is sometimes misunderstood to be this. Marx clearly writes here of independence for Ireland helping to overthrow the remnants of feudalism not capitalism itself in England.

At the time Marx wrote the English landed aristocracy still enjoyed considerable political power. The franchise had only been extended to the better-off urban workers a few years previously, and the majority of the working class were still voteless; there were not yet secretballots; Oxford and Cambridge universities had only just been opened to non-membres of the Church of England; the House of Lords could still reject any Bill it objected to as long as it was not financial.

Marx may well have been right about the effect of Irish independence in 1870. Since the English landlords only retained their power to exploit the Irish peasants by force of British arms, a British withdrawal from Ireland could well have led to their expropriation. But this was never put to the test and the Irish land question was solved in quite a different way even before Ireland got independence. The series of Land Purchase Acts introduced between 1885 and 1903 enabled the government to buy out the Anglo-Irish landowners and then lend the peasants the money to buy their farms. By 1921 Ireland was largely a country of peasant proprietors. In the meantime the political power of the English landed aristocracy had finally been broken by a series of measures culminating in the 1911 reform of the House of Lords.

What this meant was that by the time Ireland was about to get independence after the first world war, the changes Marx had expected it to bring --land reform in Ireland and a weakening of aristocratic power in England-- had already been brought about by other means. His particular case for supporting Irish independence was thus no longer relevant. Besides, the first world war destroyed the three great European feudal powers --Russia, Austria and Prussia-- so making it unnecessary for socialists to support moves to weaken them. For once industrial capitalist powers had come to dominate the world, and once a workable political democracy had been established in those States, then the task of Socialists was to advocate Socialism alone, rather than democratic and social reforms that might make the establishment of Socialism easier.

Marx and Engels were much more critical in private of the Irish Nationalists --including the Fenians whose unsuccessful 1867 uprising had re-opened the Irish question for English radicals-- than they were in their public pronouncements on behalf of the International Working Men's Association. They were particularly critical of the conspiratorial and terrorist methods the Fenians employed to try to release their members from British prisons, one attempt at which, the blowing up of Clerkenwell jail in 1867, killed 12 people and injured many more, most of them innocent members of the working class. But when two years later one Fenian prisoner, O'Donovan Rossa, a former editor of their paper The Irish People, stood for election to parliament at Tipperary and was elected (only to be disqualified), Engels wrote to Marx:

> The election in Tipperary is an event. It forces the Fenians

> out of empty conspiracy and the fabrication of plots into a path of action, which, even if legal in appearance, is still far more revolutionary than what they have been doing since the failure of their insurrection(29 November, 1869,Marx-Engels, Selected Correspondence, Moscow, 1941, p.274).

So, although Marx and Engels can be claimed as supporters of Irish independence, they certainly cannot be claimed as supporters of IRA-type terror to achieve it.

Marx had realised that the struggle of the Irish Nationalists for Home Rule would help the evolution in Britain of political democracy since both struggles were directed against the same class enemy: the English landed aristocracy. But he neglected the extent to which the area around Belfast was industrialised and had become an integral part of the industrial North of Britain. He tended to regard Ireland as a purely agricultural country and so failed to see that while Home Rule and tariff protection for infant industries might aid the development of capitalism in the agricultural south of Ireland, it would have been economically disastrous for industrial Belfast which depended on Britain for capital, raw materials and markets. But, to be fair, Marx died before Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill in 1886 revealed the determined opposition of the Belfast capitalists to the threat of being cut off from the rest of industrial Britain behind the tariff walls it feared a Home Rule parliament in Dublin would sooner or later erect.

That Marx supported Irish independence is, as we have stated, no argument for socialists supporting the Irish nationalist demand for a united Ireland in the changed circumstances of the 20th century. It can even be questioned whether Marx's position on Ireland was right even for the 19th century. For, while Irish independence might have helped the evolution of political democracy in Britain, it would have retarded the development of capitalism, and so of a working class capable of accepting socialist ideas, in Ireland.

# UNITE FOR SOCIALISM

NORTHERN IRELAND --with its street riots, its shootings, its bombings, its political prisoners-- is but one of world capitalism's trouble spots. What has been happening there is only exceptional compared with life in the rest of Western Europe. On a world scale it is normal. Somewhere, sometime innocent people are always being killed by the forces of Law and Order or by the terrorist activities of their self-appointed "liberators". If it's not Northern Ireland. If it's not Cyprus, it's Lebanon. If it's not Lebanon, it's Angola...or India, or Vietnam, or Palestine. The only difference is that Northern Ireland is a lot nearer home.

Violence is never far below the surface of capitalism, even in comparatively peaceful areas like Britain. The institutionalised violence of the State exists to protect the class monopoly of a minority over the means of wealth production and its agents have continually to contain the frustrations caused by the insecure and deprived existence of the working class under capitalism. But the scarcity the working class the world over have to endure is artificial. The world means of production are quite capable of producing an abundance of wealth from which everybody could freely take according to their needs. Capitalism holds back production because it operates, and has to operate, according to the rule "no profit, no production" and it restricts the consumption of the vast majority to what is needed to keep them efficient wealth --and profit-- producers.

Those who accept capitalism, by choosing to work within it, inevitably find themselves dividing the working class by arguing the merits of which worker, or group of workers, should get which scarce job or house or hospital bed or university place. In Northern Ireland the Catholic workers naturally say it is unfair that they don't seem to get a proportionate share of these things as compared with their Protestant fellow workers. The Protestant workers, on the other hand, equally naturally, don't feel inclined to give up whatever small advantage they believe they have just to conform to some abstract principle of equality. The reformist in practice accepts the restricted choice capitalism offers and tries to make the best of it; which isn't much. Sometimes, it is true, he does see that the solution is not a fair distribution of jobs (and so of unemployment) or of new council houses (and so of old slums) and so doespropose an increase in what there is to share amongst the workers. But here he fails to see the very real restrictions which capitalism places on doing this. Under capitalism production is for profit, not the benefit of the working class. The fact, confirmed by years of sad experience, is that capitalism just cannot be reformed so as to work in the interests of the working class, the majority of society. It is futile to try to do so --and, in the context of Northern Ireland, worse than futile.

For, given the tradition of sectarianism, any move to redistribute poverty in favour of the Catholic workers was bound to antagonise Protestant workers. This is why the Civil Rights movement must take joint responsibility with the Unionists for the current violence in Northern Ireland. For their reformist campaign helped to unleash passions that have put the clock back fifty years. The very nature of their campaign --a fairer deal for Catholics under capitalism-- meant that they were seen to be, and in fact largely were, a Catholic sectarian movement. The fact that this, and the resulting violence, was

clearly unintended is beside the point (though it does them credit as compared with most Unionist politicians who used all their party's years of experience of stirring up sectarianism to manoeuvre the Civil Rights movement into this position). They should have foreseen that this was likely to happen and that the killings, the maimings and the burnings of the past few years would have been too high a price to pay for the comparatively minor reforms they were demanding.

We are not saying that workers should not protest against their sufferings under capitalism. Of course they should. But they should fight back on sound lines --for Socialism, not reforms of capitalism. A redistribution of poverty from Protestants to Catholics is no answer. What is called for is an end to the situation where workers, Protestant, Catholic or whatever, are in the degrading position of having to struggle amongst themselves for the basic necessities of life, especially when the amount of these necessities is artificially restricted by the same system that degrades and exploits them.

Socialism alone can end this, by making the means of production the common property of all mankind so that they can be used to provide abundance for all. The struggle for Socialism will unite rather than divide the working class because it does not set worker against worker over the few crumbs capitalism has to offer but is so clearly in the interests of them all.

Capitalism is not abolished by the State taking over the ownership and control of the means of production. This merely establishes State capitalism, where a minority still effectively monopolises the means of production, where wealth is still produced for sale with a few to profit and where the workers still have to work for wages. Such a State capitalism would not benefit workers in Ireland. If anything it would probably lead to even more restrictions on the limited political democracy and trade union rights they now have. The state capitalist government in Ireland would still have to sell exports on the world market and would still have to drive the workers to produce as big a surplus as possible for re-investment. The workers would still have to resist and struggle to retain for their own consumption as much as it could of the wealth it produced (and they would probably find the likes of the IRA, in view of their record of callous disregard for working class life, harsh taskmasters).

The plain fact is that there is no national solution to the problems which face workers in Ireland, North and South. These problems are not essentially different from those of workers in all the other countries of the world. Workers everywhere live under the same system, world capitalism, which artificially divides the world into States and cultivates loyalty towards these different States in the form of nationalism in order to further the interests of the various sections of the world capitalist class who rule them. The working class, too, is worldwide with a common worldwide interest: the overthrow of capitalist rule everywhere and the freeing of modern technology from the fetters of the profit motive by the establishment of Socialism.

Socialism means a world community, without frontiers, based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.

On this basis, democratic planning to serve human needs would replace present-day production for sale with a view to profit. Money, wages, prices, banks and all the other paraphernalia of buying and selling would disappear. Goods and services would not be priced nor would people be paid a wage or salary. Instead the principle "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" would apply: everybody would freely do what they could to help produce an abundance of goods and services to which everybody would then have free access according to their needs.

It has long been technologically possible to produce enough to satisfy everybody's needs. This has not been done because the present capitalist system restricts what is produced to what can be sold profitably. Socialism would remove this artificial barrier, and with the elimination of the waste of armaments and of buying and selling, would allow mankind to create a society from which material poverty would have been banished.

In Socialism everybody would be socially equal, having an equal say in the way social affairs are conducted. Democratic participation and control would apply to all aspects of society. Those chosen to do particular technical or administrative jobs on behalf of the community would not be in any position to form a new ruling class, even in the unlikely event of them wanting to. For they would have no material privileges, everybody no matter what his job having free access to consumer goods and services. Nor would they have any means at their command to coerce people, armed forces having no place in Socialism. But, most important of all, they would be under the continuous democratic control of the community.

In Socialism the various nation-States into which the world is currently divided would be dismantled and the frontiers between them demolished. Instead there would be a single world community to control the single world productive system which already exists. In fact the source of the world's current troubles is precisely that control of this world productive system --a vast network of interdependent mines, factories, farms, warehouses, offices throughout the world-- is divided amongst autonomous and competing nation-States and multi-national corporations.

Socialism can only be established democratically, by the conscious political action of the immense majority when they want it and have organised themselves to get it. There can be no Socialism without a socialist majority. Without this socialist majority any take-over of government power, whether by constitutional or violent means, can only lead at most to some modification of capitalism. Only a socialist working class can establish Socialism through democratic political action.

Clearly at the moment Socialism does not exist anywhere, not that it could exist in just one country. Socialism must be worldwide because capitalism, the system it will replace, already is. Capitalism outlived its usefulness once it had built up the means of production into a worldwide network capable of producing abundance for all, a task it had accomplished by the turn of the century. Yet it is capitalism that is the dominating system in every country in the world. It exists equally

in Russia, China, Cuba, Yugoslavia and such places (in the form of state capitalism) as in America, Britain, France, Japan and other openly capitalist countries.

We insist that Socialism is relevant in Northern Ireland today as it is everywhere else. Understandably, at the moment, ordinary people in Northern Ireland want peace, an end to the pointless shootings and bombings and the added insecurity they bring. We too want an immediate end to this senseless sacrifice of working class life to no useful purpose (not even now the interests of their masters, as was once the case). But, over and above this, we want Socialism, a far more worthwhile objective than a mere return to "normal" capitalism with its boring jobs, its dole queues, its slums and its general poverty and exploitation minus only the extra violence.

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