

# JOHN SWIFT SENIOR LOOKS BACK TO THE IRELAND OF FIFTY YEARS AGO

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## The 'holy' crusade for the Corporate State

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**F**OR THOSE OF us old enough to remember events of fifty years ago the long drawn-out anti-abortion amendment campaign will bring to mind another holy crusade, the clamour in the thirties for the corporate state.

The crusade got going in Ireland in 1932 with the coming to power of the Portuguese fascist dictator, Salazar, though the corporate state had been established in Italy in the early twenties.

With the suppression of the trade unions the Italian fascists claimed to have resolved the class war by the creation of corporations in which workers shared joint membership with employers, the latter and the fascist party officials dominating the organisation.

The Italian fascist state was recognised by the Vatican in 1929, with what is called the Lateran Agreement or Treaty; and the Papacy regained temporal powers, but in a much restricted form.

The pact, like our own 1937 Constitution, conceded the special position of the Roman Catholic Church. Divorce was prohibited, and the status of church marriage as against civil marriage was raised.

To crown this, blasphemy laws were enacted under which spoken or written statements of defamation of the Pope were punishable. Finally, under the Lateran Agreement large sums were paid to the Vatican by the Italian fascist state as compensation for Church property losses claimed at dissolution of the Papal States in 1870.

For the corporatists, at home and abroad, an important event occurred two years after the signing of the Lateran Agreement. In 1931 the same Pope, Pius XI issued the encyclical Quadragesimo Anno. It commemorated the fortieth anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum.

Both encyclicals condemned socialism; and, as a solution of the class war, recommended the establishing of corporations on the lines of the medieval guilds.

When Salazar's corporatism, attained power in Portugal in 1932 it became evident to our local corporatists that this version of the Italian model might be more acceptable.

Salazar was known as a good churchman, notable for his piety; whereas the renegade socialist, Mussolini was generally regarded as cynical and untrustworthy as regards both religion and politics.

### SECTARIAN

Here, the crusade for an Irish corporate state got really going in 1933. Compared to the current anti-abortion campaign the 1933 crusade was more avowedly sectarian.

It got much encouragement in the lenten season, with pulpit eulogies of papal encyclicals and condemnation of socialism. Cardinal MacRory led with a sermon in Armagh Cathedral, in which he called for a united front against communism.

In that same lenten season, following their attendance at devotions in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral, mobs went on the rampage.

Connolly House, Great Strand Street, then the headquarters of the Workers Revolutionary Groups the Workers Union of Ireland offices in Marlboro Street, and Labour Party's Labour College in Eccles Street were attacked.

Of the attack and burning of Connolly House eye witnesses have already recorded reminiscences. Here it may be of interest to quote from a contemporary press comment, as revealing the self-satisfied complacency in certain political quarters regarding violence directed against those thought politically undesirable or expendable.

We quote excerpts from leading article in "The Irish Press" of March 30th, 1933. Commenting on the attacks, the article stated

"If they (those attacked) hold public meetings and offend the feelings of their audience so deeply as to stir up spontaneous anger against them, then they cannot expect to be listened to, and are in grave danger of suffering from the irate crowd."

It went on "But it's an entirely

different matter when organised groups go through the city attacking buildings and places which, house those they dislike. It merely ends in the spectacle of one group of Catholic Irishmen (the police) being forced to disperse another group of Catholic Irishmen (the attackers)".

Surely, a fine example of the bland sectarianism, not to say inhumanity, that concerns itself more with the inviolability of property than with the lives and persons of human beings considered as being beyond the pale of political acceptability!

The editorial drives home the point. It continues "Our views are the very antithesis of communism. . . We think these organised attacks on property are wrong and inexcusable. . . We think, too, they do not help but hurt the Catholic cause and do not injure but win a certain sympathy for the groups who are attacked".

### ATTACKS

The attacks were made to the singing of "Faith of our Fathers living still", and to shouting the slogans, "Up the Pope!" and "Down with Russia!"

To the Corporatists, high and low, at the time, the Soviet Union was a special irritant. The Soviet

Union was then completing its first five-year plan, and knowledge of its success was being made known to the world.

After the October Revolution in 1917 and the Civil War and War of Intervention by the imperialist powers which followed into the early twenties, economic development was slow over the period. The first five-year plan started in 1928. When completed in 1933 its great success was to be attested in much statistical evidence.

A brief quote may be made here. On the eve of the plan's start there were a million-and-a-

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and Ratepayers League held conventions and decided to merge, to become the Fine Gael Party. They held the new party's first Ard Fheis on February 10th, 1934 and elected General O'Duffy the party's president.

In his presidential address he was quick to declare his corporatist or fascist faith. He declared "after our victory at the polls, it will be essential for the country to turn its back on party politics and to organise with the utmost efficiency its social and economic life.

"The present Pope has proclaimed it as the primary duty of the state and of all good citizens to abolish conflict between classes with divergent interests. . . . He, the Pope, has declared that the aim of social legislation must be the re-establishment of vocational groups (corporations)".

#### PRACTICAL

The General went on "It is a practical proposition for Ireland and is now a complete everyday reality in the life of the Italian people. . . . I expect that because I mention the word Italy—not to mention Mussolini—we shall have shrieks of fascism, dictatorship, sedition, rising in chorus from the *Irish Press* and Government Buildings, and the Attorney General will be sent for to know how many sections of the Public Safety Act are applicable for the banning of the Corporate State to be".

O'Duffy warned the Attorney General. He went on "Let him not be too hasty on the present occasion. It would be rather unfortunate from his (the Attorney General's) point of view if it transpired before the Military Tribunal that the accused were simply following the great encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, promulgated two years ago (it was three rather) by Pope Pius XI."

From my recollections of the times I would say the clamour here for the corporate state reached its climax following the start of Franco's rebellion against Spain's legitimate Republican Government in 1936.

In that conflict General O'Duffy had his last public fling in leading a small group of fellow fascists to Spain, to fight, not very gloriously, in the cause of Spanish fascism.

#### REPUTATION

On the other side, our country's reputation for service in good causes was sustained by the republican volunteers who went to Spain and fought in defence of the Republican Government, some of them not to return.

If the Spanish Civil War marked the apogee of the corporate state crusade here, it may be said with equal propriety that another event of war signalled the decline, we hope to extinction, of the corporatist fervour.

That was the Battle of Stalingrad in the Second World War, the event that heralded the military defeat and discrediting of international fascism.

half unemployed in the Soviet Union, and the number of workers in the Soviet trade unions was around ten million. At the end of the plan, in 1933, there was no unemployment, whilst trade union membership had doubled to over twenty million.

The sectarian fervour of the mobs rampaging in the city was apparently shared, and certainly tolerated by the Gardai at the time. It was noted they did little or nothing in trying to control or repulse the mob fury.

This was hardly to be wondered at considering certain factors in the development of this comparatively new state police force. Just after the birth of the Free State, General Eoin O'Duffy was appointed in September, 1922, to organise the Garda Síochána.

In his earlier days, during the War of Independence in the North he had shown strong sectarian zeal in conflicts with non-catholic groups considered antagonistic to the national cause.

#### PILGRIMAGES

In September 1922 O'Duffy was appointed Chief Superintendent of the Gardai. In the early days of his authority he started organising pilgrimages of Gardai to Rome and Lourdes. On one of the pilgrimages to Rome he was recipient of a special blessing from the Pope. On another of his pilgrimages there he had an audience with the pioneer corporatist Mussolini himself.

De Valera and his Fianna Fáil Party came to power in 1932, and in February the following year, the new government dismissed O'Duffy from his position of Chief Commissioner. This left the General free to pursue his political ambitions.

So in that year, 1933, he became head of the National Guard (Blue-shirts), a body originally launched as the Army Comrades Association.

Later in 1933 the National Guard, the Cumann na nGaedheal Party and the National Farmers

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