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# CULTURE and REVOLUTION in IRELAND

EOIN Ó MURCHÚ





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## CULTURE AND REVOLUTION IN IRELAND

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## CULTURE AND REVOLUTION IN IRELAND

### REAMHRA

This paper was prepared for a series of educational conferences organised by the leadership of the Republican Movement. It does not pretend to be a final, definitive statement of the relation between culture and revolution. It is, however, an attempt to initiate discussion on this subject which has so largely been ignored by revolutionary thinkers in Ireland.

The natural response of most workers to the word 'culture' is to retreat in horror. The successful indoctrination of the educational murder machine has resulted in a cultural atrophy, that is most clearly seen in the decline of Irish culture:— the Irish language, the Irish traditional music and songs in English and Irish, the songs of Dublin or of Belfast. The cultural question is a very immediate one in Ireland, for the basis of nationality is culture: a national culture is the common response of a nation.

The development of national consciousness is one of the most important tasks that faces the revolutionary movement in Ireland. As an article in the first issue of 'Teoiric', the Republican Movement's theoretical journal, said: "A revolution cannot take place as the result of the dreams, desires or ideals of revolutionary minded people. A revolution requires a level of social/economic contradictions which makes it possible to overthrow the ruling class. A revolution needs the presence of another social class, which because of its place in society, its place in the process of production and its political potential, is able to achieve successfully this revolution." This 'other social class' must be converted to the need for revolution, for socialism, and this conversion can only come as a result of a development in consciousness. Hence its' importance for the revolutionary movement in Ireland today.

This is a very broad question; it covers every aspect of revolutionary theory. If our understanding of the importance of consciousness is complete – that is if we recognise the weaknesses as well as the strengths of consciousness – our policies and tactics will have a firmer base amongst the mass of the people. This point needs to be stressed with particular reference to two problems that have faced revolutionary activists in Ireland for many generations, first the cult of personality by which De Valera diverted the anti-imperialist struggle of the Irish people from its proper course, and secondly the question of spontaneity which argues that there is no need to argue and discuss political questions, and that the people have a natural instinct for revolution which will be awakened by the example of heroic and dedicated revolutionaries.

The immediacy of the cultural question can be seen from the fact that the economic and social existence of the Gaeltacht is so tenuous at the moment. We must have a policy on such matters, and to have a policy we must have a theoretical understanding of the practical problem that confronts us. Theoretical clarity and comprehension will obviate the evils we mentioned above, cultism and spontaneity.

I should repeat that this paper does not pretend to be definitive on this matter of culture. It is not holy writ or dogma, and the production of the lecture as a pamphlet is an attempt to widen the scope of our internal education programme. We are also aware that the general political public needs to be informed of the trends of our political thinking, even where our policy is not final as in this case of culture.

If the subject is properly discussed and criticised we will be able to make a programme of policy, perhaps on the lines indicated in the final section, which is called 'The Manifesto of the Cultural Revolution in Ireland.'

Eoin O Murchu.  
Iuil, 1971.

## WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is a very wide term that embraces many meanings. Some associate culture with the individuals who talk about art and drama, the arty-set; others associate it with the literature, art, music etc., which people have produced: for us, revolutionaries, it has a wider, and yet more specific, meaning – a meaning which places culture in its political context. Culture is the response of a people to the environment they live in. As such, the culture of a people includes every aspect of their lives – the way they work, eat, cohabit, play – and is not confined to the artistic means which different civilisations have developed. What we as revolutionaries are concerned about in this question of culture and art is the way people's ideas and attitudes are formed, about the development of revolutionary consciousness.

Mao Tse Tung gave a simple definition of culture when he said: "A given culture is the ideological reflection of the politics and economics of a given society". What this means is that economics (the way wealth is produced and distributed) and politics (the way class forces conflict) create a method of thinking (an ideology) which affects the way people live, work, eat, cohabit, play – and die. Culture can be summed up to be the totality of man's response to the world he lives in, for it covers all his actions and thoughts. We must assess the importance of culture and art for the revolution we are engaged upon, and the consequences that flow from adopting positive stands on cultural questions.

We will always find in our efforts to win the people over to support of our political and economic programme that what is clear to us is often vague and confusing to them. The culture of our present society is not one that encourages revolution, for the dominant economic and political ideas are those of the dominant class in Irish society, and that class obviously is opposed to the social revolution to which we are committed. The whole aim of the cultural apparatus of the state is to condition the people, through its' educational system, the mass media of radio, television and newspapers, and through the general promotion of mythology and superstition.

Pearse described the educational system that the English imperial government foisted on the Irish people as the 'murder machine'. "The system has aimed at the substitution for men and women of mere Things.....But these Things have no allegiance. Like other Things they are for sale." He went on in the same article to declare that there was no educational system, in the true meaning of education. "There is no education system in Ireland. The English have established the simulacrum of an educational system, but its' object is the precise contrary of the object of an education system. Education should foster: this education is meant to repress. Education should inspire; this education is meant to tame. Education should harden; this education is meant to enervate. The English are too wise a people to attempt to educate the Irish, in any worthy sense. As well expect them to arm us."

Anyone looking at the system of education that prevails in either part of our divided country must surely agree that what Pearse had to say in 1913 is a valid comment today. A society that is based on the crude exploitation and social misery as present day Ireland cannot afford to have its people trained to think for themselves, trained to question and voice opinions. A people educated like that would be an armed people, and a serious threat to the security of the robber barons and the cheque-book conquerors. The educational system, both in the schools and universities and in the mass media, aims to condition the people into accepting the present condition of things as permanent and immutable; it aims to convince the Irish people that the present truncated, half-nationality of the Tacamen's Ireland is the achievement of the age-old dreams and desires of our people. A culture of mythology takes the place of a culture of reality.

Historically, it can be seen that the present system of education is the direct descendant of the English system; that it is in no way changed. We can also see that this system played a large and important part in the anglicising of Ireland, in the destruction of the native culture and language of the Irish people, and that it is continuing to do so, as the closures of schools in Dun Chaoin and Rann na Feireast show. The values pushed by this system have destroyed the will of the people to maintain the Irish language, and all revival efforts have foundered on the twin rocks of popular indifference and official intolerance.

All societies, of course, have methods of educating their children, for education really means bringing up. So that even when formal, or school, education was the privilege of the rich, the common people passed on knowledge and attitudes and values by means of songs, stories and poems, by means of a culture of the people. The communication of these depends on language, and by destroying the language (almost) the attitudes and values were destroyed (almost). It is understandable then why a national scheme of education was brought in in Ireland by the English ruling class before the same was done in England: the national consciousness of the Irish people had to be broken, and they had to be taught the attitudes proper to a subject people.

We have said that culture is the totality of man's response to the world he lives in. But this response is manifested in various ways – music, painting, dancing, literature, are all methods of culture. Shapes, sounds, colours and words can all be used to convey ideas, to heighten impressions, to develop understanding and will-power. It is not the purpose of this paper to examine different art forms, for we are more concerned with content than with form, but it should be noted that all these different art forms are part of one culture: a particular period in a particular setting produces the impetus for art.

Nevertheless we need to consider what is, or what should be, the role of the artist and intellectual; what does the revolutionary movement want from these people. The purpose of art can be said to be to enrich humanity. Obviously humanity can only be enriched if the artist and intellectual reflect reality, if they are part of the struggle for the emancipation of humanity. There can be no

neutrality in this issue, because reality is not neutral. The artist who wants to cut himself off and express only his own 'individuality' – albeit an individuality framed by social and economic conditions – may do so, but he has no right to expect the mass of the people to have any respect for him. In fact of course, this 'cutting-off', this search for 'individuality' is the last fling of a middle class that is incapable of coming to terms with reality, the reality of the class struggle that is summed up in the conflict between socialism and imperialism. There is no neutrality here, and the revolutionary vanguard of the people has the right to demand of artists and intellectuals that they make a firm commitment to the progress of humanity, to the enrichment of humanity which we declared to be the purpose of art.

The question 'literature and art for whom?', which Mao Tse Tung posed at the Yenan forum on literature and art, will be dealt with in more detail in the sections dealing with imperialism and socialism. It is sufficient to point out here that culture has developed even as civilisation progressed from feudalism to capitalism, and to the present crisis in imperialism caused by the progress of humanity to socialism.

What the artist of one generation says may be progressive in that context, but reactionary if repeated unthinkingly in the next. We are not at all concerned with the method the artist or intellectual uses to express himself, with the form of his work, whether it be abstract or realist or surrealist or whatever; but we are concerned with what he says and who can understand him. To that extent, we must insist that the artist speak in a way that the mass of the people can understand him, otherwise he can be of no use to the revolution.

The artist himself needs an audience. The individual man cannot exist in a vacuum; for he is part of a social community, and as such his response is the common response of the people of which he is a part. So what we said before is reinforced: culture is the totality of man's response to a particular set of economic and political conditions. The conditions which gave rise to the great Greek culture will never reappear: nor will those that gave rise to Gaelic culture as it existed in the time of Carolan or the Munster poets. The Gaelic culture of Carolan's time was the way the Irish people of that time expressed their ideals, their values and their humanity; Carolan's achievement was that as an artist he enriched that culture and that section of humanity.

We do not seek to recover the existence of the past, and those who do are obviously living in a dream world: what we do say is this: we seek to develop our humanity and identity by pride in our past and confidence in our future. This has been crystallised by the Blacks in America in the slogan "Black is Beautiful". Similarly we wish to express the idea "Irish is beautiful". We wish to develop national consciousness.

We have already referred to the fact that no individual exists outside of a community; as John Dunne said "No man is an island". This idea of identity is a recurrent one in Irish literature, and in the English-language version of the

story of Oisín's return to Ireland by Yeats we see how Oisín is offered heaven if he renounces his former comrades of the Fianna and hell if he does not. His reply is in the tradition of our people:— "I will go to where the Fenians are, Be they in flames or at feast."

What Oisín is saying here, and what is a recurrent theme in Irish literature, particularly in Irish, is that identity with one's own people is more important than the lavish promises of a foreigner like St. Patrick. Here is the task of the artist and intellectuals, to restore pride to the Irish people, to champion the common people as the creators of all the wealth of this world, that nothing is owed to kings or wise men, that Irish is beautiful. If the people believe in themselves, and in their ability to win, the development of the social and economic circumstances necessary for revolution — which development is the foremost task of the revolutionary movement — will be accelerated.

But there is no dogmatic formula here. In abstract theory, the cultural question has no prominence over the political or economic question as Lenin said. The Russian Social-Democrats achieved power before they had reached the cultural level required by the dogmatists of the second international. But our approach to the cultural question is slightly different from Lenin's:—

First of all there is the urgency of the matter, when we consider the imminent disappearance of the Irish language as the spoken language of a living community, as well as the decline of native Irish culture generally before the in-roads of imperialism.

Secondly, we see culture as the totality of human response to environment, while Lenin did not consider the matter. It was not a practical question for him — and Lenin's great gift was his ability to relate theory to practice — while it is for us.

We have accepted the idea that culture is a response of a community at a particular time. But different social classes have different environments: the workers' view of progress, freedom, peace and stability differ from the capitalists. What is that Fintan Lalor said about peace: "There can be no peace between England and a subject Ireland except the peace of desolation." Thus a society can have different classes in it, and indeed the whole basis of revolutionary thinking is that there is a class struggle between a dominant class and a subject class. As it was put in 'Teoiric I', theoretical journal of the Republican Movement, revolution is "The change of state power from one class to another class."

Now, the songs of the common Irish people in the 17th century differed in spirit from those of Carolan. Carolan was a supreme artist who definitely enriched Irish humanity, but the world of patronage and Gaelic aristocracy was far removed from the common people, who by now had been completely dispossessed of the historic wealth and lands of our people. The subsequent destruction of the last vestiges of an independent aristocratic Gaelic culture left only the common people in possession of the Gaelic heritage of 2,000 years.

Thus was born what Donall O Corcara called the hidden Ireland, or what today might be called the condemned Ireland, condemned to die by neglect and hostility. We do not seek to recover the past, as I have already said. But we do seek to recover the best of our traditions moulded to the present needs of our people, to develop a culture that will reflect the values and aspirations of the common people. Since our political and economic programme is based on the Reconquest of Ireland by its people, so shall our cultural programme be based.

I hope that the above has helped clarify in our minds what is meant by culture and that certain guidelines for our attitude to culture have emerged. We now face the difficult question of examining native Irish culture:—

What are the attitudes and values of the progressive forces of the Irish nation?

What is native Irish culture, in the context of what we have said above?

§ \* \* \* \* \*

### NATIVE IRISH CULTURE

Mise Eire!  
Is sine me na an Chailleach Beara!  
Mor mo ghloir,  
Me do rug Cu Chullain croga,  
Mor mo nair,  
Mo chlann fein do dhiol a mathair,  
Mise Eire,  
Is uaigni me na an Chailleach Beara.

A national culture is the expression of national consciousness. The Irish nation is an amalgam of differing communities all sharing a common history: Gaeltacht and Galltacht, Northern Catholic and Northern Protestant, Urban and Rural. The attitudes and immediate traditions of different groups may vary, but the overall connecting factor is the common exploitation of Ireland and the Irish people by British Imperialism and its native collaborators.

Our purpose is to take the best of our traditions, discarding the divisive factors, and to weld a national culture that will reflect the values of the national revolution. This will not be socialist, in so far as a socialist culture can only exist in a socialist society; but it will be the precursor of socialism, even as national independence is essential for the building of socialism in Ireland. Our social and political aim has been defined as the Reconquest of Ireland; our cultural aim should be the same. We must seek to undo the past without becoming enmeshed in it. That is we should be trying to develop native Irish

culture in accordance with the best of our traditions and subject to our present needs as a subject people struggling for national liberation.

What form should an anti-imperialist culture take? I think that Mao Tse Tung again explained this point clearly: "New-democratic culture is national.... It belongs to our nation and expresses our own national characteristics." In our analysis of native Irish culture we must examine that which belongs to our nation and expresses our national consciousness. Whatever promotes imperialism (such as a Eurovision Song Contest) must be exposed and opposed: **Cultural resistance should go hand in hand with economic resistance.**

A full examination of native Irish culture would require far more research than it has been possible to do for this paper. In particular, the origins and development of Orange culture is a field that is even more virgin than even the political consideration of culture. We can, however, distinguish three main trends of Irish culture: Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and Orange. The Hiberno-English culture, of the majority although it too is in decline, is a cross between the older Gaelic culture and the indigenous literate culture of the Anglo-Irish, like Yeats.

Throughout all strands of native Irish culture, the Gaelic culture predominates even where English is the spoken language; because even Orange culture is a development of an older Gaelic culture. As Brendan Behan put it: "I heard the East Belfast come down the Shankill on the Twelfth playing Rosc Catha na Mumhan disguised as the Boyne Water, and be damn but I nearly fell in behind them and their King Billy banner."

The real conquest of Ireland dates from the defeat of Kinsale in 1601, and until that time Gaelic culture was dominant throughout Ireland. Even until the Famine, or Starvation, of the 1840s Irish was the spoken language of the majority of the people. The anglicisation of Ireland was a long process, and the 'hidden Ireland' lived in the consciousness of the common people – dispossessed but still unconquered. The greatness of the Munster poets – Aodhan O Rathaille, Eoghan rua O Suilleabhain, Aindrias Mac Caraith – lay in their closeness to the ordinary people and their lives. Here was the voice of the nation, a voice that is repeated by Mairtin O Caidhin: "Mise stoc na cille. Eistear le mghlor. Caithfear eisteacht." It took the trauma of the 1840s, together with the traitorous hostility of the churches, to achieve the conquest of the minds of the people.

The underlying theme of this 'hidden Ireland' – as expressed by O Rathaille, O Suilleabhain, Merriman, Bairead and O'Direain – is of resistance to conquest. The savagery of Eoghan Coir reflects the sullen resentment of a beaten but unyielding people:

"Taiscigi a chlocha, fe choigilt i gcoimead criaidh,  
An feallaire fola is an stollaire Dason liath;  
A ghaisce niorbh fhollas i gcogadh na i gcath la gliaidh,  
Ach ag creachadh is ag crochadh is ag coscairt na  
mbochtain riamh".

This is the revolutionary tradition of our people, the tradition we need to expand and develop. It is a tradition that lived on beyond the decline of the Irish language, as in James Stephen's English version of 'The Wave of Cliodhna':

"If I might come on thee, o howling friend,  
Knowing that sails were drumming on the sea  
westward to Eire, and that help  
might be trampling for her upon a Spanish deck,  
I'd ram they lamentation down thy neck."

Gaelic culture is clearly the most important strand of Irish culture: the music, poetry, songs, dances, stories – an inherited culture of 2,000 years – are all connected and still influence the lives of the people. But perhaps the great success of British Imperialism has been the extent to which the protagonists of various aspects of Gaelic culture fail to see the connection of the part to the whole, let alone the connection of culture and economics and politics.

As Ireland became anglicised, and the Gaelic language, the instrument of the native culture, went into decline, a culture in English was born amongst the people, a culture that continued the spirit of the old in the newly acquired language, even though truncated because of its being cut off from the living language of the Irish people over 2,000 years. Songs like 'The Bould Tenant Farmer', 'The Rocks of Bawn', and the many rebel songs were all a development of the people's voice. Romanticism – the belief in the recovery of an unrecoverable past – certainly had its influence, but in general the songs of the people were a description of their problems.

Great Irish writers in English like Behan and Yeats reveal their indebtedness to the whole of Irish culture and the Gaelic tradition, whether it be romanticised and idealised, as by Yeats; or urbanised and revitalised as by Behan. But the anglicisation of Ireland resulted in cultural atrophy, that is now reaching its logical climax in the mass media indoctrination of television and radio.

'Black is beautiful' say the Blacks of America; let us also be proud in our past, and in the strength of a people that suffered so much. "I am come of the seed of the people," said Pearse, "the people that sorrow; that have no joy but hope, no treasure laid up but the memory of an ancient glory."

If we dig up that treasure, let us use it to restore our pride and confidence, to assert that we are the masters of this land and all its wealth: we are the sovereign people.

Section Six of this paper will deal in more detail with the questions of language and culture, and the revival of Gaelic culture. Our point here is to examine the components of native Irish culture. The largest influence has been Gaelic, but we cannot afford to ignore the culture in English, both Hibernian (not in the AOH sense) and Orange. We must recognise and point out to the mass of the people, that the people's culture, in Dublin and Belfast is in decline:

that the main formers of cultural attitudes today, the mass media, studiously ignore the folk culture of Ireland. Our task is to reawaken consciousness in the people as to the worth of their culture, to gather what is useful and to discard what is not. All the strands of Irish culture today interact and intermingle. What we need to do is to develop that which reflects reality and challenge the promotion of myths. We want a culture that will advocate the rights of the people and detail their real conditions, and such a culture will be based on the historic traditions of our people.

Our enemies wish to ensnare us with myths and keep us divided: the imperialists seek to destroy national culture while the socialists seek to promote it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## IMPERIALISM AND CULTURE

### (a) BRITISH IMPERIALISM AND GAELIC CULTURE

We have asserted that Imperialism seeks to destroy national culture. We must now examine the relation of Imperialism to culture under two headings: the historical attitude of British Imperialism to Gaelic Culture; and Imperialist culture today.

The English ruling class were always uniformly hostile to the native Irish, their language and their customs. The Statutes of Cill Chainnigh summed up their attitude, an attitude that is well illustrated by the story of the English Queen Elizabeth 1 and her adviser Lord Burleigh: the gracious majesty expressed the wish to learn Irish, but was persuaded against the idea by Burleigh who pointed out what a 'barbaric' language it was; he gave the example of the sentence "d'ibh damh dubh ubh amh", which means "a black stag drank a raw egg", and is pronounced (in Munster Irish) div dav duv uv av, or (in Ulster Irish) dee daou duwe uwe aou. The Irish comment, of course, was that anyone who wanted to say anything so stupid was not worthy of learning our beautiful tongue.

Even the Protestant Reformers, whose main aim was the translation of the holy works of Christianity into vernacular languages, held back from using Irish: Protestantising and anglicising went hand in hand, and there is little wonder that few of the Gaelic Irish became Protestant until the Plantations. Nor was the Protestant Church alone in this. The Catholic Church has played a very dubious role in history, and the vast majority of its bishops can clearly be stigmatised as 'traitors'. It has been pointed out elsewhere that the real conquest of Ireland dates from the defeat of Cioinn tSaile in 1601. And that from that time an assiduous policy of denigrating everything Irish was followed. The chieftains gave lands which did not belong to them to the English kings, and

received them back from him as personal possessions on his terms: that they become more English than the English themselves. The Flight of the Earls and the anglicisation of those who remained saw the people of Ireland dispossessed of their lands and driven to the mountains and boglands, as Cromwell put it 'To hell or Connacht'. The native culture of the Irish people went with them, and from that day to this has lived as the culture of an oppressed people on the fringe of an empire.

The development of capitalism in England, and the political emergence of a bourgeoisie with the Williamite succession had a profound effect on the political and economic situation in Ireland. New social classes, which developed more certainly after the Act of Union, — entrepreneurs, lawyers and bankers — reflected the new politics, and boldly asserted the primacy of the new culture and the inferiority of the old.

We have already seen how the common people kept the Gaelic language and traditions alive for many generations to come, but from this time on the position becomes clearer: the ruling classes promote their values and attitudes, summed up in 1801 by the Act of Union. All who would rise within the system must equally accept the values of the new order — values based on vicious exploitation and deprivation — and reject Gaelic language and customs. The Gaelic aristocracy which had patronised O Cearbhallain was gone, and the newly emerged middle class saw where its' profits lay: in collaboration.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church — which up till then had been a source of strength to the Irish people, in so far as it had been anti-imperialist — now openly betrayed that people and sold them for the lands of Ma Nuad, accepting an oath of allegiance to the English king as the price for freedom to control its own sphere. Sectarianism really dates from this time, as the hierarchy sabotaged the efforts of the United Irishmen to build a United Irish Nation — aided and abetted by the Protestant Ascendancy.

From that time until the present day the Catholic Hierarchy has been the staunchest defender of the English social system in Ireland, the capitalist system; who can ignore the traitorous remarks of Bishop Moriarty of Kerry who denounced the Fenians with the famous words 'Hell is not hot enough, nor eternity long enough', a treason that has its counterpart in the antics of Conway and Philbin today.

Nor did the hierarchy neglect to play its role in cultural and linguistic affairs. I remember myself when I was in Tuar Mhic Eadaigh, South Mayo, how local people explained to me that Irish was now confined to the mountains as a spoken language because of the hostility of the former parish priest: he had refused even to hear the confessions of his Irish-speaking parishioners in their own language, though the majority spoke no English, and had the habit of going into the local schools and mocking the young children when he heard them speaking Irish. This despicable renegade only died a few years ago, in this century. Well might it be said 'Hell is not hot enough nor eternity long enough.'



This was no isolated instance; it was merely a hang-over from earlier times. Both Catholic and Protestant churches played a full part in destroying the Irish language and the culture that gave expression to the feelings, despair and hope of the common people. Daniel O'Connell, the darling of clerical history, was the king of all renegades – crowned or not. A native Irish-speaker, he despised the language (and the people who spoke it): he would address audiences, 80% of whom understood no English, entirely in that language. The message he gave was clear: Irish was a thing to be despised and forgotten, to be laughed at and mocked. It was the sign of the serf and the peasant, of the rustic and the ignorant. But so great is the power of Imperialist ideology that this man is regarded as a hero by many of our people. When the louse, O'Connell, died in 1845 his pockets were full with the thirty pieces he got for selling his people while his people died in starvation or exile.

The result was success, for Ireland was anglicised by the Churches, O'Connell, the National Education system coupled with the trauma of the Great Famine. Native hirelings did the work of the foreign rulers. Yet this most momentous event, the loss of one language and the acquisition of another, is ignored by most historians or treated with the contemptuous passing reference which it merits in the eyes of the Imperialists.

The groundwork that was laid at this time has led to a steady shrinkage of the Gaeltacht – so steady that some assert that there will be no Gaeltacht left in ten to twenty years. This point will be examined in more detail in section six. Language and Culture; it is sufficient here to note that a deliberate policy of de-Gaelicising Ireland has always been followed by British Imperialism and its native hirelings. The establishment of the Free State did not change this: it merely obscured it.

The extent of the Ulster Plantations caused a slightly different situation to arise there. East Ulster rapidly became English-speaking, especially in County Down: but no uniform pattern emerges. A linguistic map of the area would look like a patch-quilt, with firm Irish-speaking areas in Oriel (South Down, South Armagh, Louth, Monaghan, and East Cavan), the Glens of Antrim, Tir Eoghain, Donegal, South Derry and parts of Fermanagh. A large proportion of these Irish-speakers would be Protestants, as in Reachlainn, many of them Planters from Scotland.

Unfortunately, the development of politics along religious lines led to the equation of Gaelic and Irish with Catholic – an equation that was particularly absurd in view of the Catholic hierarchy's attitude to Irish. An Orange leader of today, Rev. Martin Smyth of Sandy Row, has declared that "the Irish language was stolen from the Protestant people by the 'Papish' church." It might be truer to say that it had been given up by the Protestants because of the cultural pressures which the Imperialist Ascendancy had used to make the equation of Gaelicism and Catholicism. Nevertheless, the fact that an Orange Lodge would carry a banner bearing an inscription in Irish may well mean that the cultural bridge will be easily built, if the revolutionary movement has the courage to build it.

The Unionist Party, of course, assiduously encouraged the mythology that the Irish language was a non-Protestant thing, for reasons which I hope are obvious. If the Protestant people were to recover the language spoken by the Apprentices of Derry (ba linn an la) and the anti-imperialist culture of the Irish people, the future of the Ascendancy and the imperialist interests in Ireland would look grim.

Stormont has pursued, therefore, a more obviously hostile policy towards Irish than Leinster House, a hostility that is seen in the collapse of the Irish-speaking areas in the Glens of Antrim and the Sperrins of Tyrone. But in many ways the indifference of the Free State was more damaging. As Mairtin O Cadhain put it: "Ag deire thiar is marfai neamhshuim na namhadas ar bith."

To deal with this subject fully would require a re-writing of Connolly's "Labour in Irish History", or not so much a re-writing as a continuing of the theme which he began. The recovery of our true history is one of the challenges that faces the revolutionary movement in Ireland. What we can be said to have established is the very obvious fact that British Imperialism attempted to destroy the Irish language and the native Irish culture. We need to answer the question why this happened, and what is the nature of Imperialist culture in the modern world: does it need to maintain its hostility to Gaelic culture, or would it be possible for a native culture to emerge while Ireland was still dominated by Imperialism?

#### (b) MODERN IMPERIALIST CULTURE

Imperialism needs a culture that will reflect the politics and economics of Imperialism. Imperialism in Ireland is the policy of keeping Ireland economically dependent on Britain, and of extracting the wealth of Ireland for the benefit of the Imperialists. I do not intend here to discuss Imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism nor the question of the export of capital, but I will attempt to elaborate the basic way culture is used by the imperialist system. One point, however: **imperialism is a development of capitalism, and the basic rule of both capitalism and modern imperialism is accumulation and exploitation.**

Ernst Fischer the Austrian Poet and Marxist had this to say of capitalism: "Capitalism is not a social force that is well-disposed to art or that promotes art; in so far as the average capitalist needs art at all, he needs it as an embellishment of his private life or else as a good investment." If we remember that we said that the purpose of art is to enrich humanity, and if Fischer's remarks are valid – as I am sure they are – it emerges that Imperialist culture is basically inimicable to art: it requires commodities, not values. Anyone who is interested in development of Art under capitalism is referred to Fischer's work "The Necessity of Art."

Since the politics of imperialism is that of keeping the Irish people subject as a nation, and the economics of imperialism that of exploiting the wealth of

Ireland for imperialist benefit, clearly imperialism needs to do two main things. Firstly, native culture must be weakened because it is an obvious source of strength to a subject people. Secondly, it is necessary to denigrate the ability of the common people, to present a view of world history to the effect that the present system is permanent and immutable, that it is 'good' and human.

How else might we ask does a people who have struggled for eight hundred years against foreign rule to come to accept a system so alien, so oppressive and so destructive? We can see from Irish history how there was a constant effort to destroy native Irish culture, the assault being principally directed against the Irish language. Modern imperialism, as a world system, uses many pressures to promote a view of society and life that will lead people to accept the Imperialist system. Because the reality of the system is bad for the ordinary people, Imperialism must obscure and confuse the issue by creating myths.

To the extent that people accept these myths and the Imperialist ideology (the method of thinking that reflects imperialist politics and economics), to that extent is Imperialism successful at maintaining itself. The Protestant workers are assured that the Six County State is a Protestant State for a Protestant people, despite the slums of Protestant working class districts and the profits made by Protestant and Catholic capitalists from the workers.

**Socialism is denounced by the men of privilege and riches as atheism, as tyranny, as anything that may help them to keep their ill-gotten gains.**

The Free State proudly declares itself to be for independence and for Gaelicism, while its policies have perhaps been more effective in causing a decline of the Gaeltacht and the Irish language and a loss of independence more effective than since the Act of Union in 1801. The present crisis in Ireland, sparked off by the success of the civil rights campaign in the North, is the result of contradictions between the old myths and the creation of new myths. The frustration felt by Protestant workers at the betrayal of the sectarian basis of the Six Counties, even where that sectarianism did not alter the poor housing and living conditions of Protestant workers, will generate a fascist response (which the British imperialists may again decide to use if it suits their purpose in the future) unless we succeed in explaining the true nature of Imperialism.

All the myths of Imperialism must be exposed and all those who propose them, no matter how 'revolutionary' they proclaim themselves; as for example the ICO (so-called) which maintains that the 6 county state is a Protestant state for a Protestant people and that British Imperialism neither set it up nor kept it going, that the 6 county state has a 'democratic validity'. If anything exposes the true nature of the ICO it is their 'two nation' theory.

"All mythology masters, dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature." If this comment of Marx is taken as valid, we can assume that we will have mastery over our enemies as soon as we have acquired a sufficient understanding of them. If we learn how imperialism works, what its

cultural basis is, how it maintains itself, we will be equipped to defeat it. Imperialism stands for the de-humanisation of man, because the ruthless exploitation and misery that is caused by Imperialism is inhuman. Look at all the social ills that affect our people — unemployment, bad housing, emigration, poor wages, rising prices, bad living conditions, violence, lack of hope in a future, fear, intolerance, bigotry. Are not all of these caused by the imperialist system in order to make profits for a small group of privileged men? Imperialism is de-humanisation. As such it promotes values of escape, of nihilism, of despair, of transience. Drugs and decadence are the direct creation of Imperialism. Because if the evils of life can be avoided by the nirvana of drug and sex abuse there is no need to fight Imperialism. Not only is there no need, there is no ability.

The theoretical supremacy of the working class does not rest on its numerical supremacy alone: the working class is the only class that cannot be satisfied within the system, by decadence or otherwise. The attempts of the system to corrupt the working class from its natural revolutionary position, the position for which it is now already groping, will fail because the basic needs of workers are material and cultural, not escapist and nihilist, and as such are in basic opposition to the imperialist system.

The rootless, colourless universality of 'pop', pushed by the mass media and entwined in the decadence of drug and sex abuse, is the way Imperialism obscures the reality of life. All the world has become a giant strip-show in which human values — no exploitation but peace — are lost; and we are all affected by it to some extent, and must be until the world imperialist system is broken and defeated.

**Only socialism can expose the myths, for only socialism stands on reality. What then is the theoretical and actual relation between socialism and culture?**

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### SOCIALISM AND CULTURE

If Imperialism needs a culture that will reflect the values and aspirations of the Imperialists, socialism needs a culture that will reflect the values and aspirations of socialists. Let us quote James Connolly, the great Irish revolutionary socialist:

"To put it in other words, but words as pregnant with truth and meaning: the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union found that before its' advent the working class of Dublin had been taught by all the educational agencies of the country, by all the social influences of their masters, that this world was created for the special benefit of the various sections of the master class, that kings and lords and capitalists were of value; that even flunkies, toadies, lickspittles and poodle-dogs had an honoured place in the scheme of the universe, but that there was neither honour, credit, nor consideration to the man and woman who toils to maintain them all."

Against all this the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union has taught that they who toil are the only ones that do matter, that all others are but beggars upon the bounty of those who work with hand or brain, and that this superiority of social value can at any time be realised, be translated into actual fact, by the combination of the labouring class."

What Connolly is saying here is that ordinary men and women are the real makers of all history, and that humanity owes nothing to kings or 'great' men; that it was not the pharaohs who built the great pyramids of Egypt but the slave-workers; that in fact those who work are the rightful inheritors of all the wealth of the earth. This, indeed, is the basic philosophy of socialism, the attitude of mind that we must propagate. This is the task we set our artists and intellectuals; if they are not willing to meet this task they must be consigned to waste-bins of history and others found who will perform this great revolutionary task.

Socialism stands for the full humanisation of society: an end to exploitation and misery, and the opening of mankind to the full realisation of its possibilities. This complete humanisation can only be achieved when the lowest class in society, the working class, have assumed state power and taken over the resources of the nation from the present unholy alliance of Imperialists and compradour capitalists. Socialism stands for exposing the true nature of Imperialism and building a new order based on justice and the needs of the common people. Those who proclaim socialism will seek to justify the virtues of socialism, to vaunt the supremacy of the working class, and answer the culture of imperialism.

We have previously noted how Imperialist culture seeks to do three main things:

**denigrate the humanity of subject peoples,  
propose escapism as a solution for human problems,  
and distort the history of man.**

Thus despite the obvious inhumanity of the imperialist system, despite the fact that that system is the cause of all human problems, and despite the real role of common men and women in history, imperialist culture creates a mythology. It is clear that one of the foremost jobs of a socialist movement is to answer imperialist culture, to demonstrate the falseness of imperialist ideology.

This answering of imperialism needs to be done on those three main points also. The American Negroes evolved the slogan 'Black is beautiful' as an answer to the indoctrination which all Negroes received to the effect that they should be ashamed of their race, of their past and of their history. We all know in Ireland how the establishment has consistently mocked things Irish – as we attempted to show in the section dealing with the historical attitude of British Imperialism to Gaelic culture – and how the glorious history of the Irish people has been ignored or denied. Our answer is the same as that of the American Negroes: 'Irish is beautiful'; we have nothing to be ashamed of in our past, but

much to be proud of. We may have been defeated, but after 800 years of defeat we are still struggling. Our people are constantly informed that we are not capable of either winning or maintaining genuine independence. Vague, romantic and fanciful notions of racial inequality are worked out by herrenvolk professors, to the discomfort of Irish-Americans (many of whom unfortunately swell the ranks of the bigoted and racist) in a despairing effort to stem the rising tide of national consciousness.

Let us take the case of the mining scandal. We all are aware, I hope, of the fact that £230 million of Irish wealth will leave this country as profits for the foreign mining companies. Speaking in Canada on St. Patrick's Day this year, Lalor, the Free State Minister for Commerce, thanked the imperialists for 'developing' our resources. He thanked them for being so kind as to exploit us and take the wealth of our country out. The Irish people are led to believe that development of our resources can not, and could not, be achieved without this foreign 'capital'.

The whole idea of 'capital' is fanciful, anyway, as it is nothing more nor less than the accumulated labour of working people. This is imperialist culture: the inefficiency and inability of the natives as compared with the omnipotent ability and resourcefulness of the Imperialist entrepreneurs and their masterly 'capital'. This is not, of course, confined to Ireland, but is a world-wide phenomenon wherever there are colonies or neo-colonies.

We have already dealt with the question of escapism, and little more is left to be added. We need only re-emphasise once again that we can have no liberal middle class approach: we need to take a clear stand on drug abuse, and be able to challenge the whole cult of nihilism. We need to do this because the escapism of the drug cult is one of the ways Imperialism diverts people who were fed up with the foulness of the system away from any radical or revolutionary activity. The supremacy of the working class stems basically from the fact that it has the power to organise to defeat corruption, but the agencies of Imperialism do their best to weaken and corrupt young working class people so as to destroy their revolutionary capability.

But socialism is more than just an answer to the squirming frauds of Imperialism; it is the only road to human progress in this age. Therefore apart from answering the myths of Imperialism, challenging the escapist cult, proclaiming the ability of the common people and explaining their true role in history, a socialist movement such as ours must also proclaim the future it intends to carve out.

The whole trend of revolutionary republicanism, and of any form of socialism, has been, and must be, to replace the common people of Ireland back in possession of the wealth and privileges of life in Ireland. It must be to restore in rightful supremacy that which is of the common people. Now, the immediate job facing revolutionary republicans today is to eliminate imperialism as a factor in our internal affairs; that is, we must win national liberation for our people. National liberation would necessitate the championing of native Irish culture,

for it is only the cultural difference that explains the need for national liberation as opposed to a British Social Revolution. This is an essential thing for socialism. If there was no Irish nation, and no national consciousness there would be no problem. But because there is such an Irish nation, no socialist movement – and certainly no Irish Republican Socialist Movement – can ignore the culture and history of the people of Ireland. The political and economic emancipation of the Irish people is – as we have shown in our definition of culture – tied up with their cultural development. Socialists must of necessity champion native Irish culture, and demand of socialist artists and intellectuals that they contribute to the development of what is native to the traditions of the common people of this country.

Socialists seek to develop the full potential of people, to develop their historic traditions and to weld their past to the totality of human existence. In this socialists are not neutral: for reality is not neutral. All artists and producers of ideas must play their part in defining the future of the Irish people and our true historical development; all artists must champion the cause of the common people, exposing the nature of imperialism and capitalism and proclaiming the only viable alternative: socialism. Those who do not are objectively or subjectively, supporting imperialism; and as such they must be answered and challenged.

A socialist revolution has several stages, but these stages are not an unrelated series of jerks, but a regular logical progression of political development. Socialist ideology (the method of thinking based on the socialist view of politics and economics) must relate all the facets of revolution to each other, presenting the socialist view of history. This view of history shows us (as Connolly showed in "Labour in Irish History") that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by that class and by those who accept socialist ideology: a socialist culture needs to be developed to proclaim this message. A socialist culture in Ireland will be based on the historic traditions of the Irish people and their national characteristics; it will gather what is useful to the people and discard what is not.

We have laid a great deal of emphasis on the restoration of native traditions as the base for a socialist culture and a socialist revolution. In view of the importance of Gaelic culture as the main element of Irish native culture we must now examine the question of 'Language and Culture'. This we will do under three headings:—

- (a) Socialism and Linguistics.
- (b) The Revival of Irish Language.
- (c) The Irish Language and the Gaeltacht.

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## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

### (a) SOCIALISM AND LINGUISTICS

Language is primarily a means of communication, and to that extent it can be argued that all languages are equal. But it is obvious as linguists realise that every language has a 'cut of its own', that it is the product of the people who speak it. The special subtleties of one language tend to be peculiar to that language, and as such are part of the culture of the people who made it.

Secondly, if language is a means of communication it is also the primary means of communication of a people's culture. Now it is clear that there is no need whatsoever for the people of Algeria to learn Irish; indeed such an exercise would have no meaning for a people who have had no connection with the Gaelic heritage that belongs to our people. But since language is the vehicle of a people's culture, the socialist attitude is to defend the national language of a people even as it defends their national culture.

The question that is usually discussed under the heading of 'Socialism and Linguistics' is the one Stalin dealt with. He maintained that there was no special workers' language: that the language of Russian workers and Russian bourgeoisie is the same. This is basically a correct approach, except that it doesn't touch the main point of our discussion. I say this because Stalin's article has sometimes been quoted in an attempt to reinforce the view that the revival of Irish is an unnecessary exercise, whereas it does not deal with this question at all. Even if it did, of course, it should not be beyond the power of dogmatists to assume that perhaps Stalin may have been wrong on the issue in the light of Irish experience. In what he said, he was right, except that he avoided the question of regional language, as arose in Ireland when Irish grammatical forms were fitted into English words. This Hiberno-English language is dying very fast, like the culture it supported which also grew out of the decline of the Irish language. As our cultural assimilation proceeds apace, we are left with a not very distinctive series of regional or provincial accents: we are losing all trace of our nationality.

Socialism is concerned with replacing the common people of humanity back in possession of the wealth of the world, and putting that same common people, the working class and their allies, back in supremacy in the world. We in Ireland are fighting for the Reconquest of Ireland, the peculiar way the national liberation struggle has developed here. In all this, we have assumed the slogan: recover national culture.

In our survey of native Irish culture we have seen the important part played by the Irish language and Gaelic culture: that in the absence of that language and culture our people are culturally atrophied, they have no roots. Now a people without roots has no loyalty to anything much. In an age of 'labour mobility' – imperialism's answer to workers' combination – the capability of a culturally atrophied people for organising against the evil of the imperialist



system is much weakened. We recognise, and must recognise, the main cultural task facing Irish revolutionaries is to break this atrophy, and recover and strengthen native Irish culture. If this is so, the revival of Irish has a particular relevance and importance for Irish socialists.

### (b) THE REVIVAL OF IRISH

The revival of Irish has become confused in the mind of most of the Irish people with the middle class ramblings of ineffectual, but respectable, people. The revolutionary nature of the early language movement degenerated, when the sham-freedom of the Free State was granted to her loyal Irish subjects by a gracious foreign majesty, into trust and reliance upon a system that was basically against the revival of Irish or the building of an independent Irish nation, notwithstanding the fine hypocritical words used to hide the issue. The big weakness of the major Irish language revival organisations has been their refusal to recognise this state hostility, and a more important inability to realise the intimate connection between a language and the people who speak it. The revival of one must be accompanied by the revival of the other. As Pearse put it: "We did not join the Gaelic League for the sake of is and ta, we did it for Ireland." The romantic language hides the very real fact that people are more important than language, but that a people are only half a people without culture, i.e. if they are culturally atrophied.

This failure to identify Irish with the ordinary people of Ireland has been crucial to the failure to make any progress towards the re-Gaelicisation of Ireland. Language was separated both from people, and – amazingly – from culture. The pathetic attempts of establishment organisations like Gael Linn to develop "pop-Ghaelachas" point to a bankruptcy appalling in its consequences. **Irish must be rescued from middle class respectability, and from the hypocrisy and 'beal-Ghaelachas' that ordinary people have come to associate with the whole question of Irish revival.** Socialists are interested in the revival of the Irish language because it is a means to the revival of the Irish culture, and because that is a means to the revival of the Irish people.

It should be obvious that the revival of a language is a revolutionary thing. Those who are members of 'measuil' organisations – like the Gaelic League which at least is better than groups like Comhairle Naisiunta na Gaeilge, should recognise – and be forced by the revolutionary movement to admit – that the cultural revival they are 'committed' to is thoroughly without possibility of any success unless there is a basic change in the economic infrastructure of our society. While the ordinary people face emigration, unemployment, harsh living conditions, esoteric talk of language is meaningless.

This inability of the establishment language organisations to come to terms with reality led people like Mairtin O Cadhain to propose a militant organisation

like Misneach. The original argument is contained in O Cadhain's pamphlet 'Irish above Politics', but the overall failure of Misneach to achieve anything (apart from a stirring hunger strike, a brief skirmish with an irrelevant LFM, and a little understood battle with a foreign controlled insurance company) led O Cadhain to modify his view, as expressed in 'Irish above Politics', to that he asserted in the latest pamphlet from his pen – published posthumously – 'Gluaiseacht na Gaeilge: Gluaiseacht ar Strae': he argued there, as he had argued previously in his life, that the only fight worth being part of in Ireland was the struggle for the Reconquest of Ireland; that if the Irish language movement – such as it was – failed to be active as leaders in that struggle that then the whole Irish revival must necessarily fail. Irish speakers must be revolutionaries, or give up the pretence of wanting an Irish revival.

"Se dualgas lucht na Gaeilge bheith ina soisialaigh. Siad lucht labhartha na Gaeilge sa nGaeltacht an aicme is direoile agus is buailte den mhuintir seo againn in Eirinn. Is mar a cheile agamsa, an aicme sin, pobal na Gaeilge, a shlanu agus an Ghaeilge a shlanu. Ni feidir an slanu seo a dheanamh ach le Athghabhail na hEireann – seilbh na hEireann agus a cuid maoinne uilig a thabhairt ar ais do mhuintir na hEireann. Is ionann mar sin liom an Reabhloid is ga chun na hAthghabhala sin agus slanu na Gaeilge. Mar sin gníomh ar bith a bhorrfa le meanmna phobal na Gaeilge is cuid agus cuid thabhachach den Athghabhail e."

This is a point of the greatest importance, and shows O Cadhain's basic philosophy: his equation of cultural reconquest with economic reconquest, or rather his recognition of the connection between the two. His statement can be loosely translated as follows: "It is the duty of the Irish speaking people to be socialists. The Irish-speaking community of the Gaeltacht is the poorest and most beaten down class of our people in Ireland. For me to revive that class, the Irish-speaking community, is the same as to revive the Irish language. This revival can only be achieved through the Reconquest of Ireland – the reacquisition by the people of Ireland of the ownership of Ireland and all its wealth. So for me the revival of Irish is the same as the revolution that is needed for that Reconquest. So any act which will increase the spirit of the Irish-speaking community is a part, and an important part of the Reconquest."

His message to Irish language supporters, to those who speak the language and seek its expansion, is that they must become involved in the struggle for freedom, for national liberation and for socialism. "Ni he amhain gur coir do lucht na Gaeilge a bheith pairteach i gcoga seo Athghabhala na hEireann – is e an t-aon rud e ar fiu a bheith pairteach ann in Eirinn – ach is e ar ndualgas a bheith dha chinnireacht agus dha threoru. Biodh an Ghaeilge ag stiura na reabhloide, ar an gcaoi seo biodh an Ghaeilge ar an smaointi is forasai in Eirinn: is ionann sin agus slanu na Gaeilge. Si an Ghaeilge Athghabhail na hEireann agus is i Athghabhail na hEireann slanu na Gaeilge. Si teanga na muintre a shlanos an mhuintir." Again in English: "Not only should Irish speakers be participant in this war for the Reconquest of Ireland – it is the only thing worth being part

of in Ireland – but it is our duty to be its leaders and its guides. If Irish is the steering force of the revolution, in this way Irish will be one of the most progressive forces in Ireland: that is the same as reviving Irish. The Irish language is the Reconquest of Ireland, and the Reconquest of Ireland is the Irish language. The language of the people shall revive the people.”

O Cadhain is one of the few Irish revolutionaries who correctly understood the value, and importance, of culture and language in the fight for freedom. I have quoted from him here – reasonably extensively – to illustrate what I consider to be the socialist attitude to the revival of Irish, as explained by its most conscious and clearest advocate. His death at a time of national reawakening has certainly been a severe blow to the revolutionary movement.

The failure of Misneach can be attributed to two main causes: firstly it never achieved organisational form; it remained a loose and informal grouping, identified in the public mind with fanaticism and punch-ups with the LFM. I make no argument for respectability; such a thing would horrify me as much as it would have horrified any member of Misneach. I do, however, say that nothing is possible without organisation, that the anarchy of Misneach ensured its failure. Without leadership or propaganda it has become a non-existent but convenient title for its ex-members. The second, and more important reason for its failure, was that like the establishment organisations it failed to recognise that the only future of the Irish language and the Irish people depended on the creation of a militant awareness in the Gaeltacht. In the end it neither organised in the Gaeltacht nor in the Gaeltacht.

The revival of Irish, we have asserted, is part of the revival of the Irish people; it is a means to the recovery of a culture. For that reason it should be perfectly clear that it is the culture that needs to be defended, and even clearer that it is in the present Gaeltacht that the culture lives.

If the present Gaeltacht died, Irish could only be revived by the creation of a new Gaeltacht: and the socio-economic forces which caused the death of the old would ensure the failure of a new. The death of the Gaeltacht would radically alter the whole socio-political situation in Ireland, and would remove the sole basis for Irish nationhood, the only reason for wanting an independent state.

If the revival of the Irish nation depends on the revival of Irish as the spoken language of the majority, and if that depends on defending the existent Gaeltacht, what form will, and is, the revolution to take there?

### (c) THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND THE GAELTACHT

“Mar sin gniomh ar bith a bhorrfaas le meanmna phobal na Gaeilge is cuid agus cuid thabhachtach den Athghabhail e.” The cultural question in Ireland we have asserted is a very immediate one, and this immediacy is shown in particular by the imminent extinction of the Irish-speaking communities of the Gaeltacht.

If these communities are destroyed – as they must be by the logic of the economic and social policies of the imperialist system – then the language and culture of the Irish nation goes with them. I believe that the challenge facing the existence of these historic communities is a challenge to the very existence of an Irish nation. If we lose the thread of 2,000 years of more or less unbroken tradition, despite famines, slaughters and evictions we have no national future.

Many would be socialists often argue that nothing can be done about it anyway, that the decline has gone too far. This argument may well be right, but it is usually a superficial excuse for inactivity, for avoiding the issue completely. In the same way as so-called historians of Ireland can write huge treatises with little or no reference to the disappearance of Irish as a spoken language of the community in wide areas of the country, so also is the question of the Gaeltacht ignored.

Let no one be in any doubt about what is happening. Ever since the famine the Gaeltacht (areas where the Irish language is a community vernacular) has undergone a shrinkage; so fast in some cases that whole counties became English-speaking in one generation. This rapid decline has continued until the present day. The causes of this we have already examined, but the two immediate factors are:—

Firstly – the people who live in the Gaeltacht are being driven out by the inexorable forces of capitalism and imperialism. Camden Town, Huddersfield, New York, Boston, all boast large numbers of native Irish speakers, while their ‘ceantair duchais’ are left people-less. ‘Gan teanga gan tír’ is the old slogan; ‘gan pobal gan teanga is the more correct. As the communities wither away the culture goes with them.

Secondly – that those who remain lose their faith in themselves, their culture and their future. The gombeen elements rush in their eager sycophancy to become English-speaking, and the remaining people merely follow the lead of church and state. The role of the mass media and the educational system, the treachery of the church on the national issue, coupled with the hopelessness of the situation leads to a more and more rapid anglicisation.

No republican, no socialist, no revolutionary can be neutral when faced with such issues. The destruction of the Gaeltacht is the result of the deliberate economic and social policies pursued by the puppet governments, north and south. If we are to fight imperialist policies, then we must recognise the rights of the people of the Gaeltacht as an integral and most important part of that fight – something which no Irish revolutionary has done (with the exception of O Cadhain and Mac Grianna) since Pearse and the Gaelic Leaguers of the beginning of this century. Their commitment was also more romantic and idealistic than the basic revolutionary approach of the Gaeltacht men, O Cadhain and MacGrianna. It is time the revolutionary movement in Ireland recognised its role and function.

The people of the Gaeltacht speak Irish, except the gombeen element. There is no point or value in exhortations to them to speak a language which they already speak. Their problems are basically economic like in the rest of the country; but the cultural strength of the Gaeltacht – the native culture is at least alive there – places a special position on the Gaeltacht fight.

The culture of the Gaeltacht people needs to be protected and developed, and this can only be done if there are cultural media – television, radio, newspapers, theatres etc., to service that culture. It can only be done also if there are people living in the Gaeltacht to maintain the culture. We have already argued the importance of the Gaeltacht culture for the whole Irish nation; it follows obviously then that great stress and effort must be laid on the development of the Gaeltacht revolution.

I do not intend here to assess the various Gaeltacht civil rights groups since such an analysis would take up a great deal of space if done properly. We can notice however that they are all broadly in agreement with the proposals put forward by Gluaiseacht Chearta Sibhialta na Gaeltachta calling for a local government authority for the Gaeltacht which would have control over the development of the Gaeltacht and would also, and most importantly, have control over a localised Gaeltacht radio: such a radio is indispensable if the native Gaelic culture is to show any development or even maintain ground.

The way forward is clear: the Gaeltacht must have autonomy, and it must be recognised that the revival of the Irish language is dependent on the development of the Gaeltacht.

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## MANIFESTO OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

### IN IRELAND

Come then, what are we to do? We have made an analysis of culture and revolution in Ireland, and now we must draw together our conclusions and make proposals for actions based on those conclusions.

Culture is the reflection of politics and economics, and in a society like Ireland which is thoroughly dominated economically and politically by imperialism the dominant culture is obviously an imperialist one. Since the national culture of the Irish people, whose main stream is the Gaelic heritage of the people, is in opposition to imperialism of necessity because it has historically been a source of strength to the people in resisting the destruction of the liberties and nationality of the Irish people.

Socialism is opposed to Imperialism. The concern of socialists is to recover the liberties and nationality of the Irish people, and to win social emancipation for the Irish working class in common with the working class of all nations. Socialists need to build a culture that will answer imperialism, that will gather from the traditions and heritage of the various sections of the Irish people, so

that the socialist view of humanity and of world progress can be presented and developed. Socialism needs artists and intellectuals who will perform this task, and because only socialism is progressive in the modern (the era of emerging capitalism or of feudalism is over), because only socialism is responsive to humanity, because only socialism can enrich humanity, socialists therefore have the right to demand of artists and intellectuals that they champion the cause of the people in their writings and in their art. If they do not then the socialist movement will expose them for the defenders of imperialism that they must be.

The urgency of our cause – the cause of national liberation and social emancipation of the Irish people, and particularly the Irish working class, – does not allow a socialist movement to waste time in liberal sympathy for the middle class sufferings of intellectual effetes. We want and need workers and revolutionaries to build the cultural apparatus that will develop the consciousness of the people for revolution, that will champion their past and proclaim their future.

The revival of Irish is an integral part of any cultural revolution in Ireland. This does not mean that every person will be forced by some miraculous compulsion to speak Irish. What it means is that it must be a conscious policy of Irish revolutionaries to call for those measures that will assist the revival of the Irish language: More time and programmes in Irish on television and radio. (By more time I do not mean an extra half hour; I am thinking of 50% of television, slightly less of radio but for there also to be a Gaeltacht radio station). The bias of a revival programme must be towards the Gaeltacht, for the culture of the Gaeltacht is a living and vital thing while that of the Gaeltacht in Irish is either an imitation of Imperialist culture or a weaker version of a pure original.

The revival of the Irish language depends, as O Cadhain pointed out, on the revival of those who speak it, on the revival of the Gaeltacht. It must therefore be an essential part of our policy that the Gaeltacht be defended and developed. The only people who can do this are the people of the Gaeltacht themselves, and our aim should be to encourage as much as possible the growth of Gaeltacht rights organisations and draw republican socialist support and membership from them.

We should avoid trying to tell people what to do in the Gaeltacht, as in any other place, but we should spare no effort to build a revolutionary movement there. This in view of the special importance of the Gaeltacht for the revival of Irish, and the importance of that for the Reconquest of Ireland.

But our cultural revolution is not confined to the Irish language, or the music and other traditions of Ireland. We must demand of all mass media, in the North as importantly as in the South, that these mass media be used to develop the living culture of working people. The Orangemen think that the Six County state is theirs, but there is as much time devoted to Orange culture on Northern television as there is to any other aspect of Irish culture. Plays, drama, films about Irish people are what we want from the mass media, and we should recognise the importance of campaigning for them.

In other words our cultural revolution is an attempt to undo the demoralising results of the conquest, to give the people back their dignity and belief in themselves. This we must do, because it is impossible to make revolutionaries out of people who have lost their self-respect or their belief in themselves. This is the meaning of the Black slogan — 'Black is Beautiful'. If we fail to make revolutionaries out of the Irish people then we are doomed.

Our nation faces absolute extinction, and such will be deserved, if we do like the people of famine Ireland: lie in the ditches and die. But can anyone think that that is what is before us. The people of the North have led the way in the resistance to British Imperialism, but in the building of an all-Ireland movement of the Irish working class and its allies the South will not lack behind. Victory will be ours if we have the courage and the skill to gain it.

There is an old Irish proverb, part of our lost culture 'An te nach bhfuil laidir ni folair dho a bheith glic' (if you are not strong you had best be cunning). Remember that we are fighting the longest lasting of imperialist countries, probably the cleverest, and it behoves us especially to be 'glic'.

The way to a cultural revolution is open before us. Let us realise what we are fighting for, and make sure that the result is what we wanted and that there is no repeat of the sell-outs and failures of previous generations, sell-outs and failures that arose because of our theoretical weakness at those times. Now we can win; now we will win.

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