

ONE SHILLING

# THE IRISH REPUBLICAN CONGRESS

IRISH COMMUNIST ORGANISATION PAMPHLET NUMBER THREE.

# THE REPUBLICAN CONGRESS (1934)

## Contents

	PAGE		PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1	The Athlone Manifesto	12
Fianna Fail In Power	2	The Labour Party Congress	15
The Blueshirt Opposition	6	The Republican Congress	18
The Republicans	10	CONCLUSION	22

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Published for the Irish Communist Organisation by P. Murphy,  
1 Gloucester Drive, London, N.4. to whom all enquires and  
comments should be addressed.

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## Introduction

In this pamphlet an attempt is made to give an idea of the political events in the Free State, or 26 County neo-colony of British imperialism, in the year 1934, and to do this as far as possible by using extracts from newspapers published in that year. The main political organisations were Fianna Fail, the fascist Blueshirts, the Irish Republican Army, the Republican Congress which originated in a split in the I.R.A. in March 1934, the Labour Party which did not represent the interests either of Irish labour or the Irish nation, and the Communist Party of Ireland, founded in 1933, which was active in the interest of both the working class and the nation, and which participated in the Republican Congress meeting in Dublin in September 1934.



The main armies were: a) The Free State regular army, built up by Collins and Cosgrave, sections of which were being purged to make it loyal to Fianna Fail; b) the Irish Republican Army, which had supported Fianna Fail at the elections of 1932-33, and on which De Valera relied to prevent a military coup by the Cosgrave Party during his first years in power. In 1934 the I.R.A. enjoyed a kind of semi-legality, but a couple of years later, when De Valera was confident that his regime could maintain itself without I.R.A. support, it was made illegal, and the section of the leadership which would not respond to bribery was jailed or killed; c) the League of Youth, or Blueshirts, which was the military wing of the fascist movement led by Cosgrave and O'Duffy. d) the Irish Citizen Army, which had a passing existence in 1934, and participated in the Republican Congress meeting; e) In addition to these there was De Valera's private army. By gaining state power De Valera gained control of the Free State Army. But this Army was officered by pro-treatyites loyal to Cosgrave and extensive purges had to be carried out before it could be trusted to serve Fianna Fail. While purging the Army (and the police) De Valera relied to some extent on the I.R.A., but he also had his own semi-private army constructed, recruited mainly from the I.R.A. In 1933 there was a formation called the National Guard (which had no connection with the Blueshirt National Guard) which was intended to serve as a bridge between the I.R.A. and the Free State Army; to attract revolutionary elements from the I.R.A. and enlist them in the service of the Free State. In 1934 the Brov Harriers was set up. This was an organisation of political police with very wide powers. In its early stages it must be regarded as De Valera's private army rather than as a secret organisation of the state.

It was in this complex situation that the Republican Congress came into existence in the summer of 1934.

## Fianna Fail in Power

Fianna Fail came to power in the Irish Free State in the General Election of February 1932 in which it won 72 seats. This was not an overall majority in the Dail. The Fianna Fail government depended on the votes of 7 Labour T.D.s. In January 1933 De Valera called another election and won an overall majority with

pendence of imperialism. This programme also won it the active support of the I.R.A., which declared: "We are supporting Fianna Fail, it is the way of driving out of public life a party which has sold itself to the British Empire."

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On St. Patrick's Day 1934, the year of the split in the I.R.A., and of the Athlone Manifesto and the Republican Congress, De Valera, in a broadcast to the U.S.A., gave his view of the situation after two years of Fianna Fail government:

"Two years have passed since last I had the privilege of speaking to the friends of Ireland in America. Our government had just entered its first period of office, and in my address I adverted to some of the problems that were confronting us and pressing for solution. In common with other countries we were threatened with a dangerous economic crisis. But, in our case, there were special features. Having been governed for centuries in the interest of another country, we had no manufacturing industries to speak of. Factories in Britain organised on a vast scale for competition in the world markets had crushed them out, and were supplying us with practically all our requirements in manufactured goods. To such a state of dependence were we reduced that, although we were in this part of Ireland only 3 millions of people, we were buying from Britain more than any other country in the world was buying from her... The one industry left us was agriculture, and that was mainly pastoral. We paid Britain for her manufactured goods mainly by the export of livestock and by animal products such as butter and eggs. These we had to sell in the British market in intense competition with similar produce from several other countries. In such conditions fewer people could be supported in our land. The bullock replaced the human being. Our country was being depopulated... For generations we had been rearing our children for export. But now the great world slump in agricultural prices had come upon us to destroy us completely, it seemed. Chilled and frozen meat from the trans-oceanic prairies were being substituted in the homes of the unemployed workers in Britain for the fresh meat which they had been able to buy in the days of prosperity...

"It was clear that the British market as we had known it in the past was gone... Only on ruinous terms could we trade for Britain's manufactured goods with our agricultural produce. In addition we were ~~paying~~ to Britain in cash, an annual sum which relatively to our resources imposed a burden upon us greater than that placed on Germany by war reparations. To pay that sum, which we were satisfied was neither legally nor morally due from us took, in 1931, practically the whole value of our export of fat cattle, leaving us with only eight-eence a head for them. Economically our country seemed doomed. Unemployment was growing apace, and to make matters worse, the outlet of emigration to the United States was stopped.



77 seats.

Fianna Fail was a party representing

"mainly the interests of the smaller capitalists, traders, middle farmers and owners of small industry, as distinct from banking, transport and the highly profitable brewing industry, all of which were largely controlled by British capital and by those groups which support Cosgrave." (Communist Review, February, 1933)

Fianna Fail came to power as the representative of Irish national capitalism. It was ~~over~~ overflowing with confidence in its ability to oust imperialism from the Free State and to establish political, economic and cultural independence of the Free State by establishing a thriving anti-imperialist form of capitalism based on the national resources and serving the needs of the nation.

Since his break with Sinn Fein in 1926 De Valera had carefully built his party on an anti-imperialist programme, gathering the support of the anti-imperialist sections of the nation: the national capitalists, the petty-bourgeoisie, the small and middle farmers and the workers. He won the support of the small farmers by promising to complete the agrarian revolution -- that is, to break up and distribute the estates of the big landowners who were represented by the Cosgrave party -- and to stop payment on the land annuities. He prepared to gather working class and small farming support as early as 1926 when, in his proposals to the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis which constituted the ground for his break with Sinn Fein, he included the following:

Section (4) Economic Policy

"That with the political programme shall be associated a social and economic programme which will make it clear that the Sinn Fein organisation whilst remaining broadly national, will regard it as a special duty to watch over and to safeguard the interests of the labouring classes, and of the working and small farmers, and that a Republican administration will proceed to a practical realisation of --

- a) The social ideals embodied in the democratic programme of the first Dail Eireann;
- b) The ideal of an Ireland self-supporting economically"

The proposals to the 1926 Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis, which were rejected by Sinn Fein, became the basis for the Fianna Fail programme. With this programme Fianna Fail gained the support of the masses of workers and small farmers in the Free State for Irish national capitalism in its attempt to establish it indepe-



"To meet this alarming situation, our party in the General Election of Feb. 1932, proposed that the national policy of self-sufficiency be adopted. This meant the protection of our manufacturing industries so that they might be developed to meet our needs in manufactured goods. The production of these goods would give employment to our young workers, and each industrial worker so provided for would expand the home market for the produce of our farms. Further, although we were nominally an agricultural country, we were actually importing millions of pounds worth of agricultural produce. We proposed to substitute native produce for these imports also. Our agricultural industry needed protection no less than the manufacturing industries.

"It will interest our friends to learn how we have fared in the execution of our programme, and, after two years of effort, what progress has been made.

"First, then, as regards the agricultural industry. The imports of animal products such as bacon, butter and cheese, which amounted to some millions of pounds in 1931 -- this veritable 'carrying of coals to Newcastle' has now ceased. Our market is completely reserved for our own farmers. Our dairying industry has been saved and production stimulated by state subsidy... Our wheat area has been quadrupled in two years. Our flour mills that were idle or working on part time are now working 3 shifts a day at full capacity. Our import of flour will completely disappear within a year. Three new beet factories were also completed this year... Foreign coal will gradually be substituted by native peat... The division of the larger estates and ranches into smaller economic holdings can, as a result of recent legislation, proceed now with a speed four times as great as heretofore... We have also reduced farmers' rents or annual payments by one-half... In the manufacture of apparel, which was a large item on our import list, similar progress is being made... Production of woollen and worsted industries has also been greatly increased... Our furniture and cabinet imports are gradually disappearing. Plans for factories to supply our own requirements in cement and paper are under consideration. In every field there is intense industrial activity." (St. Patrick's Day Broadcast to U.S.A. by Eamonn De Valera. Reported in the Irish Press, March 19, 1934).

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De Valera was confident that Irish capitalism could oust imperialism from the Free State and make the Free State a bulwark of Republicanism in Ireland. He represented the native capitalists, but it must be conceded that, at this time, he genuinely believed, and could produce some sort of evidence in support of his belief, that the development of native capitalism would destroy imperialism and establish a society independent of imperialism in the 26 Cos. In his appeals to the nation he appeared as a genuine Republican concerned with the principles of



Republicanism. Sean Lemass, on the other hand, was then, as he is now, a political spiv, as the following extract from the Irish Press of March 20th 1934 will make clear:

"A striking appeal to the women of Ireland to assist in the revival of home industry was made last night by the Minister for Industry and Commerce (Sean Lemass) at a meeting of the Women's Industrial Development Association in the Abbey Theatre. Almost the whole of the national income, he said, passes through the hands of the housekeeper. They spend the mens' wages and thus have control of the spending power. The time had come now when they could press the campaign for the support of Irish industry on the materialistic ground that "it was good for business"... In respect of some goods prices were higher than prices of imported goods. 'I am very glad of that' said the Minister, 'because the higher price arises entirely from the fact that the workers aren't paid better here than in the countries from which the goods used to be imported...'"

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## The Blueshirt Opposition

The Irish fascist movement, or, as it is usually called, the Blueshirt movement, was the response of the commercial (importing) capitalists, whose interests had been represented by the Cosgrave government, to the coming to power of Fianna Fail in 1932. The commercial capitalist interest, led by Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins, had signed the Treaty with imperialism in December, 1921, and had set up the Free State and made war on the Republic in 1922. Griffith and Collins died in August 1922. W.T. Cosgrave and Kevin O'Higgins then took over the leadership of the Free State Party and government. Cosgrave was the organiser and manipulator, who worked mainly behind the scenes. O'Higgins was the 'strong man', the public representative of the brutality and ruthlessness of the Free State. He would undoubtedly have become the Irish Hitler, the Blueshirt Leader, in 1932 but for the fact that he was shot dead one Sunday morning in the middle of 1927 while on his way to mass in Killiney.

The Cosgrave party represented the commercial capitalists and the ranchers. Fianna Fail came to power on a programme of setting up an independent manufacturing capitalism in Ireland which would put an end to the import of basic commodities and would thus cut the ground from under the Cosgrave capitalists; would dry up the source of their profits. It was another part of the Fianna Fail programme to split up the ranches and turn them into smallholdings. If Fianna Fail had carried out its programme thoroughly ranching and finance capitalism



would have disappeared from Irish society. Immediately Fianna Fail came to power in 1932 the ranchers and finance capitalists began to develop a fascist movement to protect their interests. And, indeed, if Fianna Fail had based itself on the people and attempted to carry out a thorough anti-imperialist programme only a fascist movement could have made any real attempt to defend the ranching and commercial interests.

Cosgrave's government was more of a coalition organised by Cosgrave than a coherent political party. The defeat of 1932 caused a certain amount of fragmentation. New organisations came into existence. One was the National Centre Party, formed by Frank MacDermott, Independent T.D. for Co. Roscommon, out of the National Farmers and Rate Payers League, which represented commerce and big farming. The Centre Party stood openly for the Empire. Its aim was to unite the country by forming an alliance of big business in North and South, to unite Ireland as a colony.

In August 1932 the Army Comrades Association was formed by Colonel T. f. O'Higgins, a brother of Kevin O'Higgins. It was composed mainly of members of the I.R.A. who had followed Collins into the Free State and who had been prominent in forming the Free State mercenary army and making war on the Republic. Early in 1933 General O'Duffy, an ardent Free Stater and follower of Collins, the organiser of the Free State police, the man who had been given command of the Free State Army in 1924 when reductions in the size of the army caused certain Generals, who had supported the Free State because they had believed the tale that the army would be strengthened in preparation for a re-start of the war with Britain, to see that the Free State government had no intention of resuming the war, and caused then to mutiny against the Cosgrave government: O'Duffy, the loyal Free Stater, was sacked from his position as Commissioner of Police by De Valera, and Col. Broy was given the job of organising the Fianna Fail political police. O'Duffy then followed his leader Cosgrave into the fascist movement, and became the figure-head leader of it. In the spring of 1933 the Army Comrades Association became the National Guard with O'Duffy as Director-General. In August of 1933 a newspaper called "The Blueshirt" was published, and the campaign to build O'Duffy into the Irish Hitler was launched at mass meetings throughout the country. In the columns of 'the Blueshirt' the country was told that O'Duffy was "the symbol of the awakening Erin" provided by "a gracious Providence" to lead the Nation. The National Guard planned to hold a mass rally on Leinster Lawn, in front of the government building, on August 12th 1933. Trains bringing thousands from every part of the 26 Counties were to converge in Dublin on that date. Every August the Cosgrave government used to hold a mass rally in Leinster Lawn in Commemoration of Arthur Griffith, Michael Collins and Kevin O'Higgins, the founder of the Free State. Fianna



Fail discontinued the practice. The National Guard had hoped that the planned rally for August 12th 1933 would be its march on Rome, leading to the downfall of De Valera and the victory of fascism in the Free State. But De Valera was prepared to call the fascist bluff. He enforced the Public Safety Act, made it clear that he would meet violence with violence, and gave the I.R.A. a free hand against the Blueshirts.

The demonstration was called off and the fascists reorganised their forces. A new party, the United Ireland Party, was organised. It was an amalgamation of Cumann na n Gaedhal (Cosgrave), the Centre Party (MacDermott) and the National Guard. O'Duffy was its figurehead president. Cosgrave, MacDermott and James Dillon were its controlling vice-presidents. Its youth wing, the Young Ireland Association, wore a uniform and continued the military organisation of the National Guard. In Dec. 1933 the Young Ireland Association was banned. It changed its name to the League of Youth. In 1934, then, the fascist movement was composed of a political wing, the United Ireland Party, and a military wing, the League of Youth. It represented the Irish professional, commercial and big landowning interests against the manufacturing capitalist and smaller farming interests represented by Fianna Fail. Collins, Griffith and O'Higgins were its heroes. O'Duffy was its Fuehrer. Cosgrave and MacDermott were founders. The gentry of Ireland were prominent on its platforms.

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In February 1934 Cosgrave declared in the Free State Dail:

"The Blueshirts have been victorious in Italy, and Hitler's shirts were victorious in Germany, so, assuredly, the Blueshirts will be victorious in the Irish Free State."

Ernest Blythe, present director of the Abbey Theatre, spoke for the rights of the supermen against the rabble:

"The Dail is not suitable for modern government. This miscellaneous assembly is not a suitable assembly for discussing the business of the Nation."

Professor James Hogan of Cork University produced a fascist diatribe against communism, "Could Ireland become Communist?", in which even the right wing of the I.R.A. was denounced as Communist. In a lecture delivered at Enniscorthy in 1934, and later published as a pamphlet by the Irish Messenger Office, the Rev. P.J. Gannon S.J. declared:

"Lenin and Stalin will rank in the future with Attila, Genseric, Genghis Khan or Tamurlane as scourges of God, historic potents comparable to famine, pestilence or earthquake. Their work will be found almost wholly destructive and sterile... For a time Bolshevism threatened Italy. But Mussolini -- probably the shrewdest politician of the 20th century, -- saw that it spelt ruin for the country, and



led his people back from the abyss towards a position of direct and irreconcilable opposition to its spirit and principles. And the result? Italy, which in 1922 was politically nearly negligible... became in five years one of the Great Powers."

Communism was denounced as an international Jewish conspiracy:

"The founders of Communism were practically all Jews. This can scarcely be a mere coincidence. It may appear singular that Marx, Engels, Lassalle and Ricardo were all Jews. Likewise such Communist leaders as Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Litvinov and Jakovlev are Jews, as well as the vast majority of the present rulers of Soviet Russia... The Russian Government is not a national government, but a Jewish oligarchy imposed on a defenceless people." (The 'Catholic Mind' May 1934)

Even the fascist subjugation of women, its attempt to deny their humanity and turn them into mere breeding animals, was actively approved of by the Blueshirts and their sympathisers:

"The Action of the National Athletic and Cycling Association in ruling that at least one event for ladies should be included in every fixture of the Association is to be deplored. No more retrograde and unChristian step has been taken in the sphere of Irish athletics than this... Our Holy Father The Pope has on more than one occasion condemned mixed athletics. In fact we would go further and say that he has condemned the intensive cultivation of all forms of strenuous athletics for women as highly undesirable both from a moral and eugenical point of view. In the first place a very serious view is taken of competitions in which men and women compete in common, and especially since such competitions destroy all vestiges of feminine modesty. On purely eugenical grounds, the objection is equally grave; so much so that Signor Mussolini, who is to be admired for many things, does not permit strenuous athletics for women. The feminine body is not suited to such avocations, and the cultivation of manly athletics does not augur well for future motherhood." (Catholic Mind) March 1934

The Leaders message to his followers on St. Patrick's Day 1934 says:

"Today... I wish you to resolve once more that as you have taken the the Cross of St. Patrick as your shield and his blue as your colour, you will in every act and word be true always to the high and noble traditions of your race, of which St. Patrick is the patron... Fear not the opposition of petty tyrants... Posterity will be our judges. Our ideal will triumph: the future is ours. Onward, League of Youth, onward to the New Ireland!"

New Ireland is fascist Ireland, Ireland of the corporate state. A Blue-shirt policy pamphlet said its aim was to secure practical recognition that the interests of the workers and employers were the same.

"The Corporative system is not merely a theory or a possibility. It



is a practical possibility for Ireland and is now a concrete reality in the life of the Italian people".

The Blueshirt propoganda was loaded with a bigoted form of nationalism and intense racialism. Its ideological progenitors were Italian and German fascistism and the form of "Republicanism" developed by Collins in 1922 -- that is, a bigoted, racist kind of nationalism tailored to confuse the people and serve imperialism in Ireland. It churned out this pseudo-Republicanism, but in fact stood squarely for the Empire.. Its purpose was to destroy the Republican and Labour movements in the interests of imperialism. While O'Duffy was delivering his demagogic orations about the New Ireland, Mrs. Redmond T.D., addressing a United Ireland Party meeting in Clonmel, said that

"the salvation of the farmer lay in the re-opening of the British market. That might sound unpatriotic but...the government would do a good day's work for Ireland if they tried to make an honourable settlement with Britain and stopped the cry of a Republic." (Irish Press. April 10)

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In March 1934 O'Duffy put the membership of the League of Youth, the Blueshirt army, at 102,000.

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## The Republicans

An I.R.A. Convention was held in March 1934. By this time Fianna Fail had been in power for two years in the Irish Free State. From 1922 to 1932, under the regimes of Collins and Cosgrave, the Free State had been an instrument for oppressing the Irish people in the interests of imperialism. From 1932 to 1934 it was, under De Valera's government, an instrument for opposing British imperialism in the interests of the manufacturers and smaller property owners. Payment of the land annuities had been stopped and the 26 Cos. was engaged in economic war with Britain. For the I.R.A. the question of its relation to the Fianna Fail government was the major question. Within the 26 Cos. Fianna Fail had engaged in struggle against imperialism in the interests of the property owners. It had not sent its army into the Six Counties, but it could give good reasons for this, and could make promises.

(In 1933 De Valera said: "the time has not come for that a new proclamation of the Republic, and we must content ourselves today with the declaration that it is the goal for which we strive and that we shall not rest until we have reached it.. Let us remove those forms of imperialism one by one, so that this state that we control



may be a Republic in fact, and that when the time comes the proclaiming of a Republic may involve no more a ceremony than the official confirmation of a status already attained." Irish Press. April 24th 1933. It was along these lines that De Valera justified himself up to the time that he made his pact with imperialism in 1938.)

Fianna Fail therefore had the support of the majority of the propertied anti-imperialist forces in the Free State. But it did not represent the working class interest. The I.R.A. leadership had the idea that it could use De Valera government in the Republican cause. There was extensive co-operation between the I.R.A. and Fianna Fail. Some thought that De Valera was a virtual prisoner of the I.R.A., that the I.R.A. was, because of his dependence on it, able to dictate his policies. A couple of years later it was clear to everyone that the opposite was true: that it was De Valera who was using the I.R.A. without conceding much in return for its services. He won over many members of the I.R.A. to Fianna Fail, and later he broke the power of the I.R.A. without much trouble. As a De Valera-ite put it:

"Mr. De Valera, who had been taunted with his inability to control the gunmen of the I.R.A., chose his own moment to make nonsense of such an accusation" (J.B. Morton: The New Ireland: 1938)

Fianna Fail could only have carried the anti-imperialist struggle through to the end by basing itself on the working class. But, since it represented the national capitalists it could not do this. Did the I.R.A. represent the working class? It did not. Though it was composed mainly of workers it did not represent the working class interest. This fact made it incapable of taking up an attitude to the De Valera government which would further the Republican cause. Only an organisation representing the revolutionary interests of the working class could have done that, because only the working class existed in conditions of irreconcilable antagonism to British monopoly capitalism in Ireland. Because the I.R.A. leadership represented propertied interests because, in this period, it represented virtually the same interests as those which Fianna Fail served in its first years in power, it was incapable of giving a clear and resolute leadership to the Republican movement.

"The leadership of the I.R.A. is not playing the independent role which its past traditions warrants. They are placing too much trust in the good intentions of the Fianna Fail leadership and are dragging at the tail of Fianna Fail instead of playing a leading part in the struggle against British imperialism." (From "Ireland's fight against imperialist aggression"; an election statement issued, in 1932, by the Secretariat of the Revolutionary Workers' Groups in Ireland. The Workers' Groups united in 1933 to form the Communist Party.)



There were a number of class conscious workers, with a long history of Republican struggle, in the I.R.A. These included Peadar O'Donnell and George Gilmore. They realised that the Republican struggle could only succeed if it was based on the workers and small farmers and led by the working class. At the I.R.A. Convention held in March 1934 an attempt was made to transform the I.R.A. into an organisation representing the workers and small farmers. Or, to put it another way, an attempt was made by the class conscious workers in the I.R.A. to oust the bourgeois leadership. This attempt came close to succeeding, but the leadership of the I.R.A. was retained by the bourgeoisie in the form of Sean MacBride and Maurice Twomey. The I.R.A. remained an organisation representing the nationalist propertied interest.

The working class section, whose attempt to win the leadership of the I.R.A. in the interest of the workers and small farmers was defeated, held a meeting in Athlone a short time later, and issued a statement which is known as the Athlone Manifesto.

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## The Athlone Manifesto

"We believe that a Republic of a united Ireland will never be achieved except through a struggle which uproots capitalism on its way. We cannot conceive of a free Ireland with a subject working class; we cannot conceive of a subject Ireland with a free working class." This teaching of Connolly represented the deepest instinct of the oppressed Irish nation.

"The fight for freedom in our day has been weakened by the failure of the workers in the North-East to see that their freedom is inseparable from the national struggle for freedom. Now that deep wedges of workers there are freeing themselves from the illusions which so long held them in bondage to their imperialist exploiters the national issue must be brought sharply forward.

"On the other hand the Republican movement in the 26 Counties must see that Irish capitalism is the holdfast at this end for the Imperial forces which in the final push for freedom will be called out to maintain the connection 'with an economy of British lives'.

"The lip-service paid to the Republic by leaderships that are tethered to Irish capitalism can therefore only confuse sincere Republicans-



ans and withhold them from their struggle for freedom.

"Such organisations steadily dwarf the national demands. It was such an organisation that reduced the Republic to the stature of document NO. 2 in 1921.

"It was a government based on such an organisation which when the British challenged the sovereignty of this nation on the Annuities met that challenge not by raising the Republic and rallying the people, but by waving British Acts of Parliament and a parade of lawyers.

"This retreat from the Republic was not, unfortunately, resisted by those organisations which would have rallied the people on the high ground of the Republic. Had the I.R.A. leadership understood that the economic war was not being fought to free Ireland but to serve Irish capitalism they would have carried out this mobilisation first before giving any support to that war. On account of their failure the Republican issue has been pushed farther into the background.

"This mistake must now be remedied. A congress of Republican opinion must be assembled to make the Republic a main issue dominating the whole political field, and to outline what are the forms of activity that move to its support.

"Into this congress will come anti-Imperialists from N.E. Ulster representing sections of the workers who have hitherto held aloof from, or have even been hostile to the national struggle. The areas of recruitment for Republican forces in the South of Ireland are:-

(1) Industrial workers who are being dragged into degrading working conditions to found a factory system at a time when the experiences of Europe and America are there to warn us of the horrors ahead;

(2) In Gaeltacht areas which must be in close support of the Irish working class. The waste of confining this youth in among rocks to dig with spades and to face the horrors of migratory conditions is becoming clear to an ever-widening area of Gaeltacht minds. The Gaeltacht is the pound of Ireland that went down at Kinsale. The Gaeltacht youth must get help to tumble its walls and get free access to the broad ranches;

(3) Small farmers and petty traders are strongly represented in Republican Organisations and here is urgent work, for this section of the nation can only free itself as the ally of the working



class. The Land Commission will never be abolished and the road open to the ranches except when a revolutionary government of workers and small farmers has achieved power. Only under such a government can agricultural wage-earners of today be rescued from their sub-human conditions. Only under such a government can this present Civil Service be dismantled and rebuilt from its lower ranks at wages related to what general conditions in field and factory can afford.

"As the Republic when established will be a Republic of the workers and small farmers, the forces that will achieve it must be drawn from these sections of our life. In order that these forces may be drawn forward to their task, we, on their behalf, call for a Republican Congress, and pledge ourselves to take up the work necessary to build it.

"Signed

(Mrs.) N. CO'U'B., Belfast; M. Price Dublin; S. McGuinness, Offally; P. Lynch, do; T. Maguire, Collinstown, Westmeath; F. Ryan Dublin; S. Humphries do; M. Laverty Belfast; B. Corrigan Malranny, Co. Mayo; E. Coyle Tirchonail; P. Norton Athlone; J. Ralph, Castlebar; S. McCann, Derry; J. Doyle, Dublin; R. Emmett do; P. Galtin, Leitrim; John Joe Goey do; C. Reynolds, Galway; S. de Burca do; Michael Feely, Kiltoun, Roscommon; G. Gilmore Dublin; S. Mulgrew, Malranny, Co. Mayo; E. Murray, Newport, do; P. O'Donnell, TirChaill, Liam Kelly Dublin; J. Cahill do; Peter Doolan Offally;

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A press statement was issued with the Manifesto:

"A conference of men and women prominently associated with the Republican movement in Connacht, Ulster and Leinster met in Athlone on Sunday. As the meeting was hurriedly called, they were unable to arrange for Munster representatives.

"The purpose of the Conference was to discuss the necessity for bringing out of the present obscurity the realities upon which the fight for the Republic must be based and so rescue the Republican issue from being merely the theme of speeches and make it a live, active force in the country.

"The opinion of the Athlone Conference was that the instinctive desires of the great body of workers and small farmers who bear the brunt of the struggle against British imperialism are not given expression in the day-to-day activities of any existing Republican organisation.

"The Athlone Conference decided that a call for a congress would meet



with an immediate and deep response and made itself the Organising Committee and prepared and signed a statement calling it.

"The Organising Committee charged provincial councils with the organising work as under:-

Leinster - Seamus McGuinness, Offally; Michael Price, George Gilmore, Frank Ryan, Sheila Humphries, R. Emmett and Liam Kelly, Dublin; Tom McGuire, Westmeath.

Ulster - Seamus McCann, Derry (Mrs.) Nora Connolly O'Brien and Marie Laverty, Belfast; Eitne Coyle and Peadar O'Donnell, Tírchon-aill.

Connacht - Brian Corrigan, Edward Murray and Thos. Ralph, Mayo; Charles Reynolds and Seamus de Burca, Galway; T. Gilroy, Roscommon; Patric Galton and John J. Hoey, Leitrim.

"In view of the conditions of oppression and coercion at present existing in the six counties, the Conference decided it was inadvisable at this stage to publicly announce the names of those at present residing in the Six Counties who are associated with the call for and preliminary organising work of the Congress.

"The Organising Committee charged Michael Price, Mrs. Nora Connolly O'Brien and Frank Ryan with the tasks of the secretarial work co-ordinating the work of the Provisional Councils and of acting as secretaries to the Republican Congress campaign."

(Published in the Irish Press, April 10th 1934.)

## Labour Party Congress

The Republican Congress was to be a united front of the Republican forces with the object of combating the fascist movement and leading the Republican struggle. Numerous organisations, including Sinn Fein and the Labour Party were invited to send delegates to the inaugural meeting of the Congress to be held in Dublin in September. At the Annual Congress of the Labour Party, which was held shortly before the meeting of the Republican Congress, R. J. Connolly moved the following motion:

"Believing that the dangers which face the workers of this and every other country from Capitalism, Fascism, International War and Imperialism, are too real and serious for us to remain parties to artificial divisions within the working class ranks, we call for a



truce among all who stand for an Irish Workers' Republic and a united front against the common enemy. We recommend that in order to achieve united action the Administrative Council invite members of the T.U.C., the Republican movement and other Republican bodies to exchange views with them on this question." He called for consultations with the Republican Congress, the Citizen Army and the I.R.A.

This attempt to draw <sup>the</sup> Labour Party into the anti-imperialist struggle was opposed by the Labour Party leadership. This leadership bears a heavy responsibility for the extent of the present oppression of the Irish workers and the Irish nation. Twice, in revolutionary situations, they threw all their weight on the side of national oppression and class exploitation. These creatures, claiming to be the heirs of Connolly, handed over the leadership of the workers in the war of independence to the bourgeoisie. They refused to participate in the anti-imperialist struggle of 1919-21, except as servants of the bourgeoisie. In 1921-22 they threw all their weight on the side of the imperialists, the Free Staters. They did their utmost to carry the workers under their influence to the side of imperialism. Mouthing revolutionary phrases, they supported the greatest counter-revolutionary force in existence at that time, British imperialism. In the early days of the Free State they supported Cosgrave's terror by behaving as a conciliatory opposition in the Dail. Thomas Johnson, the Labour Party leader, was made a Free State Senator in return for services rendered to imperialism, and delivered a eulogy in the Dail on the arch-terrorist, the most faithful servant of imperialism in the Free State, Kevin O'Figgins, when he died a natural death in 1927. Again in 1934, when society was once more in motion in Ireland; when De Valera's government was in a struggle against imperialism in the 26 Counties, which though far from thorough, and ready for compromise, was nevertheless a real struggle; when the situation demanded a unifying of the strongest anti-imperialist class forces in the nation, the workers and small farmers in order to bring pressure to bear on De Valera to intensify the struggle, and to expose him thoroughly to the people and to demolish him the instant he began to compromise: in this situation the Labour Party leaders devoted all their efforts to disrupting the anti-imperialist united front, and to splitting the working class movement.

Connolly's motion for co-operation with the Republican movement was opposed by the intellectual <sup>of the pro-imperialist leadership of</sup> the Labour Party, Cathal O'Shannon, who said:

"Was it suggested that they should exchange views with, say, Peadar O'Donnell? He had no views and never had any. The Irish Workers' Party and the United Front Movement were already split from top to bottom, nevertheless they wanted to unite and to exchange views with the Labour Party... If anyone wanted to exchange views let them come into the Labour Movement."



J. McGarry (I.N.T.O.)

"could not understand why they should reach out to other bodies to come and exchange views with them."

Senator Johnson said that

"'Other working class organisations' merely meant the Communist Party. The whole propoganda for a united front was merely an attempt here as in England, France and other countries, to nobble the Labour Party under the name of and by the officials of the Communist Party." (I.L.P. Annual Report. 1933-4.)

At the same Congress where they rejected participation in the anti-imperialist movement, the Labour Party leaders set about splitting the labour movement along religious lines, and turning the Labour Party into a sectarian organisation. The following motion was proposed and carried:

"Believing that the aim of the Irish Labour movement must continue to be the establishment of a just Social Order based on Christian teaching, this Conference will strongly oppose any attempt to introduce anti-Christian communistic doctrines into the movement."

At a time when the interest of the working class demanded that the anti-imperialist movement should be strengthened by all possible means, the Labour Party leaders, remaining true to their imperialist nature, refused to participate in the Republican movement, and made use of religious sectarianism to divide the workers, just as the Carson fascists and the Ancient Order of Hibernian capitalists had done before the Rising.

.....

SINN FEIN The bourgeois Sinn Fein, which was supposed to be dedicated to the struggle for the Republic, also refused to participate in the Republican united front. To an invitation to send delegates to the Republican Congress, it replied:

"We received your communications and enclosures and laid the same before our Standing Committee. We have been directed to point out to you that Sinn Fein could not enter into political association with any party except on the basis of acceptance of the existing Irish Republic for which Connolly and other martyrs of 1916 gave their lives."

The "existing Irish Republic", though it had been destroyed by the guns of the Free State in 1922 and 1923, continued to have a ghostly existence in the imaginative minds of Brian O'Higgins and Mary Mac Sweeney and the Standing Committee of Sinn Fein, who also considered themselves to be its government. They would only enter into "political association with any party" if that party recognised it as the government of the "existing Republic" - which was one way of keeping the leadership of the Republican struggle in bourgeois hands. But



the class conscious workers in the Republican Congress were more concerned with engaging in real struggle against imperialism to bring a real Republic one actual step nearer, than with bowing before the ghostly heroes of the "existing Republic". And Sinn Fein preferred to play at being the government of the "existing Republic" than to engage with the masses in real struggle for a real Republic. The bourgeoisie do not easily acknowledge the fact that they are no longer capable of leading the Republican struggle. And this instance makes it clear that they are capable of splitting the anti-imperialist movement if the workers become the leaders of it.

## The Republican Congress

The Irish Republican Congress met in Rathmines Town Hall, Dublin, on September 29th and 30th. 186 delegates were present from Republican groups, Trade Union organisations, Tenants' Leagues, the Communist Party of Ireland, the Irish Citizen Army, the Unemployed workers' Movement, etc. The Congress dealt with two main questions, one concerning organisation, the other concerning the political line of the movement.

"Two main opposing resolutions had been brought forward from the Organising Bureau almost on the eve of the opening of the Congress in place of the original 'Republican Resolution' previously submitted to the delegates. This course was necessitated as a result of difference of opinion which had arisen within the Organising Bureau itself on political and organisational questions... A keen debate on both resolutions occupied the major bulk of the Congress proceedings." (International Press Correspondence. Oct. 12th; report by J. Shields)

The account of the Congress debate which is given here is based on reports in the Irish Press, Labour Monthly and International Press Correspondence. (Inprecor)

The motions before the Congress are known as Majority Resolutions A & B, and Minority Resolutions A and B. The A Resolutions dealt with the political line of the Congress and the B Resolutions with its organisation. The group proposing the Majority Resolutions included R.J. Connolly, Nora Connolly O'Brien and Michael Price (the latter representing the Irish Citizen Army). The Minority group included Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and Frank Ryan. Majority and minority refer



to the relative strengths of the groups in the Organising Bureau and not at the Congress meeting.

THE RESOLUTIONS

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"Majority Resolution A had been brought forward in the name of the Army Council, of the Irish Citizen Army, and adopted by a majority of the Organising Bureau... Briefly stated, its main thesis was to the effect that the line of policy which should go out from the Congress should be that accounts must first be settled with the two existing States in Ireland, and afterwards would come the successful struggle to break the hold of British imperialism, and therefore the slogan of action must be laid down as the direct struggle for a Workers' Republic." (Imprecor)  
"According to this Resolution it was stated that: 'only by establishing a new political and economic system of society can we assure ourselves of Freedom from English domination'. It thus presented the question in such a way that the path of struggle was depicted as leading through the socialist revolution to national independence." (Labour Monthly. Nov. 1934.)

As against that the Minority Resolution A urged that 'the Republican Congress become the rallying centre for the mass movement expressing all the forces for complete national independence', and declared that 'the dominating political task is the realisation of the Republic. The line of struggle presented by the Minority group was therefore the line of driving forward for the smashing of the imperialist hold and securing national liberation as opening up the way for social emancipation" (Labour Monthly). 'It called for a new and decisive campaign to achieve this through building the united front of the working class and small farmers in the struggle against the imperialist and native exploiters... Whereas the Majority Resolution referred only in vague, general terms to the struggle for the 'needs of the small farmers and workers' without attempting to specify further on the matter, the Minority Resolution laid down as follows:

'The Republican Congress campaign to organise the widest possible backing for all working class and small farmer struggles: it will work to achieve ever wider support for wage demovements, unemployed demands, workers' housing struggles. It will back and initiate struggles of landless men for free land. The Congress raises the demand that all bank actions against working farmers must be withdrawn, that every attempt by banks to collect either interest or capital must be campaigned against with all possible energy; that the working farmers must be freed from the Land Annuities; that wages on all work under the Land Commission and Board of Works shall be not less than 40 shillings weekly. The Congress pledges itself to support agricultural wage earners in their fight for increased wages and social insurance, and will help to organise an agricultural wage earners union.'" (Imprecor)



The difference between the two resolutions boiled down to this: the Majority group wanted an immediate struggle for socialism, while the Minority group held that the immediate struggle should be for national independence and that this would lead on to, and prepare the ground for, a socialist revolution. The Majority line assumed that it would be possible to sneak through a socialist revolution when imperialism wasn't looking. The Minority group held that the imperialist question could not be side-stepped, or put off until after there had been a socialist revolution. British imperialism and its allies in the Irish capitalist class were the main enemy of the Irish people. Until this enemy had been dealt with socialist revolution would not be possible. This line was based on the Comintern analysis of Ireland (See 'Irish Communist' No. 3)

THE DEBATE "The political resolution of the Majority Group was introduced by R.J. Connolly,.. He pointed out how the working class was coming to the forefront in the struggle and from this drew the conclusion that the main slogan <sup>of the workers' republic</sup> had always typified the revolutionary struggle in Ireland and was the only slogan which would really arouse mass enthusiasm" (Inprecor)

"Nora Connolly O'Brien, who seconded, argued that only by raising such a slogan as that which the Majority Resolution advanced would it be possible to bring the workers of Northern Ireland into the fight. (Inprecor)

"Mr. Warren, Six Co. Socialist Party, said it was futile to try to attract the Northern revolutionary workers on the basis of an Irish Republic, because by that they understood a capitalist republic as envisaged by Fianna Fail." (Irish Press)

Micael Price held that it was due to the lack of the slogan for a Workers' Republic that the national struggle in the past had failed to ~~emerge~~ triumph. He said that the Minority viewpoint was based on opportunism and expediency and ran counter to the aims for which James Connolly fought.

The main speaker for the Minority Resolution, for the political line of struggle for an independent Republic was Peadar O'Donnell, who said that

"the mistake must not be made of confusing the stage of struggle which was facing the country at the moment. He emphasised that it was necessary to detach those large masses of genuine nationalist opinion who were still under the influence of De Valera, demonstrate to them that the Fianna Fail government had betrayed the fight for the Irish Republic, and gather the whole power of the Republican



masses in united front action on the basis of the line set out by the Minority Resolution to drive forward the unity and independence of Ireland" (Inprecor). "Mr. Peadar O'Donnell...said that his quarrel with Mr. De Valera was not that Mr. De Valera was not a socialist but that he had ceased to be a Republican" (Irish Press).

"Sean Murray of the Communist Party of Ireland opposed the Majority Resolution. He stated that it sidetracked the question, and that the purpose of the Congress must be to form a mighty Republican movement on the basis of ~~an~~ alliance between the workers and the masses of ~~bo-~~ or farmers which would smash Britain's hold on Ireland. In the past, he said, the leadership of the Republican movement had been in the hands of the Irish capitalists who had betrayed it. It was true that, only with working class leadership would the struggle for the Irish Republic be led to victory. But the Majority Resolution put obstacles in the way of this and failed to realise that capitalism could not be smashed without the smashing of British imperialism" (Inprecor).

Also speaking in favour of the motion were Frank Ryan and George Gilmore.

"Some of the contributions..., e.g., particularly a number of the country delegates,...were not quite clear as to the actual character of the differences involved" (Inprecor).

The Minority Resolution, carrying the line of struggle for an Independent Republic, was carried by 99 votes to 84. Then the Resolutions B came on the agenda. In these resolutions the Majority group wanted to form the Congress into a political party, though there was already a Communist Party in existence, while the Minority group held that the Congress should function as a united front organisation, and have the function of uniting all the anti-imperialist forces in the struggle under the leadership of the working class. This resolution was withdrawn by the Majority group after their other Resolution was defeated.

When elections to the National Executive were held the members of the Majority group refused nomination. They were R.J. Connolly, Nora Connolly O'Brien, M. Price, T. Maguire and Barney Conway, (of the Workers' Union of Ireland). M. Price said that "He had left the I.R.A. because it would not accept his slogan of a Workers' Republic as the main line of fight, and it would be inconsistent for him to accept nomination for Executive on these grounds. He had but one place to turn -- the Citizen Army."

.....

The Executive of 40 was elected, including P. O'Donnell, F. Ryan, G. Gilmore, Cera Hughes, May Laverty, Sean Murray and James Larkin jar.

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The Congress received messages of support from the League Against Imperialism, the Irish Workers' Clubs in America, the British Youth Anti-War and Anti-Fascist Movement and the Indian political Group. It was agreed delegates to the Indian Polki Congress in London.

## Conclusion

We hope to issue a pamphlet in the near future dealing with the fortunes of the Republican Congress after this meeting. But it is important first of all to understand what was at issue at the meeting in Sept. 1934.

What was not at issue was the fact that it was virtually impossible for a capitalist ruled Ireland to exist side by side with an imperialist Britain and be independent of it. That was not at issue. Nor was the fact, that only the working class could lead the Irish nation to independence, at issue. Both sides wanted Ireland independent and socialist. The difference lay in the question of the method of struggle needed to achieve these ends. Both sides agreed about what they wanted to get. They disagreed about how to get it.

The Majority Group thought it was possible for socialist revolutions to occur in the 6 Cos. and the 26 Cos. within the imperialist framework, and that the struggle against imperialism would begin after the socialist revolutions. The Minority Group held that socialism could only come after the imperialism had been overthrown, and that the immediate task was therefore to unite all the anti-imperialist forces in a struggle for the Republic.

This is a very old problem and a very new problem. James Connolly had to deal with it. And it is still necessary to deal with it. So long as imperialism remains in Ireland and so long as the Irish nation remains in existence, this problem will remain. It is inescapable. It can be formulated in many ways. It can be seen from many angles. People have tried, are trying, and will try again, to escape from it by finding new formulations for it, or trying to see it from new angles, but while the Irish nation exists and is dominated by imperialism the problem exists stark and objective and no amount of mental gymnastics or wishful thinking can conjure it away. It will only be removed when imperialism leaves the nation.



"Capitalism will be uprooted on the way to independence"; or "Imperialism will be overthrown on the way to socialism". These are the two lines that met head-on at the Republican Congress of 1934. They met in Connolly's day. They are meeting again to-day.

The struggle between the two lines in the Irish working class movement can be said to have begun when Sean O'Casey resigned from the secretaryship of the Citizen Army in 1915 because he objected to Connolly's line on the national question, (though, in this instance, other issues were also involved). Connolly took the line later taken by the Minority Group while O'Casey took the line of the Majority Group. (This was also Larkin's line)

At the present day the heirs of the Majority Group are the revisionist Irish Workers' Party and the trotskyist Irish Workers' Group, both of which hold that the Free State is an independent Republic. The heir of the Minority Group is the Irish Communist Organisation. The Connolly Association tries to straddle the difference, but in practice its line has been that of the Majority Group. It too puts around the idea that the Free State is an independent republic.

What were the practical consequences of the two lines in the situation which existed in 1934? The application of the Minority line would lead to an intensifying of the struggle for independence, while the Majority line would postpone the struggle for independence and campaign for the socialist overthrow of De Valera.

But there was a struggle for national independence in progress, and De Valera had built up a mass following on the basis of a Republican programme. The Majority line did not relate at all to this situation. It would have led to a form of struggle not relating to the existing situation.

The task of exposing De Valera and winning over his mass following was a major one. The whole progress of the struggle depended on this. The Majority line, since it was against engaging in struggle for an independent Republic, could not have exposed De Valera to his followers. It would have exposed him as a person who was in opposition to the struggle for a Workers' Republic, as a non-socialist. But, then, he had never claimed to be a socialist and his following was not based on a socialist programme. It was based on a Republican programme. The Minority line would have exposed him as a non-Republican. If he had been exposed as a non-Republican he would have been punctured.

.....

Republicanism, in Ireland, means struggle against British imperialism. The Majority line did not involve struggle against imperialism, but



only against Irish capitalism, against the Free State. The Free State and Stormont governments would have to be overthrown and replaced by a socialist government before the struggle against imperialism could be launched. Irish capitalism had to be overthrown before imperialism could be got at. This was the Majority line.

This is where the class nature of the Free State becomes of supreme importance. The Majority line pre-supposed that the Free State could be overthrown without overthrowing imperialism in Ireland. This line could have gathered together for the attack on the Free State all the forces opposed to capitalism, but not all those opposed to imperialism. Some, and probably many, anti-imperialist forces would have been in active opposition to socialism.

The Majority Group would have come to the Free State to overthrow it as an independent capitalist State. And what would they have found? As soon as a finger was laid on it, the little mouse of an Irish Free State would have struck back with the claws of the British lion. They would have come equipped for combat with a mouse, and they would have discovered that the mouse was not a mouse at all but a lion; or the catspaw of a lion. Then, like it or not, they would have had to appeal to all the Republican forces to rally against imperialism, and their misadventure would have <sup>ENDED BY</sup> ~~been~~ trying to apply the Minority line under highly unfavourable circumstances.

The moral is that it is necessary to know the nature of the beast that you are stalking.

The Minority Group recognised the nature of the beast. Their line was designed for struggle against the British Empire. If the Empire had been dealt with and disposed of the step from there to the Workers' Republic would have been very small.

The main obstacle to the establishing of the Workers' Republic is not the Irish gombeen man. He is a very minor obstacle. The main obstacle to the establishing of a Workers' Republic is the same as the main obstacle to the establishing an independent People's Republic. It is the British Empire. The Irish gombeen man is only a glove puppet on the hand of the British monopoly capitalist. Break the hand of the monopoly capitalist and the gombeen man will only be a rag.

.....

The Majority Group as one of their arguments for the slogan for a Workers' Republic, said that the Northern workers would not be interested in the struggle for an independent Republic. This line of reasoning is false.



There are numbers of workers all over Ireland who are not active in the National struggle, and who are not interested in it. What are the reasons for this? There are two basic reasons. The first is that the development of class consciousness and political awareness by the workers in a capitalist society is hindered in numerous ways by the state and the capitalist class. In the first place it is done by the educational system that Pearse called the 'murder machine'. It is also done every minute of the day by the propaganda organs of capitalist society: the newspapers, radio, television, cinema and God knows what else.

In the second place it is caused by the failure of the Labour Parties, the trade union leaders and a number of supposedly socialist organisations to explain to the workers the significance for them of the struggle against imperialism. There are "socialists" and "Marxists" in Ireland who are out and out opponents of Republicanism, and who therefore are supporters of the imperialist domination of Ireland. They are a new form of the "Orange" socialists that Connolly scourged. Large numbers of these Orange socialists are active in the North. They are also to be found in the South. Is it any wonder then that numbers of workers, who are subjected to Unionist propaganda from the imperialist "socialists" as well as from the imperialist capitalists, do not realise the significance for them of the anti-imperialist struggle. Imperialist influence in the working class is something to be fought against with patient and persistent effort. It is not something to base one's policies on.

To imagine that the imperialist question can be avoided in the Six Cos., to imagine that there can be a socialist overthrow of the Stormont government behind the back of British imperialism is rather outlandish. It overlooks the little fact that the Six Cos. is not only a direct colony of Britain's, but is a colonial police state.

Unionism is a terrible force in the Six Cos. As a consequence of the movement that culminated in Carson and Brookeborough, Republicanism had been turned into the equivalent of the devil for sections of the working class there. Imperialist consciousness in sections of the Northern working class is a big problem. We will not solve it by pretending that it isn't there. There is a fish called the stickleback. When he comes up against a certain problem, and it turns out to be a big problem, he turns away from it, sticks his nose in the sand, and wiggles his tail.

If when we come up against imperialist ideas in Northern workers, we do not deal with the problem of eradicating them, but turn away from them and pretend that something else is the problem, and change our policies so that they do not conflict with these ideas, we shall be behaving very like the stickleback.



Other material dealing with the point at issue at the Republican Congress meeting will be found in The Irish Communist of 1934, which has been reprinted by the Irish Communist Organisation, and in the Comintern message to the Irish and British workers in 1922, printed in "The Irish Communist", Number 3.

I.C.C. PAMPHLETS ARE

1. Reprints from "The Irish Communist" (1934) - 9d
2. F. Engels "History of Ireland" (translated by Angela Clifford), - 2/-

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