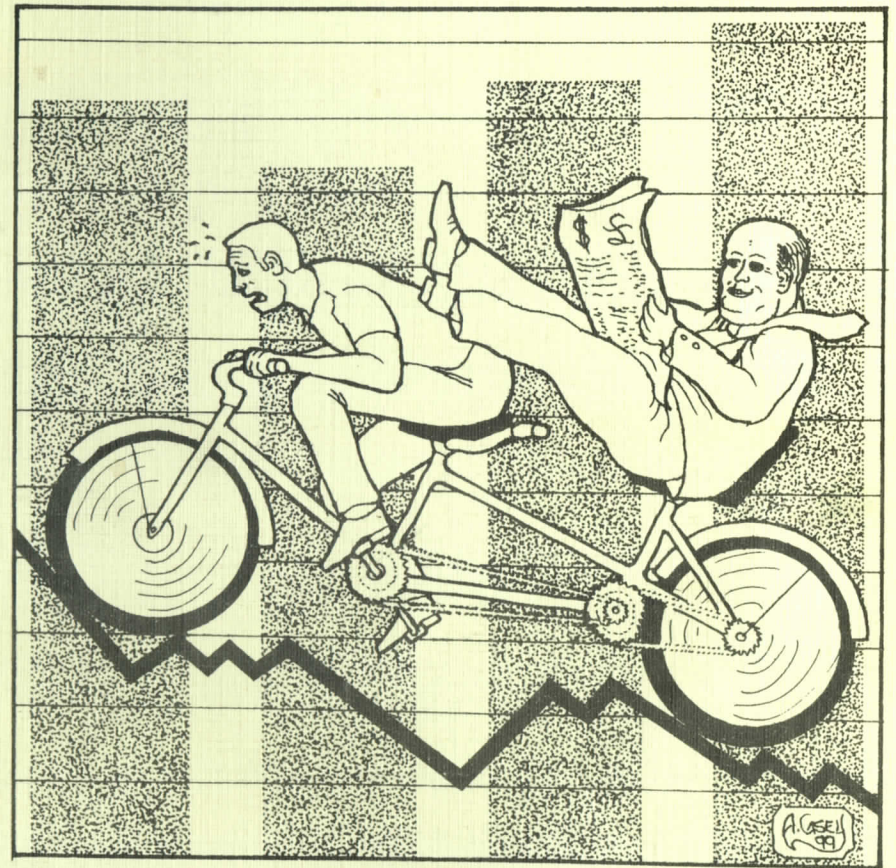


RedBanner

a magazine of socialist ideas

ISSUE 5

£2



IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Social partnership**
- Lessons of Kosovo • John Maclean • Hidden Connolly
- Marx agus direoilíú na n-oibrithe • Clondalkin sit-ins

 **RedBanner**
a magazine of socialist ideas

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The next step

It is now two years since *Red Banner* was launched. We expressed the belief back then that it was "high time something like this magazine came along". That was said more in hope than expectation, but the last two years have proved that it was more than just another vain wish. The magazine has won firm respect for itself amongst socialists in Ireland and beyond.

The formula for *Red Banner's* success has been simple. It has tried to provide a place where the ideas of socialism could be presented, discussed, developed. A place where this could be done in an interesting and vigorous way. Where it could be done with no hidden agenda, just the clear intent to promote revolutionary socialism.

Too often left-wing publications are trying to sell us something. They tend to tell us not enough about how and why to fight for socialist revolution, and too much about why we should go in for their own particular brand. And the hard sell is all too rarely relieved by anything that might pass for an engaging manner.

This magazine has consequently found itself in a position familiar to observers of our friend the Celtic Tiger. An increase in demand has begun to create something of a supply shortfall.

It is no longer good enough that *Red Banner* appears only twice a year. The call to read the magazine, and to write for it, means that from this issue onwards the magazine will come out three times a year.

This move is not motivated by pre-millennial hype, nor are we suggesting that the masses are eagerly gathering to snap up copies as they come off the press. But our intention was always to bring *Red Banner* out more frequently as soon as seemed practical. The first two years of the magazine's existence have shown it to be as much of a necessity as a possibility. Our regret is that limited resources prevent us from going beyond this small step. But that too, we hope, will happen before too long.

Of course, the world we live in has played its own part in demonstrating the necessity of socialist ideas. Since our last issue appeared, the international scene has been one of war and devastation. Ireland has witnessed further evidence of endemic corruption on the part of the capitalist class, and of resistance on the part of the working class. *Red Banner* continues to play its modest part in attempting to understand and change that world.

The workers' movement in Ireland faces a moment of truth as it decides whether or not to break out of the straitjacket of social partnership. Ellen McCann analyses the concept and reviews an attempt at an alternative. Alan MacSimóin argues for a socialist strategy in the unions.

The revolutionary life of Scottish socialist John Maclean is discussed by Maeve Connaughton. Des Derwin concludes the history of the Clondalkin sit-ins. Our Hidden Connolly series provides articles by James Connolly from the time of the Dublin lockout which haven't seen the light of day since his death. John McAnulty draws the lessons of the war in the Balkans and its aftermath. Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh defends Marx against his critics in the light of recent economic history.

That *Red Banner* has come this far is due solely to the support of its readers and writers. For this new chapter in the magazine's history to succeed, that support has to continue. Don't just read *Red Banner*—subscribe to it, sell more copies of it, write for it. Don't just accept what you read here—add to it, correct it, take it forward. Send your articles in time for issue 6, out in March 2000. Most importantly of all, though, the ideas of socialism need to be spread further, deeper and wider within the movements of the working class, so that theory moves into practice.



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Challenged consensus

Ellen McCann

A New Agenda for Economic Power Sharing.
ATGWU, Dublin, March 1999, 47 pp (no price indicated).

That the ideological entrenchment of 'social partnership' is crossing over from consensus to common sense was signalled by the President, Mary McAleese, on 2nd September. Speaking at the 'annual lunch' (sponsored by Allied Irish Banks) of the Small Firms Association she said that sustaining partnership was the only way to safeguard economic growth while enabling all sections of society to benefit from prosperity. She contended that wage moderation had sustained competitiveness and growth, leading to greater employment and increased revenue. She added: "It has been a win-win situation and everyone has a stake in seeing that it continues." Mary Robinson may have pushed out the boundaries of what it is permissible for a President to say, but it is doubtful if there is another issue, with the exception of the Northern 'peace process', on which Mary McAleese could safely make so partisan an intervention, especially since the question "that it continues" is something the unions had yet to vote on.

The media seem to have absorbed the consensus as deeply. The *Irish Times* leader for 16th September did not beat around the bush. "Partnership or Pain" announced the heading of the editorial. Well, you can't get any blunter than that. One can almost see Laurence Olivier standing over the ill-fated Dustin Hoffman in *Marathon Man*, with a dentist's probe in one hand and a bottle of clove oil in the other, saying that it was up to poor Dustin which he chose. The leader writer might have glanced at his own paper's headlines on the Ansbacher accounts, DIRT evasion, payments to politicians, planning corruption.... The embarrassing relation between the current mindboggling string of scandals and social partnership goes beyond even that of dramatic double standards. The chief figurehead of social partnership was Charles J Haughey. The Ansbacher revelations concerning the year 1987—the year of the McSharry cuts and the first year of partnership—show to workers a massive *illegal* rip-off, to add to the legal one by the same tycoons under partnership in the Celtic Tiger.

The thrust of media and government argumentation against this “growing militancy” is less that the claims are unjust (it being hard to argue that the nurses don’t deserve more, or that Dublin Bus drivers on £204-£268 basic per week shouldn’t have a slice of the ‘Celtic Tiger’) and more that these claims threaten to bring down social partnership. A government statement after the Cabinet meeting on 8th September described the approach of workers such as those in CIÉ as an attempt “to pursue their own individual agenda, regardless of the impact this would have on the prospects of negotiating a possible successor to Partnership 2000 and maintaining social partnership. Surely we do not wish to return to the habits of over a decade ago, when the economy plunged into a downward spiral. The Government cannot and will not acquiesce in such a situation.” IBEC described this as “plain common sense”. Mary Harney, launching the annual report of the Labour Court the same day, said an unprecedented decade of industrial peace had resulted in huge economic benefits, which could be put at risk. The figure for production days ‘lost’ last year because of disputes was only 37,000!

Social partnership, with its mainstay series of national agreements between the unions, the employers and the government, has become such an essential social reality for our betters—and, they assume, for everyone else—that workers’ aspirations which go beyond it are being opposed not so much because of their cost but because of the threat they pose to the edifice. The job-security of the bouncer is presented as the reason for not attempting to get in with sneakers and jeans. The prisoner should not attempt to escape because the perimeter fence might be cut.

Why? Because social partnership does more than repel sizable claims—many of which, from nurses, gardaí, building workers, those with scarce skills and, less visibly, from industrial workers in highly profitable firms, have been accommodated; social partnership does more than preclude a general run of claims on the wages office (it seems that DART drivers demanding a barrister-sized ‘refresher,’ or a 20% claim from the proles who move other proles around the city, is a ‘special case’ too far). Social partnership presses down on general wage levels—and on wage-incomes *alone*—delivers industrial peace, a weak trade union movement with an acquiescent leadership, compliance with workplace change, and the philosophical notion that the bosses are the partners of the workers.

The particular project of social partnership—one understood most consciously by its architects on the trade union side—is to remove the class struggle (‘adversarial’ industrial relations) from trade unionism. Or, at least the *idea* of the class struggle, since the rain cannot be wished away

from a rainy day even if the Met Office has advised you to leave aside your umbrella.

As ‘social partnership’ becomes a motif right across society and social discourse, and more and more sectors are engulfed (the ‘community’ and ‘voluntary’ sectors became the Social Pillar of Partnership 2000), and as nationalism and religion decline here, we see the emergence of a new, less mystical ideology of cohesion. Its twelve year implantation has surrounded the prospect of the loss of the *Entente Cordiale* with a horror akin to the loss of the Northern ‘peace process’. Furthermore, the fortuitous arrival of an unimagined economic boom has greatly strengthened the confidence of the protagonists—claiming social partnership led to the boom, and believing it too, hence great angst at the possibilities of its loss.

The trade union media is, if anything, more devoted to the consensus. SIPTU’s *Report* bulletin to its shop stewards and representatives has become practically a Pure Pro Partnership Propaganda Publication. The Summer 1999 issue has pages of positive coverage for social and workplace partnership, including four written by Maureen Gaffney of the National Economic and Social Forum.

Compared to a veritable industry, a burgeoning literature, in support of partnership, the arsenal of the opposition is a slingshot facing a tank. Locked out of the mainstream and trade union media, the opponents’ own production has been bantam.¹ Putting a David behind the slingshot comes the pamphlet *A New Agenda for Economic Power Sharing* from the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union. With it the ATGWU’s Regional Secretary, Michael O’Reilly (who wrote the Introduction and, we believe, the entire pamphlet, ably assisted by the silently subversive science of Kieran Crilly) has, not for the first time, ‘done the movement some service’.

In the first part *A New Agenda* knocks the lie of social partnership for six. For this section alone it’s worth keeping a copy in the top pocket of your overalls. Its devastating arguments have all the more impact by being simply and clearly (for the most part) presented, with lots of back-up figures and statistics, in a succinct and attractive form in a well-designed short pamphlet.

Treatises against the partnership programmes usually start with their bread and butter effects. Not *A New Agenda* which bravely begins with the ruinous effects of social partnership and centralised bargaining on the power and internal life of the trade unions. This is a sign of the political seriousness of the pamphlet, the recognition it gives to the political (with a small ‘p’) import of these pacts, an import now fully recognised by the

establishment. (Where the pamphlet's own politics leads we'll consider later.)

The Introduction says, "For too long the debate over national agreements has been dominated by overblown rhetoric and commonplace catastrophism: namely, that if trade union members don't give up the power to negotiate their wages with their own employers then the very edifice of economic growth will collapse." Minister for Finance and holidaytaker Charlie McCreevy provided the classic illustration of this point when he ranted on radio that anyone with "half a brain" could see that these "stupid claims" could "wreck the economy". The Introduction continues, with equal comprehension: "Unfortunately, many senior trade unionists and progressive politicians participate in this refrain. Not only does this ignore the relationship between national agreements and economic growth, it shows a lack of trust in trade union members themselves, as if the power to bargain locally would always and everywhere be wielded in an irresponsible manner."

Some other gems are his contrasting of local bargaining to "monopolised negotiation by a trade union elite" (p 6). Verbal diplomacy, a major problem in parts of the pamphlet, is not a consideration here! Another nugget is: "Members are becoming consumers of trade unionism, not producers" (p 7). And: "How better-paid workers taking a smaller wage increase than they might get under local bargaining helps the low-paid is something that has not been answered" (p 12). Throughout, the author shows the same grasp, and ease of articulation, of many of the major pro-partnership arguments—including the ones being employed particularly at present. Nevertheless in certain crucial areas his finger seems to miss the pulse. We shall stick to the traditional schema and start with the effects of social partnership on your pocket.

Between 1987 and 1997, during which the national wealth more than doubled, "increasing by a staggering £20 billion", corporate profits increased by 267%, self-employed income by 169% and wages by 104% (p 20).

Over the period of national agreements, labour's share of income has declined by over 13% while profits have increased by a massive 46% as a percentage of national wealth. ...if wages had maintained the same share of national wealth in 1997 as it had in 1987, each worker would be better off by over £2,500 [pp 22-23].

Income tax cuts have been weighted towards upper income groups. A single high earner received twice as much benefit as a low income worker [p 24; the figures are 36.1% and 18.8% respectively]...

Where is the wealth going?

The logic of increasing profitability and 'entrepreneurial' income was to increase reinvestment in the economy. But this is not happening. Between 1975 and 1998 expatriated profits, share dividends and royalties rose from £45 million to over £8 billion. There is a further loss of £3 billion of other capital (both legal and illegal). This means that 25% of our national income is being exported... Gross fixed capital formation has fallen by over 11% since 1990 while Ireland has one of the lowest levels of investment in the EU. Wage controls are not being turned into investment but, rather, are subsidising private sector investment abroad [p 21].

Jobs were one of the intended goals of the national agreements. Since 1990 nearly 300,000 jobs have been created. What kind of jobs?

Between 1989 and 1995 less than 40% of jobs created were full-time while 20% were part-time, low-paid government scheme work. In 1990 there were 50,000 taxpayers on Marginal Tax Relief. By 1997 there were 174,000. This accounts for almost half of all jobs created. In other words, 50% of jobs created had pay so low that workers didn't even pay tax at the standard rate [p 20].

Another goal was the reduction of poverty. *A New Agenda* claims

increasing poverty during the period of national wage agreement... According to the UN Ireland ranks second in the industrialised world in the level of extreme poverty. Over 15% of the population now lives in absolute poverty. Since 1987 the hourly earnings of the lowest 10% income group experienced no real increase... Over 30% of the population is reliant upon social welfare income... 40% of children live in social welfare households. Between 1994 and 1998 (the period of greatest economic growth) social welfare rates fell behind average incomes by nearly a third, increasing the relative levels of poverty [p 26].

Some of these startling claims could be more closely sourced if activists are to confidently use them in debate.

The pamphlet pays particular and timely attention to the 'Myth and Reality' of the contention that social partnership led to the Celtic Tiger. Denying that the deals were the "sole or primary factors", he enumerates several of the bigger ones. *Increased export performance* began before the deals with the two devaluations of 1986 and 1993 a big factor, plus "the IDA's successful targeting of key, recession-proof industries" (chemicals, computers and pharmaceuticals). *EU funds*, "making up 3-4% of GNP per annum" poured into the economy. *Foreign investment*, attracted by "an overly generous grant-aid policy along with an almost non-existent tax regime" rather than the national deals, increased massively, with £10 billion invested by US companies in 1994 alone and 25% of US multinational investment in the EU now located in Ireland (here come the marines!). *Commercial profitability*, which in many sectors "increased more in the pre-wage agreement period than after". The *decline in the dependency ratio* and massive *industrial restructuring* (often resulting in redundancies) and *infrastructural modernisation* were also considerable preparatory factors (pp 15-18).²

The 'wage-restraint-for-social-gains' fallacy is given short shrift. The effects of what is deemed a "low-spending economy" on health, education and housing are listed (on p 10: again, more sources would be helpful, and some mention of the McSharry and McCreevy cuts.). It is argued, he says, that national partnership "provides the necessary leverage to influence macro-economic and social policy; that without this power what trade unions gain at the local level they would lose out in the wider political sphere... Were there strong evidence that the trade union movement were successful in influencing such policies this argument might hold more credibility" (p 9). Page thirty three cuts to the quick:

if wage control is such a benefit to the economy, why not profit control or price control or rent control or housing price control or controls on share dividend and self-employed income? Why is it only wages should be controlled? Does this not suggest a rather obvious agenda?... Of course, this hypocrisy merely veils an ideological analysis that equates the national interest with the corporate which is interested in reducing costs, namely wages.

The pamphlet pays particular attention to the effects of social partnership and centralised bargaining on the trade union movement. This 'partnership' has

actually eroded trade unions' ability to effectively represent their members' interests, creating a more compliant, less effective trade union movement. Trade union practice is based on an activism that emanates from the membership itself, so that it can assert democratic control over their own wages, conditions and life-opportunities. Remove that activism and you not only remove the democratic premise for trade unions, you remove their ability to renew and regenerate their practice.... The starting point is the workplace [pp 5-7].

While acknowledging that there are several causes behind the fall in trade union membership (presumably, 'density' is intended), "the removal of local bargaining has undeniably contributed to this decline". What is the incentive to join a union "when being a member makes no difference to the wage increase?" (p 8).

A New Agenda for Economic Power Sharing is a work of two parts. On the one hand it is a much needed and heartwarming demolition of social partnership and a clear call for a return to 'local' bargaining. On the other it is a proposal for a new *national* agreement. The sub-title is actually 'Proposals for a new National Agreement.' Most of the latter part of the pamphlet is given over to a 'New Model For A National Wage Agreement'. Of the many reasons why this is unfortunate, the most immediate one is the confusion this could cause for the ordinary activist. It is important that the option of Free Collective Bargaining (not experienced for twelve years and daily scorned as a chaotic 'free-for-all') is clearly put before the membership and defended, not least because it is actually breaking through the kernel of social partnership. How ironic that when some commentators and Congress figures—earlier in the year when it first looked like P2000 might not have an offspring—were contemplating the possibility of partnership without a national agreement, that Michael O'Reilly should be proposing a national agreement without partnership.

The pamphlet's 'new' National Wage Agreement is not a simple Seventies-type pay deal. It is part of a two-pronged alternative to social partnership. One is industrial: a national agreement that would allow local bargaining, and has "economic power sharing" at workplace level. The other is political: a "new political project" for the Left and the labour movement in which the new national agreement is made with a Left-led

government. The ensemble is at one point headed 'A Programme for the Millennium'. The robbery of the language of partnership—a device used throughout *A New Agenda*, starting with the title—may be a clever tactic, except when the substance of what is proposed runs dangerously close itself to social and workplace partnership.

The workplace "power sharing" model is first posited as "industrial democracy", the old aspiration of the trade union Left which, whatever its political limitations, could be lived with by trade union militants. The model quickly passes over to something looking, and sounding, uncannily like workplace partnership with local wage bargaining attached. It is a "power-sharing model that can transcend traditional collective bargaining relationships" (p 29). Did you catch the word 'adversarial' flitting through that sentence? Well how about this one? "It, therefore, constitutes a new paradigm, one fitting for the new millennium, moving beyond the confrontational environment of traditional free collective bargaining" (p 30). Unions and employers would accept "*co-responsibility* as the fundamental principle of managing the company, obliging all parties to work together to serve the interests of customers, staff and stakeholders... to improve the commercial performance of the company to service the interests of workers, customers, owners and society".

The principles of this model are based, according to the author, on *The Compact* agreement at Aer Rianta. Like this "power-sharing" model, the word 'partnership' does not figure in the title of the Aer Rianta agreement. Nevertheless, SIPTU recently cited Aer Rianta as their foremost model for workplace partnership. Aer Rianta is of course in the queue for privatisation.

To underpin the above principles it is proposed that, "in the context of a new national agreement",

A new code of economic and industrial co-responsibility be drafted by the *social partners* which will provide a guideline for industrial practice, to be monitored by the *Labour Relations Commission* or some other body with a specific remit [p 31, my emphasis].

This might be a quote from an ICTU document!³

The national agreement would have three tiers. The first would "introduce" a flat-rate pay increase for "all" employees. He suggests an example of £10 per week! (5% of a £200 per week wage!) "The second tier should link wage increases to either the overall national or sectoral performance, as established by *pay norms* agreed by the relevant *social*

partners." (My emphasis.) And thirdly, "Where company performance exceeds sectoral/national average performance, wage increases should be negotiated locally commensurate with the company's *competitiveness*" (pp 31-32, my emphasis). For the life of me I cannot see a great difference between this and an old fashioned National Wage Agreement, with a sectoral replacing a national norm, and with a looser local bargaining clause from which poorly performing companies are excluded, and in which 'competitiveness' is the ceiling. 'Competitiveness'—game, set and match to the market.

The third tier would apply in the public sector as "*performance-related* increases, incorporating productivity agreements, relativities, etc." (p 32, my emphasis). Performance-related increases are what the government are seeking to replace relativities! This will really go down a bomb in the Teachers Union of Ireland.

Not until page thirty-nine does the great contradiction of the pamphlet resolve itself. The first step in the proposed 'Left Strategy', in breaking the right-wing consensus, is to empower the membership through a return to local bargaining. "The next step is to create a new bloc into which this renewed activism can be channelled and which can win majority support for the programme we outlined." The new bloc would be, or aim to be, a "Left-led government" (p 39) The new national apct would be between the unions and this government. To work out the programme "Representatives of the trade union movement [Peter Cassells and Des Geraghty?] should sit down with Labour Party representatives" (p 42). "Social and economic interests" will oppose this programme. But "this is where the political struggle lies. Not in trying to find some mythical common ground. But in trying to win over a majority to a new political project" (p 43)—i.e. a majority in the Dáil for a Coalition including conservative parties.

At this point we have gone beyond the criticism of *A New Agenda* that can be made in a strictly trade union forum debating the alternative to P2000. The pamphlet has gone on into a political strategy seeking "the foundations of a new democratic culture" and "profound and progressive effects for political society" (p 30). In this forum I *can* make a brief political criticism. The 'Left' spoken of in the pamphlet is already part of the right wing consensus including, and with enthusiasm, social partnership. There is no mention here of the need to replace, or outflank with a movement from below, the present leadership of the trade union movement before it would embark upon any alternative strategy. Unfortunately the "social and economic interests" will not confine their "political struggle" to the effort "to win over a majority" of the voters.

Has this attempt to elaborate an alternative to the right wing consensus not ended up in a left wing social partnership? Left wing social democracy is, these days, almost a breath of fresh air, even one hundred years (exactly) after Rosa Luxemburg demonstrated that trade unions plus parliament cannot end capitalism. But language and structures which virtually land us back where we want to get away from, must make us regret that such a damning critique of social partnership can only be begun and ended, by the eager reader, through a new national agreement, a workplace consensus, and a 'social contract' with Ruairi Quinn at its head. One glad step forward. One sad step back.

However, lest I stand indicted, or in danger, of falling into a classic knee-jerk reaction against a 'third way', I recommend that readers take *A New Agenda* as seriously as it is intended, study it and judge for themselves how close its prescriptions are or aren't to the practice and orthodoxy of the current consensus. Michael has put forward *his* mid-to-long-term strategy. It is up to those who differ from it to produce theirs.⁴

The campaign for another partnership programme is already intense. Intense but defensive. The unions, employers and government met on 13th September to 'salvage' P2000, or its successor. The string of disputes broke into ICTU general secretary Peter Cassells's statements prior to this meeting, juxtaposing some unusual fare alongside what you would only expect: "The Minister appears to believe that social partnership is about nothing more than pay restraint. [Now what would give him that idea?] We all must face up to the fact that this country and social partnership are at a crossroads. The national mood has been changed by the various tribunals and scandals, including scandals at the very highest level." (The material world asserts itself against the myth.)

After the two-hour meeting the common hymnsheet had been restored and it was reported that the Government, the unions and the employers were to engage in intensive discussions to salvage national wage negotiations and the principle of social partnership over the following weeks. As part of the 'salvage' operation the ICTU requested the Labour Court to intervene in the Dublin Bus dispute and then the unions deferred the planned strikes.

Mary Harney returned to the dominant theme at the Dublin Chamber of Commerce the next day: "Pay moderation is essential if we are to maintain economic growth and eliminate social exclusion. We cannot trigger a spiral of wage claims that will destroy the Irish economic miracle and leave us all worse off in a very short period of time." (How similar this argument is to that used by trade union leaders to advocate another P2000.)

The Dublin Chamber might not like to be so forcefully told of the meaning of the economic miracle to some of the citizens of Dublin: in August a plastics manufacturing firm in Poppintree advertised for part-time packers at £3.77 per hour and the Catering Department of Trinity College sought catering assistants at £4.50 per hour (£175.50 for a 39 hour week). Not much left after the rent there. A friend of a friend sadly suffered a stroke in early September. She was on a trolley in the Mater Hospital A&E department in Dublin from Saturday lunchtime to Monday evening. Meanwhile 58 beds in the hospital remained 'closed' because of a shortage of nurses! A report from the London office of investment bank Solomon Smith Barney in September said that wage levels in Spain and Ireland were about half the German level and less than 70 percent of the Euro zone average.

By the end of September, the determination of the nurses, and the Ansbacher revelations, seemed to have precipitated a retreat among partnership's supporters. A former adviser to Ruairi Quinn, Brendan Lynch, wrote on 28th September that the old agreements had come to a close. There was a need, he said, for "a new shared political economic perspective". On 25th September (a few days after some SIPTU shop stewards from Tullamore had participated in an anti-partnership press conference) Jack O'Connor, a SIPTU Regional Secretary (speaking in Tullamore as it happens), jumped way ahead of anything opponents of another deal were currently saying. He said that the government should set aside P2000 because it had become "obsolete, irrelevant and redundant". In its place "a special increase should be negotiated for all workers to take account of the economic growth over the last three years". Of course all kinds of valuable cargo is jettisoned by a ship in a desperate bid to stay afloat. Jack O'Connor's dramatic gesture (undoubtedly cleared by Head Office) does not abandon social partnership or centralised bargaining. These special claims, together with £1 billion of tax concessions, would constitute an "attempt to revive social partnership". The motivation was not well hidden: "If things are not to be allowed to collapse into an irretrievable mess, the Government must immediately undertake a major initiative with a view to the development of a new consensus model."

At time of writing, the prospects for an effective, united, influential effort in the unions *against* a new deal was still some way from being assured. The outlook was not helped by the great difficulty many on the Irish far left have in working with each other. Whatever emerges the pamphlet *A New Agenda for Economic Power Sharing* will be an invaluable aid to a campaign for the rejection of 'P2000 and One' in a ballot. In

the long term its flaws will eclipse its value to those seeking radical change in the unions and revolutionary change in society.

Notes

- 1 Just published is the pamphlet *Workers and the Celtic Tiger: Why Partnership Doesn't Pay*, by Kieran Allen (Dublin, September 1999). Another oppositional pamphlet is *Portraits of a Partnership* by Conlon, Derwin and Muldowney (Dublin, January 1997).
- 2 The SSB bank report mentioned below indicates that Ireland is sharing in a boom of the 'peripheral' EU countries, including Spain and Portugal, evening them up to the 'core' economies.
- 3 The proposals of SIPTU Regional Secretary, Jack O'Connor, for what should follow P2000 (see below)—sectoral pay parameters and a "social contract" with the government—fit *A New Agenda* all too comfortably.
- 4 Those who might correct *A New Agenda* are themselves not beyond error. The principal leaflet of *Trade Unionists and Unemployed Against the Programme* (1990) contained the following prophetic nugget: "Government sources have recently been stressing that the primary source of job creation will be the private sector. The ICTU have accepted this ridiculous notion. *Only a massive state-led job creation drive will do anything to tackle the cancer of unemployment.*" (Emphasis in original.) *Ouch!!*



Socialists in the unions

Alan MacSimóin

When last year management locked out the 39 SIPTU members in Ryanair other workers in the airport showed tremendous solidarity when they walked off the job in support of the baggage handlers. Chefs, waiters, loaders, clerks, firefighters, computer operators, even the airport police struck in solidarity.

But the SIPTU leadership threw it all away. Keeping the airport closed for a day or two would have seen such pressure put on Ryanair that they would have had to recognise the union. It would also have made a huge dent in the Industrial Relations Act—which makes sympathy action illegal. And most importantly, it would have demonstrated very graphically that we have great power if we stick together and rely on our collective strength instead of putting our faith in the pleadings of union leaders. It would have shown the real fighting alternative to the class collaboration that in Ireland is called 'social partnership'.

That scared the bureaucrats who occupy the top floor of Liberty Hall. Social Partnership is the idea that workers, the bosses and the government can sit down as equals and make the best decisions to help the 'national interest'. It's a very noble sounding idea until you consider that there is no 'national interest'. Workers and bosses have opposing interests. If they didn't we wouldn't need unions! The 'partnership' sells us wage restraint and no-strike deals, gives the bosses industrial peace and bigger profits, and is used to make us think we have more in common with our employers than we do with workers in other countries.

Cynicism and demoralisation are found among trade unionists in almost every job and trade union branch. Everyone knows that big changes are needed in our unions. There is a great potential power in the trade union movement. About half of all workers in Ireland are union members. This means that throughout the public sector and in a lot of private sector employments which are not just small family businesses the majority of workers are in a union. But this potential is not being used.

Joining a trade union implies, although it is not always clearly thought out, that we have different interests to those of the boss. It further recognises that to look after our own interests we have to get together with

other workers. This is the beginning of class consciousness, an understanding that our interests are different to those of the employers.

Anarchists and other revolutionary socialists have always said that workers organised on the job have tremendous power. This is a power that can and should be used to win day-to-day improvements. It is also the power that can overthrow capitalism, replacing it with genuine socialism and liberty. We have also said that even a small amount of direct action is better than a lot of conciliation, arbitration and mediation. This is action that is taken collectively by workers and which remains under their direct control. It is no exaggeration to say that there is a grave shortage of direct action at the moment!

Trade unions were set up to defend workers under capitalism, to stop the bosses having a completely free hand in setting wages and conditions. They organise workers to get the best possible deal (at least that's the idea) under the present system. Their goal is to get the best price for their members' ability to work, the highest possible wages. It is not to get rid of exploitation and the wages system. Their preferred method is negotiation rather than struggle. This is not to say that trade unionists are naturally conservative or meek. It merely shows how the ideas of capitalism are reflected inside our unions. Part of this is that there must be a division into leaders and led, order-givers and order-takers.

The initiative is very much with the full-time officials, many of whom are not even elected but enjoy considerable power and influence. Most of these have jobs for life and see their union work as a career rather than a commitment. The vast majority are unresponsive to the needs of their members. They live a different lifestyle, often being found alongside employers and senior civil servants on commissions and the boards of semi-state companies. Quite a number never even had an ordinary job in a factory, office or hospital. No matter what ideas they have at the beginning they quickly have to accept that their career is that of an arbitrator, a smart talker, a fixer. What is important to them is proving their skill as smart negotiators, not helping their members to *fight* for their demands.

These people rarely lead strikes. Instead they will have you 'making submissions' to the Labour Relations Commission, to 'impartial mediators', and to every other talking shop they can find. They seem to thrive on almost endless negotiation, aimed at finding a 'reasonable settlement'. Some negotiations go on, literally, for years. They see taking any form of industrial action as very much a last resort and are very quick to condemn unofficial action (i.e. action that hasn't been sanctioned by them). The 'correct procedures' and negotiation machinery are vitally important to

them. Confidence among the members at workplace level rarely merits a second thought. The official believes that it is his or her negotiating skill that wins concessions from the boss. The activity of the rank and file is seen, at best, as secondary.

Once a deal has been struck the official has to see that the members stick to it. The continued existence of the negotiation machinery depends on an element of trust. If the employer can't be sure that the union official can ensure that the members adhere to the deal, why should any boss enter negotiations? The union official's career depends on being able to make the members comply with agreements. The result is a cautious, conservative bureaucracy at the top of the unions that seeks more and more control over the members, and opposes any independent organisation among the rank and file.

This does not mean that these people will never support struggles. While they don't exactly make a habit of it they are capable of leading and supporting strikes, especially when the negotiating machinery is brought into question. And even where they shy away from striking they still take recognition disputes very seriously. This is why, for instance, SIPTU's leaders were prepared to spend a small fortune explaining the case of the Ryanair workers.

However, in many strikes verbal support is slow in coming, if it comes at all. With the idea of 'social partnership' and the anti-strike provisions of the 1990 Industrial Relations Act (which was agreed as part of the first partnership agreement, the 1987 Programme for National Recovery, and hailed by ICTU's Kevin Duffy as leaving us "better off") we are seeing even less support for strikers. Much sympathy but little active support—as we saw at Nolan's Transport in New Ross, Pat the Baker in Cherry Orchard, the Three Lakes Hotel in Killarney, and too many others.

In our own jobs there are things we can all do right now. Things like turning our shop stewards into delegates who take instruction from their workmates, instead of representatives who are elected once a year and then left to get on with it. Things like strengthening class consciousness by publicising disputes, taking up collections for strikers, sending delegations to show support. None of this is easy. But it can be done, and is being done. It is one small, but concrete and necessary, step towards popularising the ideas of solidarity, direct action and direct democracy.

Beyond this, how can activists inside the unions organise to combat the authority of the officials and bring together workers who take their trade unionism seriously? Three options can be put forward.

The first is the Broad Left strategy. This is about building groups within individual unions whose main purpose is to elect a 'left wing' leadership, though as part of this they will also try to generate support for workers in struggle. Sometimes they also argue that officials should get no more than the average wage of their members and should have to stand for regular re-election.

It is correct to raise demands like these and to support candidates who are more responsive to the needs of the membership. A problem arises, however, when electing leaders becomes more important than winning support for rule changes which would allow for more participation and democracy, than organising at the grassroots and offering solidarity to workers when it is denied by the leadership.

As the Broad Left idea concentrates on leadership we must start off by asking if leaders are a good thing, and if they are necessary. These are not two separate questions, since if leaders are necessary they must also be good. Here we are not talking of a 'leadership of ideas', of those whose ideas are accepted because they make sense to the rest of us. We are talking about the leadership which divides us into leaders and led, the leader being the man or woman who—as a representative—has acquired combined administrative and decision-making powers.

As such he or she sees no need for much debate or activity among the rank and file. Indeed, from the point of view of the average official, such thought and action—by encouraging questioning and criticism—is an obstacle to 'normal' trade unionism. Leadership implies almost absolute power held by the leader. All leaders become corrupt to some degree despite their own good intentions. Nobody was ever good enough, brave enough or strong enough to have such power as real leadership implies.

The power of initiative, the sense of collective responsibility, the self-respect that comes from making decisions is taken away from the members and given to the leader. Most of the members are reduced to inactivity and passivity. Attendance at meetings, participation in internal union life, and even basic identification with the union declines as power shifts away from the workplace and the branch.

Of course not all advocates of the Broad Left strategy see things this way. Though constantly proclaiming the need for a 'fighting leadership' they also look for more internal democracy and activity. In reality, however, the main task is still seen as getting Broad Left supporters elected to positions of influence. The rank and file are to elect a new leadership who will then bring about change from the top.

The second option is building a Rank and File Movement. This is a strategy for organising within the union to win more democracy, more struggle against the bosses and more involvement by the membership. Its attitude is best summed up by the slogan "with the officials when possible, without them when necessary". Where there have been large rank and file movements they have always been based on combative workers who find the union bureaucracy is an obstacle in their way. They are then forced to ignore the instructions of the bureaucracy and disobey them if their struggle is to be won.

This can start with being denied official sanction for a strike, or encountering obstruction from the bureaucracy when you need to spread your strike, or just refusing to get sucked into endless rounds of mediation. The point is that large rank and file groupings are created when workers are fighting the bosses, are confident, and then find the union officials are trying to sabotage their struggle. The need for independent organisation within the union is then posed. Struggle creates genuine rank and file movements, not the other way round.

At a time when most workers are on the defensive and lacking in confidence, any attempt to create such groups will attract only small numbers of activists. This is not to decry such attempts where they arise from a genuine desire to take on the bosses and bureaucrats, but to warn against setting any unrealistic goals at this time.

The third option is building a Solidarity Network. We have to face the fact that years of centralised wage bargaining have left many good union activists demoralised. They are doubtful about the possibility of fighting back against the employers and even the union leaders.

But all is not doom and gloom. There are militants who want to fight back. The one third of union members who have consistently voted against the partnership agreements are one good sign of this. The illegal and successful strikes organised against sub-contracting by the 'Building Workers Against the Black Economy' group are another. Within SIPTU I would also point to the high votes secured in national ballots by a self-described revolutionary socialist, Carolann Duggan. The vast majority of the people who voted for her were not voting for revolutionary socialism—they were voting against 'social partnership' and for militant trade unionism. We need some sort of structure to bring these people together, a visible network that can attract other activists.

We need to break down the isolation that makes us weak, to combat 'social partnership' deals, to support all resistance to job losses and

cutbacks, to fight for more democracy in our unions, and to organise solidarity with workers in struggle. A solidarity network could, if it gets enough support, produce magazines with factual information on disputes, wage deals, the behaviour of union leaders. It could also be a forum for debating different ideas for changing our unions. *SIPTU Fightback* is a bulletin produced by a small group of members from varying left wing traditions, which goes out to about 500 shop stewards and activists. It is one contribution to this process.

Such a network will certainly be militant on the 'bread and butter' issues, but it must also be political. This does not mean linking up with any particular party or organisation; it does mean taking up questions like racism as well as pay, promotions and union democracy. Anarchists and socialists want to win as many people as possible to our ideas. However we should not make co-operation with other militant workers conditional on them agreeing with all our politics.

A solidarity network such as this would allow us to pool our efforts while at the same time discussing the different strategies for putting union power back where it should be—back in the workplace. It is a moderate proposal but one which could provide a springboard for real rank and file organisation, and now is as good a time as any to start making preparations.



REVOLUTIONARY LIVES John Maclean

Maeve Connaughton

John Maclean was born on 24 August 1879 in Pollokshaws, not far from Glasgow. His father, a potter, died less than nine years later, leaving his mother to struggle at a variety of jobs in order to rear four children. Thanks to her sacrifices John was able to stay on at school, and eventually train as a teacher.

His involvement with the socialist movement began in late 1902 or early 1903 when he joined the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), being already a convinced Marxist. He soon became a central figure in Glasgow socialism, throwing himself into speaking at street meetings and writing for the left-wing press. He also began a class in Marxist economics which drew large numbers of workers, and socialist education remained a constant concern for Maclean. The capitalists had colleges and universities to turn out the type of human being their system required; the working class, he said, needed "such education as will make revolutionists".

Marxism was never a matter of repeating formulas, as far as Maclean was concerned, but of engaging with and understanding the world: "Marxians do not fall back upon what Marx said here or there, but apply his principles to each set of circumstances as it arises. 'Thus spake Marx' is not the Marxian but the anti-Marxian method." Not that Marx's words were unimportant, as he stressed at the end of one particular talk:

I want you to go home and read the works of Karl Marx. If you read one or two good books they will do more good for your head and heart than a library of rubbish. What we want in this country today is an educated working class. The millenium, if it is to come, must come from an educated working class. Today you can be swayed by speeches and pamphlets. But the person who has studied Marx and applied him to literature, to life in all its phases, can see things as they really are.

Theory, though, had to develop in close connection with practice: "Fighting leads to new facts, thus to our new theory and thence to revolution."

Maclean shared many of the shortcomings of the contemporary socialist movement, however. He tended to downplay strikes, seeing them as justified defensive actions but with no part to play in achieving socialism. This changed after he visited Belfast at Jim Larkin's invitation in 1907. The strikes there were a radical movement of unskilled workers, a far cry from the staid trade unionism of skilled tradesmen that he was used to in Glasgow. When the British version of Larkinism spread a few years later in the 'great unrest' that preceded the world war, Maclean was fully involved.

One of the biggest faults of the socialism of this period, internationally as well as in Britain, was its misunderstanding of the state, a misunderstanding that Maclean too was guilty of. He accused those who said socialism would come about by direct seizure of workplaces of denying "the naturalness of the state"; the state's responsibilities had progressively expanded, and the job of socialists was "to carry forward this growth of the duties of the state until the social revolution has been accomplished". He claimed that "the various states were the supreme representatives of associated mankind.... these states must be captured by the workers." There is nothing in the least natural about the existence of parliaments, police, prisons and the rest, of course; but it wasn't until the Russian revolution that Maclean—and others—would grasp that such states had to be got rid of, not taken over.

Waging the class war

When war broke out in 1914, Maclean and his family were on holiday in the Highlands: his initial response was to write anti-war graffiti on any available wall. Back in Glasgow he began regular meetings in the city centre, arguing that the war was a crime born of capitalism's desire for profit, and that British workers should stand together with German workers instead of going out to kill them. Many other socialists went to ground and retreated from their regular round of meetings, but Maclean always managed to draw a crowd and get a hearing.

Such a stand was not only extremely brave at the start of the war, but also extremely rare. Like most of its counterparts in Europe the leadership of the British Socialist Party (the BSP, as the SDF had become in 1911) capitulated, arguing that the war effort should be supported to defeat the evil of German militarism. "Our first business is to hate the British capitalist system", replied Maclean. Amidst all the patriotic slaughter, he wrote, "it is our business as socialists to develop 'class patriotism', refusing to murder one another for a sordid world capitalism". The real enemies of

German militarism were the German socialists, and the defence of capitalist profit should be left to the capitalist class themselves.

The class war at home broke out in earnest in 1915. Attempts to raise rents in Glasgow led to a rent strike across the city; when munitions workers threatened to strike in support, the government restricted all rents to pre-war levels. In the munitions factories themselves workers faced a concerted attack: unskilled workers were introduced, workers faced the prospect of conscription, and it was made illegal to strike or even to move to another factory. As government, employers and even union officials lined up in the attempt to smash militant trade unionism in Glasgow, the rank and file organised independently, and the Clyde Workers' Committee was born.

In this situation revolutionary socialism got a ready audience, and Maclean steadily pushed the revolt of the Clydeside workers. The fight, he argued, should broaden out to involve all sections of the working class, and should take on the wider issues: opposition to the war, and to capitalism itself. "*The only war that is worth waging is the Class War,*" he wrote, "the workers against the world exploiters, until we have obtained industrial freedom."

The authorities were not about to let such activity go unchecked. At the end of 1915 Maclean received five days' imprisonment for making statements likely to prejudice recruiting, and was sacked from his job. He was arrested again the following February as the government moved to break the Clyde Workers' Committee. This time the courts were not so lenient, and he was sentenced to three years' penal servitude. In prison he wasn't allowed to read, write, or associate with others, and the harsh criminal regime began to affect his health.

But the stand of Convict 2652 was drawing international attention. In Zürich Lenin instanced Maclean as a representative of the trend that had remained loyal to socialism. In June 1917 the first All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, following the overthrow of Tsarism, sent greetings and solidarity to the political prisoner. In Britain a working-class campaign for Maclean's release was gathering momentum. When the prime minister Lloyd George visited Glasgow to receive the freedom of the city, he was met by huge crowds, not to welcome him but to demand freedom for John Maclean. The government backed down and let him go after serving just over a year.

He took up where he left off, never neglecting the task of socialist education: over 500 Glasgow workers enrolled for the classes he organised. The October revolution in Russia vindicated the revolutionary opponents of

the war, and recognised Maclean's own contribution. He was elected among the honorary presidents of the Congress of Soviets, and appointed consul for Soviet Russia in Glasgow. The important thing now was to emulate the Russian revolution in Britain—not to wait, like some socialists, for capitalism to 'inevitably' fall apart: he insisted that "if capitalism is to be 'sent west' it will only be the result of the delivery of the greatest knock-out blow ever given, and that this blow must be given by a united, revolutionary working class".

Maclean's activity was again interrupted in April 1918 when he was arrested on a charge of sedition. He turned his trial the following month into a propaganda platform. When informed of his right to object to any of the respectable Glaswegians on the jury, he replied: "I object to the whole of them!" In his speech from the dock he proclaimed that no government would prevent him speaking and protesting. "I am not here, then, as the accused: I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot." In conclusion he threw down the gauntlet:

I am a Socialist, and have been fighting and will fight for an absolute reconstruction of society for the benefit of all. I am proud of my conduct... I have nothing to retract. I have nothing to be ashamed of. ...my appeal is to the working class. I appeal exclusively to them because they, and only they, can bring about the time when the whole world will be one brotherhood, on a sound economic foundation. That, and that alone, can be the means of bringing about a re-organisation of society. That can only be obtained when the people of the world get the world, and retain the world.

The jury didn't even bother to retire before finding Maclean guilty on all counts, and the judge condemned him to five years' penal servitude. As he was led away to the cells Maclean turned to his comrades in the public gallery and shouted: "Keep it going, boys! Keep it going!"

They did keep it going: demonstrations in Glasgow demanded Maclean's release, and he was nominated as a candidate in the forthcoming general election. He refused to take prison food and was force-fed by the authorities. Following the end of the war the government found, for the second time, that he was more dangerous in prison than out, and released him in December. His ill-health left him unable to play a big part in his election campaign, but what campaigning he did focussed not on catching votes but on the class struggles that would follow the war. 7,000 voters agreed with him.

The Irish situation

At the same election Ireland voted for independence, and John Maclean supported the demand wholeheartedly. On a visit to Dublin in July 1919, however, he showed his ignorance. He was not the first or last British socialist who needed putting right when he referred to Britain as 'the mainland'. While correctly pointing out that "Irish Labour would not be free under a Sinn Fein Republic, but only under a Socialist, Workers' Republic", at this stage he saw the fight for Irish independence as subordinate to the struggles of British workers—soldiers included: "I urged that Ireland alone could never gain her freedom, that her Republic depended on the revolt and success of British Labour, and that therefore the Irish workers ought not to antagonise the soldiers of occupation in Ireland, but should try to win them over to the Irish point of view".

He later came to understand that a defeat for the British in Ireland would mean "the beginning of the end of the British empire... British labour will consequently have an easier task in seizing political power". He saw the Irish working class overtaking the British: indeed, he was unfortunately optimistic in his hope that they would "before the republic has really been started convert it into a socialist republic".

Overcoming its apathy as regards British rule in Ireland was therefore paramount for the British working class. "This is more important than protesting against higher rents or the high cost of living. It is acquiescing and participating in the murder of a race rightly protesting its own right to rule itself." Socialists who failed to recognise this much were no revolutionaries as far as Maclean was concerned:

The Irish situation, obviously, is the most revolutionary that has ever arisen in British history, but unfortunately lads who fancy themselves the only revolutionaries are too stupid or too obsessed with some little crotchet to see with sufficient clarity the tight corner the Irish are placing Britain in.

The Irish Sinn Feiners, who make no profession of Socialism or Communism, and who are at best non-Socialists, are doing more to help Russia and the Revolution than all we professed Marxian Bolsheviks in Britain...

He called for a general strike to force a British withdrawal from Ireland.

Marxism in Britain

In the aftermath of the war British socialists were busy trying to bring the various groups on the left together into a united revolutionary party able to organise for socialist revolution. But the process was flawed from the beginning. As in much of Europe, revolutionaries were in too much of a hurry to separate themselves, and were inspired more by the Russian example than by the workers' movement in their own country.

With his Marxist training, his stand against the war, and his opposition to reformism, no one was better qualified than John Maclean to play a leading role in a revolutionary party in Britain. Instead an assortment of recent converts and simple fly-by-nights came to assume leadership positions. Maclean insisted that the best help British workers could give the Russian revolution was to develop a revolution of their own. The BSP leadership wanted a single-issue Hands Off Russia campaign, with Maclean abandoning all his other agitation to be the campaign's paid full-timer. Instead of winning unity on an honest theoretical and practical basis, the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was, to a large extent, characterised by organisational manoeuvre and liberal use of Russian subsidies. Maclean was effectively expelled from the BSP in 1920, and thus excluded from the Communist Party being formed.

Maclean was determined to put together a revolutionary organisation with its roots in the British working class, not an outfit operating on a Russian franchise. "We stand for the Marxian method applied to British conditions. The less Russians interfere in the internal affairs of other countries at this juncture, the better for the cause of Revolution in those countries." For all his admiration for the Bolsheviks, he recognised that the tactics that proved successful in Russia couldn't just be transferred to different situations: "I am not prepared to let Moscow dictate to Glasgow. The Communist Party has sold itself to Moscow, with disastrous results both to Russia and the British Revolutionary Movement." Instead of getting to grips with the situation in Britain, "the Socialists are discussing whether Lenin can wink as well with the right eye as the left eye".

A Scottish workers' republic

Maclean gathered a small group of socialists who brought out a paper and engaged on a tireless round of campaigning, drawing hundreds of workers to their meetings. They called for a separate Scottish communist party to be formed, to fight for an independent Scottish workers' republic.

Firstly, Maclean argued, breaking up the British empire could only help socialism: "Scottish separation is part of the process of England's imperial

disintegration and is a help towards the ultimate triumph of the workers of the world." An independent Scotland would frustrate the war plans of the English ruling class. Secondly, he claimed that Scottish workers were more socialist than English workers: "The Social Revolution is possible sooner in Scotland than in England." Thirdly, the demand for a Scottish republic could help in "utilising our latent Highland and Scottish sentiments and traditions" in the cause of socialism: "The Communism of the clans must be re-established on a modern basis." And fourthly, "an entente between the Celts of Scotland and the Celts of Ireland" would be established, and Irish workers in Scotland would rally to the Scottish workers' republic.

Maclean wildly overestimated the sense of Celtic solidarity between Irish and Scottish workers, and was to complain a couple of years later that Glasgow's Irish community voted against him en masse. While Maclean's work for socialism in the Highlands was outstanding, the clans' common ownership of land was barely even a memory by this stage. While Clydeside workers had indeed scaled heights of militancy during and after the war, any idea that Scotland as a whole was more ripe for revolution than the rest of Britain was untrue. Separation from England would, of course, have helped break up the British empire—but Scottish workers showed no inclination to go any further than home rule within Britain. Although it should have gone without saying that all socialists should uphold Scotland's right to separate from England if it so desired, Maclean was mistaken to put separation forward as his central demand.

Espousing a Scottish road to socialism was a completely new departure for Maclean. Until now he had always insisted on the working class fighting together in an all-British context. Before the war he had gone so far as to describe the proposal for a Scottish parliament as "a retrograde step". And even now, while advocating a separate organisation for Scottish socialists, he still advocated a single organisation for all of Britain's trade unionists.

The change in direction was undoubtedly influenced by Ireland. Maclean's solidarity with the fight for Irish independence led him to attempt a Scottish imitation. His call for a Scottish communist party explicitly cited the Irish precedent: "We in Scotland must not let ourselves play second fiddle to any organisation with headquarters in London, no more than we would ask Dublin to bend to the will of London." The Scottish situation was very different from the Irish, however: any disadvantages that Scotland suffered within Britain paled beside the British imperial oppression of Ireland.

The main motivation for Maclean's new policy must have been an attempt to break new ground after being pushed out of the embryonic CPGB. He quoted "The corruption of the London communists" as one justification for a separate Scottish party. His new-found, albeit deeply-felt, support for a Scottish socialist republic has to be seen in this context. Establishing Scotland as a new theatre for revolutionary practice (an idea that other Scottish socialists were considering) would allow him to take part in establishing a real socialist party—revolutionary and in full sympathy with the Bolsheviks, but free of the sectarianism and Russophilia of the CPGB.

Maclean's shift was never a retreat to Caledonian parochialism, however, but an attempt to find a new path towards the internationalist vision he still remained loyal to:

When all empires are broken up and the workers by political control start to make land and wealth-producing property common property, when of the wealth produced all get sufficient to give them life abundantly with leisure and pleasure and education added thereunto, then all the independent workers' republics will come together into one great League or Parliament of Communist Peoples, as a stage towards the time in the future when inter-marriage will wipe out all national differences and the world will become one.

Bolshevik, communist, revolutionary, Marxist

Maclean and his supporters were to the fore in organising Glasgow's unemployed—work which again attracted the authorities' attention in April 1921 when Maclean was arrested for inciting sedition. At his trial the following month he denied that the revolution he called for meant uncontrolled bloodshed. When the prosecutor asked him what exactly he did mean by revolution, Maclean held out one hand above the other, saying that they represented the two classes in society. Then he turned them around so that the lower hand was now on top. That, he said, was revolution. He was sentenced to another three months in prison.

He was only out a couple of months before he was arrested again, for telling the unemployed to take food rather than starve. While in jail he stood as a revolutionary candidate in a local election, and easily beat the Labour candidate into third place. At his trial he was once again sent to prison, this time for twelve months. Yet again he was nominated for election while a prisoner, and doubled his vote. In the 1922 parliamentary election he stood, according to his election address, "as a Bolshevik, alias a

Communist, alias a Revolutionist, alias a Marxian". The 4,000 votes he got were obviously not due to watering down his politics!

In February 1923 Maclean formed the Scottish Workers' Republican Party, an organisation which made up for its smallness by its activism. But at this stage his personal situation was desperate. Since being dismissed as a teacher he had lived on whatever was collected at his meetings, but now most of his listeners were unemployed and had nothing to give. He was subsisting on a diet of porridge, and the fact that he had spent half of the last seven years in prison had taken a terrible toll on his health.

That winter he stood in the general election, calling on the working class to end capitalist robbery by a revolution that would transfer the means of production to the community. But he didn't live until polling day: he had to be carried from an election platform, and on 30 November 1923 John Maclean died of double pneumonia aged only 44. Three days later 10,000 people attended his funeral, remembering a life that was dedicated to the freedom of the working class in Scotland, in Britain, in all the world.

Marx agus roinnt an bhodaigh

Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh

“You’ve never had it so good”:

The favourite phrase of those who’ve always had it better

—Moore/Bottomley/King, *Bring It Down! (This Insane Thing)*

An té atá ag léirmheas, bíonn a leath faoi féin. Cuireadh an méid sin i dtuiscint do dhuine a d’iarr spior spear a dhéanamh de leabhar ar Marx tamall ó shin. Dúisíodh taibhsí seachas taibhse an chumannachais, agus b’éigean dó cúlú go maolchluasach, gan ach urchar mioscaise a scaoileadh ó Shráid D’Olier.

Ach tharraing sé seancheist roimh imeacht dó: nach léir go bhfuil feabhas tagtha ar chaighdeán maireachtála an lucht oibre; agus nach gcruthaíonn sé sin go raibh Marx mícheart? Ní ón ngaoth a thug sé an cheist, nó tá an méid céanna ráite ag saineolaithe eile (slán an tsamhail). Joseph Schumpeter, mar shampla, chomh fada siar le 1942: “Marx undoubtedly held that in the course of capitalist evolution real wage rates and the standard of life of the masses would fall”. Ocht mbliana ina dhiaidh mhaigh R N Carew Hunt go raibh “*Law of Increasing Misery*” ag Marx, is é sin, “the misery of the workers will continually increase”. Go fiú C Wright Mills, a raibh bá áirid aige leis an Marxachas, rinne sé liosta de phrionsabail Marx i 1962, agus “*The material misery of the workers will increase*” ag uimhir a naoi. Nach bhfuil aon bhunús, mar sin, leis an tuairim gur thuar Marx siordhireoilíú do na hoibrithe?

Tá, bunús eicint, sa méid seo: ba shin é go díreach a thuar Marx tráth. Féach an Clár Cumannach:

An t-oibri nua-aimseartha, áfach, seachas dul in airde le dul chun cinn na tionsclaíochta, titeann sé síos níos faide i gcónaí faoi bhun choinniollacha a aicme féin. Déantar déirceach den oibri, agus forbraíonn an déirceachas níos sciobtha ná an daonra agus an saibhreas... Cuirtear iallach uirthi [ar an aicme chaipitleach] ligean dó titim síos go dtí staid ina gcaithfidh sí é a chothú, seachas eisean i a chothú.

D’fhéadfaí a leithéid a mhaitheamh dó, agus a ainnise is a bhí pá an lucht oibre i lár an naoú céad déag. Ach bhí dul amú ar Marx: claonadh gearr-thréimhseach a bhí ansin, seachas gné bhuan den chaipitleachas.

Níorbh fhada ina dhiaidh sin go raibh sé dá cheartú féin. In ‘Obair Phá agus Caipiteal’, a foilsíodh in 1849, cuireann sé i gcás go dtéann pá an oibri i méid de thoradh forbairt an chaipitleachais. Más fearr cás an oibri, nach fearr fós cás an chaipitlí?

Féadfaidh teach a bheith mór nó beag; an fhad is a bhíonn na tithe thart air chomh beag céanna sásaíonn sé gach éileamh sóisialta ar áit chónaithe. Tógтар pálás le hais an tí bhig, áfach, agus crapann an teach beag ina bhothán... agus dá airde a eascraíonn sé i gcúrsa na sibhialtachta, má eascraíonn an pálás béal dorais sa mhéid céanna nó níos mó, éireoidh cónaitheoir an tí atá beag i gcoibhneas níos míchompordaí míshásta domheanmnaí in aghaidh an lae taobh istigh dá cheithre bhalla.

Ní leor an t-airgead a chuntas agus a chur i gcomparáid lena raibh againn anuraidh. Is ainmhithe sóisialta muid, agus de réir mar a ghabhann an saol chun cinn, bíonn muid ag iarraidh gabháil chun cinn leis. Má tá na caipitlithe ag cruthú níos fearr ná muid, tá thíos orainn, siúd is go bhfuil níos mó pingneacha inár bpócaí. Nuair a mhéadaíonn ár gcuid pá, ach a mhéadaíonn brabach an chaipitlí níos mó, tá muid níos measa as. Mar a deir Marx, “Tá feabhas ar staid ábhartha an oibri, ach ar chostas a staide sóisialta. Tá an bhearna shóisialta idir é agus an caipitlí tar éis leathnú.”

*Direoilíú coibhneasta an aicme oibre atá i gceist ag Marx, beatha na n-oibrithe i gcomórtas le beatha na gcaipitlithe, cion na n-oibrithe mar sciar de mhaoín an tsaoil i gcoitinne. Céard a bhí le rá aige ins *An Caipiteal*, agus a dhianstaidéar ar an gcóras caipitleach tugtha chun críche? Fágann forbairt an chaipitleachais, a scríobhann sé,*

go gcaithfidh staid an oibri, pé ar bith cén iocalocht a fhaigheann sé, ard nó íseal, dul in olcas de réir mar a charntar caipiteal. Ar deireadh comhtháthaíonn an dlí a choinníonn an ródhaonra coibhneasta nó cúl-taca tionsclaíoch i gcothromaíocht le raon agus fuinneamh an charntha i gcónaí, comhtháthaíonn sé an t-oibri leis an gcaipiteal níos doichte ná mar a rinne dingeacha Heiféisteas Proiméiteas a chomhtháthú leis na carraigeacha. Cuireann sé mar choinníoll leis an gcarnadh caipitil a chóimhéid de charnadh ainnise. Is ionann an saibhreas a charnadh ag ceann amháin agus, san am céanna, ainnise, crá

oibre, sclábhaíocht, aineolas, brúidiú agus táire mhorálta a charnadh ag an gceann eile, .i. ar thaobh na haicme a *tháirgeann a táirge féin mar chaipiteal*.

Ní hé méid na pá an rud mór i ndireoilíú an oibrí: más ard íseal é, téann a staid in olcas. Is é an cúltaca tionsclaíoch is mó atá i gceist le carnadh na hainnise anseo, na daoine a choinnítear amach as obair, ina n-arm ag an aicme chaipitleach le beartú ina n-aghaidh siúd atá ag obair, lena gcuid misnigh agus pá a shrianadh. Ní direoilíú coibhneasta gach direoilíú a chruthaíonn an caipitleachas. Tá glandireoilíú simplí ann freisin, direoilíú an dream a fhágtar ar an trá fhalamh ar fad, gan airgead, gan dídean, gan tada i ndán dóibh—direoilíú a mhairfidh comhfhad leis an gcóras is siocair leis.

Tá smaoineamh an direoilíú choibhneasta le fáil aríst san aitheasc a thug Marx ar bhunú Chumann Idirnáisiúnta na nOibrithe in 1864. Cé gur tháinig ardú ar phá oibrithe na hEorpa, a deir sé, "Everywhere the great mass of the working classes were sinking down to a lower depth, at the same rate, at least, that those above them were rising in the social scale." Má bhí céim suas faighte acu ó thaobh airgid, bhí céim síos tugtha dóibh sa saol. Is léir an méid seo: "every fresh development of the productive powers of labour must tend to deepen social contrasts and point social antagonisms".

Ag sin Marx. Ach is cuma céard a dúirt sé siúd mara bhfuil sé ag teacht le frinne an scéil. Tá go breá, a déarfadh na léirmheastóirí linn, ach cá bhfuil an fhianaise go bhfuil staid na n-oibrithe ag titim i gcomparáid le staid na gcaipitlithe?

Is iomaí freagra a d'fhéadfadh muid a thabhairt orthu. D'fhéadfadh muid trácht ar na sluaite a chónaíonn ar shraideanna na gcathracha, iad beo ar an déirc. D'fhéadfadh muid an saol mór taobh amuigh den leath thuaidh den domhan a chur ar a súile dóibh, an géarbhochtanas atá muintir na dtíreacha mífhorbartha a fhulaingt i gcónaí. Más direoilíú atá siad a iarraidh, níl aon ghanntanas samplaí ann.

Ní fearr rud a dhéanadh muid, áfach, ach fanacht in Inis Fáil, agus taobh le pá na ndaoine a ghabhann amach ag obair, mar a aithristear i staitisticí oifigiúla rialtais í. Le dhá scór bliain anuas tá an Phríomhoifig Staidrimh ag foilsíú tuarascála bliantúla, faoin teideal tarraingteach *National Income and Expenditure*. Insíonn sí don saol Fódalach cé mhéid brabaigh a dhéantar agus cé mhéid pá a íoctar sna sé chonadae fichead chuile bhliain. Níl na figiúirí gan locht: áirítear tuarastail bhainisteoirí agus saoisí i measc na pá, chomh maith le hiocaíochtaí ASPC na

bhfostóirí. Ach biodh sin: an dtugann na staitisticí seo aon fhianaise i ndireoilíú coibhneasta an aicme oibre in Éirinn? Siod é an scéal maidir leis an gceathrú dheireanach den fhichiú aois:

	BRABACH		PÁ	
1975:	£501.5m	19.2%	£2,113.9m	80.8%
1976:	£628.6m	19.9%	£2,526.1m	80.1%
1977:	£922.8m	23.8%	£2,948.7m	76.2%
1978:	£1,196.1m	25.5%	£3,501.6m	74.5%
1979:	£1,379m	24.5%	£4,253m	75.5%
1980:	£1,604.4m	22.6%	£5,491.7m	77.4%
1981:	£1,998.5m	23.5%	£6,522.1m	76.5%
1982:	£2,434.1m	24.6%	£7,446.6m	75.4%
1983:	£2,728.6m	25.1%	£8,138.9m	74.9%
1984:	£3,323.3m	27.2%	£8,898.6m	72.8%
1985:	£4,200.1m	30.7%	£9,464.7m	69.3%
1986:	£4,409.9m	30.4%	£10,113.2m	69.6%
1987:	£4,756.5m	30.9%	£10,623.7m	69.1%
1988:	£5,449m	32.8%	£11,184.5m	67.2%
1989:	£6,123.5m	34%	£11,899.9m	66%
1990:	£7,077m	35.6%	£12,793m	64.4%
1991:	£8,106.9m	37.3%	£13,642.9m	62.7%
1992:	£8,273.8m	36.1%	£14,648.1m	63.9%
1993:	£9,368.6m	37.1%	£15,853.4m	62.9%
1994:	£10,001.4m	37.2%	£16,869.6m	62.8%
1995:	£12,031.1m	39.8%	£18,195.5m	60.2%
1996:	£13,365m	40.3%	£19,778m	59.7%
1997:	£15,433m	41.4%	£21,806m	58.6%

Foinse: National Income and Expenditure, blianta éagsúla. Ní chuirtear teacht isteach ón talmhaíocht san áireamh. Brabach, tuilleamh gairmiúil, ús, dibhinní, agus teacht isteach ó thalamh agus ó fhoirgintí atá i gceist le Brabach. Pá, tuarastail, pinsin, agus iocaíochtaí ASPC fostóirí atá i gceist le Pá.

I 1975, mar sin, bhí os cionn 80% den táirgeacht iomlán ag an aicme oibre; faoi 1997 bhí níos lú ná 60% againn. Mhéadaigh an brabach ó leathbhiliúin punt go dtí 15 bhiliúin, níor mhéadaigh an phá ach ó dhá bhiliúin go dtí fiche biliúin. Is é sin, gur mhéadaigh brabach na gcaipitlithe tuilleadh agus trí oiread thar mar a mhéadaigh pá na n-oibrithe. (Dá dtéadh muid siar go dtí 1953, an chéad bhliain dár foilsíodh na staitisticí seo, ba mhó fós an difríocht: bhí méadú an bhbrabaigh 4.6 uaire níos mó ná

méadú na pá.) Chuaigh 19% de thoradh ár gcuid oibre chuig an aicme chaipitleach i 1975; 41% a fuair siad i 1997. Má bhí tú ag'obair cúig lá sa tseachtain i 1975, bhí cion an chaipitlí saothraithe agat roimh scoireadh Dé Luain; i 1997 bhí tú dá shaothrú fós maidin Dé Céadaoin.

Níl gar dá shéanadh, tá níos mó airgid ag an aicme se'againne anois ná mar a bhí i 1975. Ach tá muid thar éis titim ar gcúl i gcomórtas leis na caipitlithe. Tá an mheá cacnamaíochta i ndiaidh bogadh go suntasach, agus ní i leith na n-oibríthe é. Is lú go mór ár sciar de mhaoín an tsaoil: lena rá go gairid, is boichte muid. Tá muide, na céadta míle oibríthe, thar éis cáca oilmhór a dhéanamh; agus tá siadsan, cupla míle caipitlithe, thar éis stiaill i bhfad níos mó de a alpadh chucu féin. Amhail is nach raibh craos an diabhair ag na súmairí céanna cheana! Is é roinnt an bhodaigh mar is áil leis féin é.

Fágann an méid seo gurbh fhíor do Marx. Déanann an caipitleachas díreoilíú ar bheatha an aicme oibre i gcomórtas le beatha na haicme caipitlí. Tá athmhachnamh le déanamh ag na léirmheastóirí, gan amhras, ach ar a dtuiscint féin seachas tuiscint Marx.

Cuirtear ó dhóras muid, agus cuirfear, leis an leithscéal go bhfuil só ag ár n-aicme anois nach mbíodh ag ár sinsir. Tá, cinnte, ach níor shail gan saothrú againn é: bhí orainn oibriú agus troid go daor ar shon chuile phíosa de. Agus tuige nach mblaisfeadh muid den mhaitheas atá cruthaithe againn? Níl ann ach an ceart go mbainfeadh gach glúin nithe amach nach raibh ag an nglúin a ghabh roimpi, agus go ndéanfaidh ár sliocht an cleas céanna amach anseo. Is é a laghad a locht, go deimhin. Ach ní leor sin. Ní bheidh an obair críochnaithe nó go mbainfidh muid an t-iomlán dearg amach mar atá dlite dúinn, go mbeidh jab rí-éasca le déanamh ag an bPríomhoifig Staidrimh. Mar a dúirt an té a dúirt, níl uainn ach an saol mór.



The lessons of Kosovo

John McNulty

The Kosovo campaign stood in a line of actions including the Gulf war and Bosnia. These are the campaigns of the new world order, where imperialism has been able to pose more and more nakedly its need for unrestrained military action across the globe. The left have been weak and fragmented. At each new crisis the same old routine analysis and arguments reappear and few seem to learn from events. In the absence of serious debate the left lack clarity and are unable to aid the development of working class resistance and solidarity.

The reformist argument

First among the routine arguments is what I would call the reformist argument. This expresses pessimism about the possibility of working class resistance and argues that we must use existing structures to ameliorate the effects of imperialist rule. Its expression in the Gulf war was the counter-position of sanctions to the bombing campaign. In the event the UN applied both bombs and sanctions, leading to large-scale and continuing child deaths from malnutrition and lack of medicines. In the Kosovo campaign the same logic involved calls to support the UN rather than NATO.

It's true that one of the most salient aspects of the Kosovo campaign was the need of imperialism to shake itself free of the cumbersome machinations needed to use the UN as a cover for military force, and to define a new aggressive role for NATO as the police force for the region. However to counterbalance the UN to NATO one needs to ignore even its most recent history in Bosnia. Today the UN force in Bosnia is more or less indistinguishable from the KFOR force in Kosovo.

In Bosnia the UN prevented the Bosnian people from defending themselves, stood by and watched as genocide was perpetrated and collaborated with Serb forces in a series of plans to fragment Bosnia and establish sectarian cantons. In Kosovo the differences between the UN and NATO (to the extent that there were any differences) were purely tactical. The international community represented by the UN and NATO had only one policy—the Rambouillet accord which maintained Serbian sovereignty, explicitly

ruled out Kosovar independence and demanded the disbanding of the KLA. Today the UN is at the forefront yet again, putting together a coalition of Indonesian ethnic cleansers with those who armed and supported them through their long and bloody occupation of East Timor. It's hard to see this process giving full democratic rights to the Timorese.

There is a more general argument about the UN. The task of Marxists is to aid the working class in self-organisation against capitalism. Reformists attempt to improve capitalism and convince the capitalists to rule more humanely. The two currents can share common demands and activities while at the same time struggling with each other. Normally one would expect that both would march in protest to the seat of government rather than to the civil service offices. This argument does not apply to the UN. While it is entirely legitimate to make propaganda about the great powers flouting UN resolutions (Israel springs to mind) or breaking international laws they made themselves (for example, the mining of Nicaraguan harbours by the US) it would be impermissible to increase working class illusions that in some way we have a nascent world government or a world court when, in reality, the UN is the creature of imperialism, especially US imperialism.

The Stalinist argument

Interpenetrating the reformist argument is what I would call the Stalinist argument. This amounted to unconditional support for Serbia. At its heart this position boils down to conspiracy theory. The breakup of Yugoslavia was part of a conspiracy to defeat socialism. The Kosovar campaign was planned by imperialism to finish off socialist Yugoslavia. A slightly more cynical version is the campist approach, which left to one side the question of Yugoslavia in the face of the more important task of defending "socialist" Russia.

In one sense this is a defensible position. It can not yet be said in Russia or in much of eastern Europe that capitalist property relations have decisively been restored. The point however is that in all these countries capitalist restoration is well advanced, that all the regimes support capitalist restoration and that a decisive element in the restoration project in Yugoslavia has been the Milosevic regime. This regime has gone well beyond its role as the revolution's gravedigger, embracing genocide and ethnic cleansing. In the rear the Yeltsin regime has distinguished itself in its contempt for democracy and unrestrained looting of every last rouble of public funds and property available. The Yugoslav regime does not in practice stand in opposition to imperialism. Yeltsin is in hock to imperialism for billions and stands at the head of a savage offensive against the working class.

Milosevic and the west came to blows over Kosovo. Milosevic was unable to agree Rambouillet without putting his base at risk and the west were unable to see stability for their investments without some curbing of greater Serbian chauvinism.

Before the Kosovo campaign Milosevic and the west collaborated happily. After the NATO victory and the subsequent occupation NATO moved to defend the long-term interests of the Serbian elite as the lynchpin of stability in the area. Co-operation in the future will increase and there is no danger of an independent Kosovo to cause difficulties, given that the Rambouillet accord held firmly to the legal title of Serbia in Kosovo. Russian opposition boiled down to demands for a place in KFOR.

What links the reformist and Stalinist positions is diplomacy. Those who wish to assert the rights of the UN as opposed to NATO, or are in a position to aid Russian diplomacy, must be spoken to behind closed doors and are unlikely to be willing to do business with anyone attempting to build working class mobilisation.

The Marxist position

In actual fact the Marxist position on Kosovo should have been quite clear. The overwhelming risk for the working class arising from the Kosovo conflict arose in relation to the NATO expansion and its new role as a regional police. This question posed itself especially sharply in Ireland, where the question of the Partnership For Peace (PFP) meant that what was on the agenda was the integration and control of the Irish army by NATO. The traditional anti-imperialist sympathy in Ireland has long been a difficulty both for NATO and for local capitalism. However, effective resistance to NATO could only be effective in the context of a full-blooded defence of the Kosovars. A movement which dodged this question would automatically discredit itself with the mass of workers.

Besides this tactical question stands a deeper issue of policy. Questions like self-defence and self-determination stand on their own. Marxists should not find themselves refusing to support the right of a population to defend itself. Self-determination means self-determination. Nations should not have to pass some test of political correctness to establish their rights.

In the long run the solution in the Balkans requires a socialist alliance of the people of the area. That future socialist federation will rest on equality. People will exercise self-determination through sharing it. Trotsky expressed it as follows: "State unity... can be achieved... from above, by expanding one Balkan state, whichever proves strongest, at the expense of the weaker ones—this is the road of wars of extermination and oppression of

weak nations... or from below...—this is the road of revolution.” (*The Balkan Wars 1912-13.*)

Confusion about self-determination leads some socialists to counterpose socialism to self-determination. A well-known British socialist, Alex Callinicos, complained that we could not support self-determination for Kosovars on the ground that this would destabilise countries in the area, apparently forgetting that the task of socialists is to prioritise people over lines on a map. The result of this confusion was that the questions were framed in terms of peace rather than in terms of class struggle. Failure to deal with the political questions led effectively to left unity in support of Serbian chauvinism. Finally this led to routinism. The issue was devalued and led to two separate campaigns of routine recruitment—further discrediting the left.

United front

What appeared to be a formal united front structure was set up. Representatives from the various left organisations came together and agreed a programme that was formally correct in its opposition to the bombing but incomplete through its silence on Kosovo. In reality, for all the reasons listed above, the alliance lacked one crucial element—there was no commitment to strike together. Those supporting the reformist and Stalinist position were willing to support an abstract opposition to ethnic cleansing but unwilling to apply it to the question of the Kosovars. This abstention immediately bound and gagged the movement.

We had the unity, but at the price of united action. This was made explicit when a resolution at the founding meeting criticising Milosevic was removed at a later and smaller organising meeting. The remainder of the campaign was marked by decline and fragmentation. The left has now gone its separate ways with no real discussion and with the working class unaware that their campaign existed in the first place.

Outcome

If this were all the experience in Ireland it would hardly be worth chronicling, but the debate here mirrored debates across Europe, many of which were carried on around substantial mass mobilisations against the war. One debate around the war, which became of greater importance as it ended, was the extent to which it succeeded as a technical and military experiment. The imperialists were actually very heavily constrained by the Vietnam factor—they can fight anywhere as long as they avoid substantial casualties themselves. This consideration led to the war becoming a

one-sided bombardment conducted at 15,000 feet. The evidence to date is of the limited usefulness of such tactics. It was very effective against fixed structures and of limited use against military hardware, though it may have limited deployment by the Serbian forces. For this reason the campaign degenerated into a blitzkrieg aimed at the civilian population and a formal break with Milosevic by means of a war crimes charge—a signal that they were serious in demanding the compliance of the regime. This was successful against a relatively weak regime with little popular support in a situation where the KLA were a local force on the ground. It is unlikely that it would be successful against a mobilised population able to draw on wider international solidarity.

That said, the imperialists gained control. Milosevic had neither the political programme nor the popular support to mount an effective opposition. The Serbian opposition have mobilised to force him out but have little support from imperialism. It also includes elements that participated in government with Milosevic while he was ethnically cleansing Kosovo. We are in an Iraq situation here—the imperialists want to dump Milosevic but they want someone like him in his place. In Kosovo they made it clear right away that self-determination was not on the agenda and set up a military protectorate based on armed occupation by their forces. The KLA leadership have now been through a series of selections in a situation where they face opposition from almost the entire left but were drip-fed supplies by the CIA and other imperialist forces. Even then the KLA found itself in conflict with KFOR when they began a programme of cantonisation that breaks up the territory on sectarian lines. By the end of September they were humiliated by disarmament and are effectively facing total disbandment; even the figleaf of a civilian police force is so reduced in stature as to be meaningless. KFOR, having invaded under the banner of the Kosovars, has now taken any form of Kosovar independence off the agenda.

Then the troops landed in East Timor. On this occasion sections of the Marxist movement were calling in advance for imperialist intervention. Anyone who believes that the invaders will produce self-determination for the Timorese is living in a dream world—à la Kosovo the East Timorese are ignored and simple steps such as recognising their leadership as the legitimate interim government set aside. Again the invasion takes place against a background of close co-operation and support for the forces of repression and a game-plan that involves saving the Indonesian military from broader democratic opposition. The most likely outcome is a new

protectorate which would allow unrestricted imperialist exploitation of East Timor and its mineral wealth.

Georg Lukacs spoke of the immediacy of revolution as central to Leninism. That means that even in very unfavourable circumstances the revolution needs a line of march to take it from the here and now to the eventual revolutionary upturn. This concept is absent in the left today. The left are not responsible for the inaction of the working class, but in the absence of debate and clarity they are unable to prepare for future organisation.

AB

The Hidden Connolly

Irish Transport and General Workers' Union TO THE WORKING CLASS OF DUBLIN

[*Irish Worker*, 13 December 1913]

FELLOW WORKERS,

Once again the Employers of Dublin have received an offer, the acceptance of which would have enabled them to restore themselves in the estimation of the civilised world and to appear as normal human beings with human hearts and consciences. And once again they have refused to respond and to recognise the common humanity of the work people.

On Sunday morning, December 7th, the representatives of Labour met in Conference with the Masters in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, and after agreeing upon a proposal to set up a Conciliation Board to be established by 7th March, 1914, and to suspend all strikes and sympathetic strikes until that date, the following proposal was laid before the masters, it being explained that its acceptance by the employers was a necessary condition of our final acceptance of the proposal just set forth:—

The employers undertake that there will be no victimisation, and that employment will be found for all workers within a period of one month from the date of settlement.

This Clause in the proposed settlement was drafted by Mr Arthur Henderson, MP, and agreed to by the representatives of the Joint Labour Board from Great Britain along with delegates of the local Lock-out Committee, but was absolutely rejected by the employers. In its place they offered a clause in which they stated that "they will take on as many of their former employees as they can find room for," and "will make a bona-fide effort to find employment for as many as possible."

After sending this outrageous proposal back to them twice with a declaration that we still stood by the proposal drafted by Mr Henderson, MP, the Conference finally broke up on that point.

While there may be guileless people in this world who do not know the evil meaning of the threat conveyed in the Employers' Proposal, we are certain that in the ranks of the working class there are none so simple as not to know what these gentry mean when they tell us that "they will take

on as many of their former employees as they can find room for." They were always of that mind, and we know that since the very beginning of this fight they were willing to take on as many as they could find room for, but that they had no room for members of the Irish Transport Workers' Union.

That condition remains unaltered. We had heard outside that the ban upon our Union—the Employers' Agreement—had to be withdrawn, but neither in their presence by word of mouth, nor in Conference by type-written or other document, was any such assurance given us. As far as we have any knowledge, that document still remains.

Remember that the Employers' Agreement is denounced by every enlightened public opinion in these islands; that it is denounced by the whole trade union world; by the public of Dublin; by the Press of Great Britain; by the report of Sir George Askwith; by the verdict of the Industrial Peace Committee;¹ and remember that the men, women, and girls locked-out are idle because they nobly refused to sign this degrading document, and then ask yourselves could we consent to abandon those heroic workers to the tender mercies of the men who had planned their degradation?

Could we consent to the victimisation of workers who refused to sign a document which everybody of common sense denounces as iniquitous? We could not!

There may be somewhere trade union leaders who can regard with calmness the certain victimisation of a number of their rank and file, but, thank God, we are not of their number. We regard the rank and file fighters as the real heroes of this struggle, and we will never consent to their being sacrificed, not while there is a shot in our locker or a shred of our organisation together.

We have no fear or doubt of our ultimate success in this fight, but if we had we would not consent to the sacrifice of those who had trusted us and honoured us by their trust. We would rather go down nobly fighting for our noble comrades than survive ignobly by consenting to their victimisation.

Brothers and sisters, the fight must go on. And be it long or short the victory will be the victory of the rank and file.

Yours,

JAMES CONNOLLY,
Acting General Sec.,
Liberty Hall.

Mr Murphy's Great New Year Speech

(Exclusive to the *Irish Worker*.)

[*Irish Worker*, 3 January 1914]

We are informed that on Wednesday, December 31st (New Year's Eve), a special meeting of the Employers' Association was held in the Antient Concert Rooms to hear an address by Mr William Martin Murphy. The meeting was called at the personal request of that gentleman, and was the most remarkable gathering that has been held since the beginning of the dispute. The great hall was taxed to its utmost, and the remarkable address was listened to in absolute silence, in fact with a feeling almost of awe-struck wonderment. We dare not speculate upon the possible results of this unique pronouncement.

Mr Murphy said: "Gentlemen, I have called you together on the eve of the New Year, 1914, because I have something to tell you that I feel can better be told upon such an occasion than upon any other. It has long been the custom amongst Christian nations to make the closing of the old year and the opening of the book of the new an occasion for the promulgation of new policies, and for the renunciation of old sins. Such of us as feel wearied and worn out with old forms of iniquity and desirous of aspiring after a newer life in which to qualify for a greater righteousness naturally choose that period in which the thoughts of men turn to change as the period best suited to mark their change of heart. For that reason I have fixed upon this evening as the most auspicious occasion, and the one most calculated to awaken in your breasts a responsive throb for the review of the past and the announcement of the change of policy I intend to follow upon my change of heart (sensation). Yes, gentlemen, I intend to embark upon a new line of policy—a policy that I hope will reconcile me at last to the great heart of the Dublin public, of the generous Irish public from whom I have been so long estranged.

"For years I have followed in Ireland a policy which set my own interests above and before everything else. I have schemed and contrived by every means to obtain control of every kind of business, even if in doing so I had to destroy the business and wreck the prospects of helpless orphans. I have never followed any policy of Christian charity, of humane pity, even of common decency, to restrain me when engaged trying to obtain possession of the business interests of those whom I considered as business rivals. I have made a fine art, or perhaps I should say a scientific business of the accumulation in my own hands of the fortunes and control of destinies of others. My path through the business world has been marked by the ruin of others, and all over Dublin and the other scenes of my activities can be

traced the sufferers—suffering in silence for the most part, as I have successfully manipulated into silence every avenue of publicity by means of which they could make themselves heard.

“What I have done to the business people in this business world I have done even more ruthlessly and unscrupulously to those members of the working class who dared to cross my path. You all know the tale of the West Clare Railway. How I terrorised the whole countryside into acceptance of my terms, how I evicted poor Irish labourers for daring to ask as a weekly wage a sum not sufficient to pay for a box at the Opera for one of my guests at Dartry Hall, how I secured that this eviction should pass and win the approval of a venal Home Rule Press which had grown into popularity by the denunciation of evictions not one half as cold-blooded and merciless, and how in spite of this eviction of my poor countrymen and women I still managed to pose before the public as a pure-souled patriot and lover of my kind. All this you know, gentlemen! You also know—for you have been participating in my crime—how I managed our latest attempt to reduce to soulless slavery the gallant workers of Dublin. You know how I managed to secure a sufficient number of slaves prepared to sell their manhood for a chance to earn a few miserable shillings; how I used those slaves, and when I was sure of their slavishness proceeded to goad the more manly workers into revolt, and then supplanted them by the help of those Judases. How I had prepared my plans so that the Judge who tried the strikers, arrested by a police force drunken with rural hatred of the city, should feel that his own right to dividends was on trial when confronted by a working class prisoner, and should hit out vindictively with fiendish sentences accordingly. You also know, none better, how we had our secret agents in every club, society and gathering place in the city. How we encouraged them to play upon the most sacred offices and the most hallowed institutions and to divert them to our uses. How we made priests of the Most High imagine they were obeying the call of God when in reality they were only being galled by our carefully poisoned suggestions—made them mistake the insinuations of the devil for the inspirations of God. How we secured that through the influence of some of our lady shareholders the uniformed ruffians of the police should be let loose to insult with foul-mouthed indecencies the brave girls who dared to strike against the unbearable conditions you imposed upon them, and when in the pride of their outraged purity they resented the insults the same police bullies beat them, arrested them, and perjured themselves to swear their liberties away. All this you know, gentlemen! You also know how we made the streets of Dublin a place of terror for every worker not prepared to sell his class; how

class; how our uniformed brutes (whom I despised even whilst using them) batoned, kicked and maimed all and sundry; how we murdered two men in Dublin and left another widow and six orphans in Kingstown;² how we armed scabs to shoot at will, and how, in short, we have made of the Capital City of our country a place of slaughter, of misery, and a byword amongst the nations.

“Well, gentlemen, what has it all profited us? At the end of it all we find that the workers of Dublin are still unsubdued, and I now believe are unsubduable and unconquerable. You can extract what comfort you may from that fact. For myself now at the opening of the New Year I am determined to do what I can in the few years left me to try and make amends for all the long array of crimes against my kind of which I have been guilty. I, at least, will no longer make war upon the liberties of my poorer brothers and sisters, or use my ill-gotten wealth to exploit others. What I have done I cannot restore, but I can restore to the working class the rights of which I used my wealth to deprive them. From this night, gentlemen, I cease to hold the pistol of starvation at the heads of the poor to make them surrender their souls and liberties. I propose to go down to the Tramway Depots and hunt away the foul vermin who now pollute the cars by their presence. I propose to open the dispatch business of the *Independent* and *Herald* with Transport Union members, and if they will permit me I will grasp the hand of each and beg their pardon for my crimes against their manhood. These will be but the beginning.

“From this day forward I am at the service of every honest cause, and I trust that the closing years of a life spent in unscrupulous acquisition of gold may be worthy of some honour when spent as they will be spent in trying to win instead the esteem of my fellows.

“To-day I am sending to Jim Larkin, whom I have grown to esteem and value as a worthy citizen, an invitation to do me the honour of consenting to dine with me on New Year’s Day at the Imperial Hotel. There on the spot made historic by Larkin,³ I propose that he and I shall make a pact of friendship, and trust that united our efforts will succeed in purging Dublin and Ireland of much of its squalor and misery, and set its feet upon the upward path that leads towards righteousness.”

(NOTE.—Up to the present the invitation has not arrived, and we are wondering whether our reporter invented the speech of Mr Murphy, as Murphy’s supporters have hitherto invented so many speeches attributed to Mr Larkin.)

JAMES CONNOLLY.

The Outrages at Jacob's

[*Irish Worker*, 14 March 1914]

In the course of the abortive Board of Trade Inquiry into the Labour situation in Dublin, Mr Tim Healy, acting as Counsel for the employers, waxed eloquent upon the high esteem in which the people of Ireland held the Quakers owing to the exceedingly charitable work performed by members of that religion during the years of the great Irish famine. As a piece of historical information it was based upon facts; as what it was intended to be, a justification of the industrial practices of Messrs Jacob's, it was a senseless pandering to a foolish sentiment. Foolish, because as no sect or party can be held responsible for the acts of individuals acting as individuals, neither can individuals shelter themselves behind the record of their sect or party in matters foreign to their own conduct as individuals. That the Quakers organised charitable relief to the Irish victims of an absurd and aggressive social system does not justify the Quakers of another generation seeking to mercilessly crush the Irish victims of that system in their day. The difference of method employed does not materially alter the fact of the aggression. A work girl, sweated in a biscuit factory, is, or should be, as sacred in the eyes of humanity as a tenant farmer, rackrented and starving on an Irish farm.

Especially does this show true when dealing with practices by members of a sect, which are totally antagonistic to the principles of that sect, which in another and stricter day would have led to expulsion from that sect as the acts of unworthy members.

And this is especially and emphatically the record of Jacob's. If Quakerism—the principles of the Society of Friends—claims to be the embodiment of the most rigid application of the higher moral teachings of Christianity, it must be conceded that the commercial principles which in Messrs Jacob's are practised in their crudest, most shameless form, are the negation or denial of those principles—are, in fact, the very essence of diabolical cruelty.

Let us be a little more explicit. At the calling off of the strike in Dublin⁴ it was understood that since the workers were willing to handle all goods, the employers' lock-out would also be called off. Especially was this believed as the employers had been declaring their desire for peace and restoring harmonious relations with their employees, and as at each conference they had been vehement in their repudiations of any intention to victimise.

Furthermore it must be conceded that the great majority of the employers have so acted as to justify their claims. Among those who have refused

to fall in line with the effort to restore harmony in Dublin, and whose mean and petty souls saw only in the occasion an opportunity to wreak vengeance, the employers of women labour are the worst offenders, and the worst among the worst are the firms of Paterson's, Match Makers, and G Jacob's, Biscuit Manufacturers. Paterson's we will deal with another time; at present Messrs Jacob's deserve our attention as exhibiting the basest characteristics, and the most cowardly swinishness in dealing with its former employees. It is difficult to believe that in Ireland there could be found any man capable of giving vent to passions as low and bestial as must have filled the man whose actions we are about to describe.

Messrs Jacob's have recently been luxuriating in a crop of threats of actions for libel against journalists who dared to mention the conditions under which their slaves have toiled in the past. We propose to give them in this article a few grounds for action against us, and we cheerfully invite them to go ahead with their action and give us the greater audience before which we may expose the scoundrelly and blackguardly conduct of their Manager, Mr Dawson, to the girls who have applied to him for re-employment.

Let it be remembered that in Jacob's case the girls were locked out because they refused to surrender their right to wear a Union Badge, or be false to the Irish Women Workers' Union.

We have been told that when the girls apply for re-employment this manager, after brutally insulting them before the scabs whom he brings in, in order that he may parade the applicants before them, compels them to submit to his examination of their clothes, their hats, skirts and blouses, to submit while he pinches their arms, and examines their physical condition, and that all through this degrading examination he keeps up a running fire of insulting remarks of which the following are a fair sample:—

"So you had to come back when you got hungry, had you?"

"You have bad teeth, that is with eating the rotten English food, from the food ships."

"Did you get that coat from Larkin?"

"It is a wonder that the Englishmen did not give you a better pair of boots."

"Why did you not go to the Liberty Hall kitchen instead of coming here? Oh, I forgot, this kitchen is closed, and you are coming here for us to feed you now."⁵

"So you are one of Larkin's girls? It's a wonder he didn't feed you better."

"Is this one of the Liberty Hall blouses you have on?"

"Where did you get that skirt? Did you get it from Larkin?"

But why go on sullyng our paper with further quotations from the language of this brute, especially when we know that no quotation in print can convey the vile nature of the insults heaped upon girls whose boots he is not worthy to clean.

In addition to this the girls have to strip to the waist, take off boots and stockings, and then in a semi-nude state go before a doctor to be examined. After submitting to all this they receive the final verdict from the manager. Usually that verdict is a refusal to re-employ—a refusal that was determined on before the ordeal, and was only delayed in order to give this vile brute of a manager an opportunity to gloat over the sufferings of the girls.

In the re-employment that has taken place the higher-paid girls have been usually refused, and only the lower-paid get a ghost of a chance. And boys or girls who get maimed in this service have absolutely no chance of re-employment. The firm seizes gloatingly upon the opportunity to victimise them.

That such things should be possible and provoke no protest from those who are eternally preaching to Labour upon its immoral conduct and lack of true Christian charity. Could the records of all the Labour Unions combined exhibit any vileness to equal this gloating over poor girls whose one fault it was to be beaten in a struggle to maintain their rights as workers to organise in the manner they thought best?

As we have said before, the brute capable of such conduct is not morally fit to blacken the shoes of those girls—our sisters.

Now, bring on your libel action!

JAMES CONNOLLY.

Notes

- 1 Askwith headed the Board of Trade inquiry into the lockout. Set up to promote a compromise in the lockout, the Industrial Peace Committee had dissolved itself in November, the majority forming a Civic League to support the workers.
- 2 James Nolan and James Byrne were killed by a police baton charge, and another James Byrne died on hunger strike in prison.
- 3 It was from a balcony of the Imperial Hotel that Larkin spoke on Bloody Sunday.
- 4 The workers returned to work in early 1914.
- 5 Strikers and their families received food and clothing at Liberty Hall during the lockout, much of it sent by workers in Britain.

Trouble at t'mill: The Clondalkin sit-ins 1982-83 (part two)

Des Derwin

This article is continued from the last issue of Red Banner.

The closure of Clondalkin Paper Mills (CPM) outside Dublin in January 1982, discarding 450 jobs, led to a year-long sit-in by the workers. The sit-in became the centre of a nationwide campaign of industrial, community and political solidarity. On 8th February 1983 the (Fine Gael-Labour Coalition) government agreed to purchase the mill. But the struggle wasn't over yet. The mill remained unopened.

After 8th February the sit-in ended "almost straight away". The Committee continued to meet regularly as did some of the workers.¹ Not long after the ending of the sit-in the Ranks workers, occupying *their* mill at Phibsborough in Dublin, were jailed. Workers from many workplaces across the city stopped work and took to the streets. There was serious talk (as opposed to leaflet talk) of a general strike and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) called a march for Saturday 26th February. It was a build-up similar to that for CPM earlier in the month and then again for CPM later in the year (but with the bite of actual stoppages). The Ranks workers were released at 1am on the 26th. Nevertheless the Trades Council march went ahead (deflated in numbers but elated in spirit because of the releases) with the Ranks workers, their families and their placards surrounding the DCTU banner at the head of the march. The next banner behind was that of the 'Clondalkin Paper Mills Action Group'.²

As the months of the industrial battlefield that was 1983 rolled by, the mill remained becalmed and unopened. The ICTU together with Action Committee members met John Bruton, the Minister for Industry and Energy, on 22nd June. They were told that the government would not re-open the Paper Mills as a state industry. It would only open if taken over by private interests (such as the Canadian company then talking to the IDA). Bruton, it was reported, told Congress that the government only agreed to buy the mill, not to re-open it. The Clondalkin workers were

quite clear that the commitment given on 8th February was to the purchase of the plant and to the re-opening schedule laid down by the previous, Fianna Fáil, government. Congress called for a meeting with Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald and urged the workers not to do anything that might scare away the Canadians or give the government an excuse not to meet Congress. The mill workers responded by giving the ICTU time to talk to Fitzgerald, but they also responded angrily to Bruton's betrayal of 22nd June by beginning a campaign of 'civil disruption' to highlight the breach of faith and to bring the issue back to public attention. Two hundred CPM workers and their families blocked the Naas dual carriageway outside the city. Further traffic disruptions followed including the city centre.³

This phase of their struggle was deliberately one of 'non-trade union activities'. The Clondalkin workers were before long to embrace the most direct industrial methods again, and even at this stage their leaders let it be known that 'trade union activities' were only temporarily parked. It was reported that if Fitzgerald confirmed Bruton's decisions they would be seeking, through their unions and Congress, the blacking of paper by public sector workers. Gerry Courtney, Chair of the Action Committee, said: "If it [the 8th February agreement] is reneged on and the ICTU and the trade union leaders don't bring the full power of the movement into operation, then there is no future for trade unions in this country." Paul Billings, the Secretary of the Committee, said: "We have done nearly all we can as a group of trade unionists. It looks now as if we will be needing the support of the entire labour movement and the local community to pull us through. Without that support, we cannot defeat a government, and that is what we are faced with."⁴

The step

Still the months passed and the mill remained unopened. Myles Speight sets the scene for the next development:

Brian [Nolan] and myself had discussed the situation for quite a while. Our campaign had gone on so long, and there was a bit of disillusionment settling in, especially with the Committee. We had had a tremendous campaign, but didn't seem to be getting anywhere. We had a picket going on down on the Government Stationery Office for a period of time and it didn't seem to be going anywhere; there was a low profile from the government and other people on it, and even from our own trade union leaders. I felt something drastic had to be done; and I felt so

strong at the time—and I know Brian did as well—on the issue, that we took the step.⁵

What the step was is recorded in an *Irish Times* heading of 2nd November 1983, 'Mill workers threaten fast', accompanied by a photograph of the two and the following report by Eugene McEldowney:

Two former employees of the Clondalkin Paper Mills in Dublin, Mr. Myles Speight and Mr. Brian Nolan, are threatening to go on hunger strike to-morrow to press the Government to reopen the mills. The move follows a decision last week by the Minister for Energy, Mr. Bruton, not to reopen the mills unless they can be made financially viable. The announcement has led to heated exchanges between Mr. Bruton and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions which has called for a public enquiry into the Government's handling of the mills issue and demanded Mr. Bruton's resignation. The Government bought the mills last February for £1.7 million, but so far they have not reactivated it.

Yesterday a delegation from the ICTU met the Fianna Fail leader, Mr. Haughey, and a joint statement later said that both sides agreed that reopening the mills was essential from the national and strategic viewpoints, and the interests of the workers.

Fianna Fail agreed to pursue the question of re-opening the mills with the Government, and to take whatever parliamentary action is open to them, to compel the Taoiseach and the Government to honour their commitments.

On 3rd November Myles Speight and Brian Nolan began their hunger strike in the mill and gained the front page. Other Clondalkin workers also resumed their occupation on the same day. AUEW-TASS (Brian Nolan's union) tabled a motion for the next meeting of the DCTU calling for a day of action on the issue to include a work stoppage.

A large sign was put up in Clondalkin village proclaiming how many days the two had fasted. The small office where they stayed was seldom without visitors.⁶ 'Mill workers pledge a death fast', proclaimed an *Irish Times* report of 8th November, marking the sixth day off food. There was a photograph of the two with their wives, Catherine Nolan and Kathleen Speight. The men said they were willing to fast to the death. The women were not quite sure about that. Myles was 45 and Brian was 35. Two of Myles's sons had recently been made redundant. A statement from Brian Nolan declared, "In the light of our complete disillusionment we address

ourselves specifically to all workers of the country and ask them to show solidarity and do whatever is necessary." There was a possibility of more joining the hunger strike.

Dick Spring, the Tánaiste and leader of the Labour Party, and other members of the parliamentary party met the Dublin South-West (Clondalkin) Constituency Council of the party on the evening of the 8th. The Council chairperson said later that Dick Spring had reaffirmed his promise to the workers a year previously that the mill would be reopened. This contrasted with John Bruton's recent statement that the mill would only be reopened if commercially viable. The government would be considering another IDA report on the mill the following morning. In the light of these developments the Constituency Council was calling on the two to suspend their protest. The same evening the DCTU called for a one day stoppage and demonstration in support of the Clondalkin workers.

Mr. Spring's support, however, needed 'clarification' in the cold light of the following day. According to the Irish Times (10th November), "Reports yesterday that the Tánaiste, Mr. Spring, had 'reaffirmed his promise to the workers a year ago that the mills would be reopened' were clarified yesterday by Mr. Spring and the Labour TD for the constituency Mr. Mervyn Taylor. Mr. Taylor said yesterday that it was 'a commitment to open it subject to some form of viability.' The need for viability may have been more implicit than explicit in Mr. Spring's remarks, made to a constituency party meeting, but there had been no change in his position." Truly, Dick Spring's spindoctors flourished a clear decade before Tony Blair's!

Charles Haughey visited the hunger strikers on Wednesday 9th. He asked them, unsuccessfully, to give up their strike, or at least to suspend it until a Fianna Fáil motion on Clondalkin was debated in the Dáil the following week. They were determined to continue their fast. It was the seventh day and Brian Nolan said: "The doctors told us that we were now clinically starving."⁷ When Brian's brother, Niall, tried to collect his £26 unemployment assistance on his behalf on this same day the local office, after consulting a senior official in the Department of Social Welfare, refused to pay it.

On the evening of the 9th Garret Fitzgerald, the Taoiseach, met the ICTU on the future of the mill. According to that morning's *Irish Times*, "The Clondalkin affair has put a severe strain on relations between the ICTU and the Government. It is understood that the Congress had to exert considerable pressure on the Taoiseach to secure to-day's meeting, and that, had the meeting not been arranged, the ICTU was prepared to boycott

scheduled talks with the Government on economic matters." (Greater love hath no Congress than this, that he should lay down his economic talks with the government for his brother.)

The meeting lasted more than three hours, with Spring and Bruton also present. The ICTU statement afterwards said, in toto, "The Government informed the ICTU representatives that two projects were under consideration for reopening of Clondalkin Paper Mills, but were unable to give assurances that the mills would reopen if these proposals were not successfully concluded. The delegation stated that in these circumstances no purpose could be served in pursuing discussions at the present time." (Would that Congress statements were today so short, and so sweet.) The government statement said, "With a view to securing the re-opening of the Clondalkin Paper Mills as a viable operation the IDA is currently negotiating with a Canadian company Freedham McCormack Investments (FMI) and is also in touch with another company." The government said some time was needed for the IDA to explore these two alternatives.

The next day, Thursday 10th, the Dublin Printing Trades Group of unions called on all its members to support the DCTU's stoppage fully. Joe Higgins of the Administrative Council of the Labour Party (now the Socialist Party TD) called on the party to "give an unconditional guarantee that the mill would be reopened shortly under State Ownership".

Less predictable parts of the Labour Party were also concerned that unconditional commitments be given. It seems that the Clondalkin branch of the party was unhappy with the 'clarification' of the statements made at Tuesday's Constituency Council meeting. The branch sent a detailed file to all Labour TDs, including a letter written by Dick Spring on 22nd November 1982 to John O'Keefe of the Action Committee. It said, "On behalf of the Labour Party I wish to reiterate that we are in favour of the re-opening of the mills and the maintaining of employment there. We will do all in our power to bring this about", and made no reference to the need for the mill to be viable before being reopened.⁸

War of words

An extraordinary war of words, between the ICTU and John Bruton and the government, developed out of Bruton's statements in the Dáil that day. The conflict was about whether a commitment to reopen had been given with or without a 'viability' condition, and centred on contradictory accounts of meetings in February. Bruton said: "No commitment of the kind suggested by Congress was made by me at that meeting [February 8th]... It would be entirely wrong for anyone to take a course of action

based on a false perception of what the Government actually committed themselves to. Those who propagate a false impression of what the Government were actually committed to contribute to a worsening of that situation." But Brian Nolan said on television that evening; "We are not trying to elicit any new policies or commitments from the Government. This is merely a protest at the Government's delay in implementing a State commitment to the ICTU on February 8th."

On Friday 11th November the ICTU said that the February meetings were in the context of a commitment from the previous (Fianna Fáil) government that the mill would be reopened. In support of this Congress quoted from a letter from the former Minister for Energy, Albert Reynolds, as follows: "On completion of refurbishment, the mills will be reopened and employment phased in, in relation to market demand, to achieve production on a two machine basis." The ICTU statement continued: "We do not accept that the Government would have perpetrated a confidence trick on Congress and the Clondalkin workers by using taxpayers' money simply to purchase some real estate as a ploy to head off a serious situation that was developing in February last. The mills were purchased as a step towards their re-opening and the provision of a paper-making facility at Clondalkin."⁹ (Come back Donal Nevin, all is forgiven.)

That night John Bruton strongly denied he had ever given any commitment to reopen the mill regardless of its commercial viability. Bruton said that "the propagation of information to the contrary was contributing to the prolongation of the hunger strike". A government spokesperson denounced the ICTU's claim as "false and irresponsible".¹⁰

In the Clondalkin area Sean MacBride, Nobel-but-not-yet-Lenin Peace Prize winner, addressed a public meeting, saying that the government was guilty of "gross breach of faith with the workers and the ICTU". That evening too, the executive council of the DCTU set the day of action for the following Thursday, to include a strike and a demonstration. Sam Nolan, DCTU secretary (as he still is), said that they expected a massive response for the day of action. He said that the Council was giving its full backing to the Clondalkin workers, whose struggle they viewed "as part of the overall fight against unemployment".¹¹

A commercial judgment

By Saturday 12th the Clondalkin struggle was front-page headlines again. A Labour Youth march and rally at Liberty Hall, Dublin, attended by 1,000 young people it was said, with banners from the major unions, was led by a group of CPM workers and addressed by Niall Nolan.

Over the week-end the intense verbal swordplay continued. The first ICTU statement, on the Sunday, was to concede that it had been mistaken in thinking that Bruton had personally committed himself in February to reopening the mill! A major strike to Bruton in the war of words, which he was not slow to exploit. In its second statement that day the ICTU said, "Congress asserts that the Clondalkin workers are quite right in saying that there is a Government commitment on the basis of the five-point agreement made with the previous Government in Mr. Reynolds' letter of November 16th, 1982. In this they have the full backing and support of Congress."¹²

Bruton responded with a second statement of his own that night:

[The ICTU] now claim that the commitment of the previous defeated Government in regards to Clondalkin binds the present Government. This is not so, and never was accepted by me or the present Government in any of its meetings with Congress. The previous Government was defeated at the last election and a new one was elected. Elections would make no sense if new ones were bound, regardless of all other considerations, to follow the policies of their predecessors. I will stick to my policy of seeking the opening of the mill on a viable basis.... One of those now on hunger strike has specifically stated the reason for the strike as being a protest at the non-implementation of my commitment of February 8th. By clearly showing that no such commitment was made, the ICTU are helping to bring this protest to an end. Protests and pressure do not affect the viability of paper making which is a matter of commercial judgment in a commercial market. To set up an industry on political grounds without first being satisfied that it could pay its way would be to repeat the Government errors of the 1970s.

He warned that public arm twisting would not be successful as far as he was concerned. Brian Nolan replied, "We are not attempting to twist anyone's arm... we are merely protesting at the lengthy delay in the implementation of the commitment already made to the ICTU that the November timetable would be adhered to."¹³ The hunger strikers insisted that they intended to go on with their fast.

Bruton had cut deep with Congress's climbdown on his personal commitments at meetings. Congress had stressed, however, that the underlying issue was the general commitment to reopening without qualifications of 'viability'. Congress would have put themselves on even safer ground (and avoided Bruton's discourse on 'democracy' in relation to

continuity between governments) by basing their demand for the reopening of the mill on the right to work, by challenging the notion of 'viability' as a synonym for 'profitability', and demanding that the mill be nationalised if it was incapable of producing profits to the satisfaction of a new owner. This might have been an ideological step too far for Congress, but not for the Clondalkin workers who, although never insisting that the mill be nationalised, were clear that it should be if no new operator could be engaged. The previous government's commitment (at least on paper) to reopen was undoubtedly a major tactical weapon. But Congress based its public support for CPM on this commitment, almost as a special case, a promise made. Bruton's bold stand by the banner of business reality was never really challenged by Congress.

Furthermore, Congress supported reopening but not the hunger strike. This was flagged prior to a visit by Donal Nevin on the following afternoon (Monday 14th) to the hunger strikers and the Clondalkin Action Committee, as was the caveat that he was going "in a personal capacity".¹⁴ (You see, even general secretaries of Congress do things 'in a personal capacity'.) The next morning's newspaper carried a delightful photograph of himself and FWUI leader Billy Attley at the bedside of Brian Nolan.

Congress kept up the statements duel that day, saying it was news to them that an agreement with one government could be abrogated by its successor without any notification to the other party, and it was more surprising that such abrogation could be retrospectively applied. The Talbot agreement with the Fianna Fáil government¹⁵ had been maintained by its Coalition successor. No communication had ever been received, Congress said, that the government wished to abrogate the Clondalkin agreement. However, Congress had this, their fall-back position from the gaff on Bruton's commitment, undermined somewhat when Albert Reynolds himself, on RTÉ radio that day, stressed the importance he gave to the viability of the mill.

Dublin County Council had three motions on CPM before it that night, which led to a two-hour wrangle. The Labour motion calling for the early reopening of the mills to save the lives of the two, was passed, Labour and Fianna Fáil voting together. The Fine Gael motion noting the efforts of the government to reopen the mill and urging the two to co-operate with it, was *also* passed, Fine Gael and Labour voting together. The Fianna Fáil one, calling on Bruton to resign, fell, Fine Gael and Labour voting together!

The organisers of the Trades Council stoppage and demonstration were that evening predicting that thousands of workers would take part. They

said that support was guaranteed from the ITGWU, the FWUI and the ATGWU, the three biggest unions!¹⁶

In the Dáil

The Cabinet again discussed the Clondalkin crisis on Tuesday 15th. There were speculations of a major development in securing a buyer. Nine members of the Administrative Council of the Labour Party called on the Labour deputies to give an unequivocal guarantee that the mill would be reopened. The group said Fitzgerald and Bruton were ideologically opposed to the reopening of the mill as a nationalised industry. An emergency meeting of the Administrative Council was set for the next day.

In the Dáil Fianna Fáil had put down a motion calling on the government, "following the purchase of the premises, to honour their clear commitment to have Clondalkin Paper Mills reopened for the production of paper". The motion made no reference to viability. One of its four sponsors was Mary Harney! She bested that in the Dáil that evening when she argued that by supporting Bruton on the issue, Labour deputies would be betraying their own philosophy! A Workers Party amendment demanded that the mills be taken over by the state.

Bruton told the Dáil a third firm was interested and he hoped their representatives could visit Clondalkin the following week. He claimed that Reynolds's radio recollection showed that his predecessor shared his approach. But Brian Lenihan of Fianna Fáil insisted that no government would spend £1.76 million of taxpayers' money to buy the mill with the intention of keeping it closed. The vote on the motion, he said, would show whether Labour deputies were prepared to support the right-wing ideology of Mr. Bruton up to the hilt!

Myles Speight said they would not suspend the hunger strike in view of the visit by potential buyers referred to in the Dáil. There had been visits from all over but it had all come to nothing. They would continue "until such time as we see concrete proposals with a deadline on negotiations".¹⁷ The ASTI and UPTCS unions issued statements calling on their members to support the Trades Council demonstration on Thursday.

Myles Speight and Brian Nolan, on Wednesday 16th, the thirteenth day of their hunger strike, called on all workers and fellow trade unionists to show their solidarity by giving full support to the stoppage and march the next day. They had been advised by UCD medical specialists that they would suffer irreversible damage unless they came off the fast in the next couple of days. "We are very weak at the moment", said Brian Nolan. He had lost one stone, three ounces, and Myles a similar weight. "We have

aching joints, headaches and stomach pains, but we are determined to go on until the future of the mills is secure."

The ICTU executive decided that morning to boycott a meeting scheduled for the afternoon with Fitzgerald and government Ministers for talks on the economy. The debate on Clondalkin continued in the Dáil that night. It was the fourteenth day of the hunger strike and the eve of the DCTU's 'Day of Action', which was shaping up to be the biggest show of solidarity strike action in the state, in support of a single group of workers, for a long time before and all the time since.

A report of the time¹⁸ said that on the previous Friday the leaders of the ITGWU, the FWUI and other unions affiliated to the Labour Party were to meet the four Labour Ministers to urge them to give a full commitment to the reopening of the mills. In Fergus Finlay's recent memoirs the former aide to Dick Spring places the meeting on this night, the 16th:

Fianna Fáil put down a Private Members Motion condemning the government's handling of the situation. On the night the vote was to be taken on the motion, a delegation of senior trade union people came to see the Labour Ministers. For an hour they harangued the Ministers about how critical it was for the future of the Labour Party that we should not be caught on the wrong side of this vote. Eventually they put their cards on the table. It was Billy Attley who spelled out the demand. 'We're here to make sure you vote against the government to-night,' he said. 'If you don't the party's finished.' It was a delicate moment, requiring tact and diplomacy. Instead Barry [Desmond] spoke. 'As usual, Bill, you're missing the point,' he said. 'We won't be voting against the government. We are the government.'¹⁹

As the Dáil was completing its debate on the motion, Minister of State Eddie Collins suddenly announced an agreement in principle with the Canadian company FMI to take over the mill and initially start paper conversion there. Shortly afterwards the government's motion won by 83 votes to 75. Myles Speight and Brian Nolan agreed to call off their hunger strike. The DCTU cancelled the 'Day of Action' and described the hunger strike outcome as a great victory for the workers and for the trade union movement.²⁰

Clondalkin Paper Mills was once again the front page headline the next morning. A Peter Thursfield photograph of Myles and Kathleen Speight captured the moment wonderfully: the sweetest kiss ever to adorn the front page of the *Irish Times*.

Victory or defeat?

The very first reports of the settlement would have led the boy to shout at the naked emperor. It was painfully obvious that the FMI deal was a stop-gap measure hastily grasped at: it was only 'in principle'; it was only for paper conversion with 30 jobs and not for the main work of the mills with 220 jobs expected: FMI had first approached the IDA almost a year previously; and the government were still talking to a British company as well about paper making at the mills! One might have been forgiven for dubbing it an exercise in cosmetics to take everybody off the hook.

This was not necessarily the full picture, as the future of the mill was to bear out, whether planned or not. But it was a realistic one, and one shared by many,²¹ including at first the hunger strikers themselves. When a journalist first showed a copy of Bruton's statement to the two on the 16th, they were pessimistic about an end to the fast. They were dissatisfied with the vagueness of the statement which promised only 30 jobs in the first year rising to 45 in the second! After the Dáil proceedings members of the Action Committee together with ICTU representatives arrived in Clondalkin from Leinster House. After a meeting, it was reported, "the redundant workers supported an end to the hunger strike and appeared satisfied that they had won a victory and a commitment for their jobs".²² The two ended the fast on the basis of assurances from Congress that every effort would be made to secure the reopening of the plant. "There are details to be thrashed out alright. But the broad outline has been agreed", Brian Nolan said. Neither would give any details of what had been promised apart from referring to the Congress assurances. The imminence of what looked like being a powerful showing on the Day of Action, the very next day, and the capacity for the two to last at least another day or two on hunger strike goes against the idea that the deal was accepted to save face or lives.

Tom McGrath issued a statement: "The executive council of the ICTU reaffirms in absolute terms its commitment to the trade union campaign to reopen the Clondalkin Paper Mills. The whole trade union movement pays tribute to Brian Nolan and Myles Speight for their unselfish action, which has brought to the attention of the whole country the terrible scourge of unemployment and the failure of the Government to take effective steps to provide jobs. The trade union campaign must be pursued with renewed vigour, and to this end the Executive Council again affirms its total commitment to achieve this objective."

Paul Billings (now a senior officer of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed), later read a statement on behalf of the Action Committee: "After consultation with the action committee and in conjunc-

tion with the statement issued by Congress, the decision was taken this evening to end the hunger strike. We want to thank the entire trade union movement for the swell of support our campaign has received. We are confident that such solidarity will be preserved in the trade union movement and that this will enable workers throughout the land to confront and overcome the scourge of unemployment which is rife today." After medical examination the two were discharged from hospital.²³

Epilogue

The mill reopened and at the beginning of 1987 there were 234 employed. This appears however to have rested on a financial foundation of sand, or rather smoke.²⁴ As 1986 turned into 1987, 170 production workers were laid off. Here began a saga (of bids for state aid, stays of execution and two more short sit-ins) to end the saga. If a date must be fixed for the final end of Clondalkin Paper Mills it is 11th March 1987, although some of the workers kept up an organised involvement with the receiver and then the dismantler until the end of the decade.

In 1982 and 1983 Clondalkin Paper Mills provided us with a practical demonstration of how a closure can be fought. *Occupation*, and the creation around it by the workers of a *national industrial and political support campaign*, had forced the state to buy the mill, broker its re-opening and pushed back the final closure by five years. Among the Action Committee which led that, including some who served to the bitter end of the mill, were Eugene Charles, Gerry Courtney, Paul Billings, Johnny Delaney (now deceased), Bob Gleeson, Denis Kenny, Ollie Lannery, Frank McClone, Brian Nolan, Niall Nolan, John O'Keefe, Billy Phelan, Danny Power, Myles Speight and Sean Stynes.²⁵

Notes

- 1 Danny Power, Assistant Treasurer of the Action Committee, interview with author.
- 2 *The Worker*, Apr-May 1983.
- 3 Report by John Byrne, *The Worker*, Aug-Sept 1983.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Out of the Limelight*, RTÉ Radio 1, 1990, produced and presented by Betty Purcell.
- 6 Among the less distinguished visitors were John Cane and myself. I remember Myles clutching a bottle of spring water—long before it became a fashion accessory.
- 7 *Irish Times*, 10 Nov 1983.
- 8 *Irish Times*, 11 Nov 1983.

- 9 *Irish Times*, 12 Nov 1983.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *Irish Times*, 14 Nov 1983.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 A couple of years previously a struggle by the workers at the Talbot car assembly plant in Dublin had also secured threatened jobs, though in the roundabout way of guaranteeing public service jobs or wages to the workers of the closed plant.
- 16 *Irish Times*, 15 Nov 1983.
- 17 *Irish Times*, 16 Nov 1983.
- 18 *Irish Times*, 11 Nov 1983.
- 19 Fergus Finlay, *Snakes and Ladders*, New Island Books, Dublin, 1998, p 44.
- 20 *Irish Times*, 17 Nov 1983.
- 21 For one assessment, "It was by no means a victory as the ICTU bureaucrats liked to claim. It just salvaged a near total defeat for Clondalkin workers" (*The Worker*, Dec 1983).
- 22 Niall Kiely, *Irish Times*, 17 Nov 1983.
- 23 Myles reminisced later that he'd recommend a two week hunger strike to anyone; his stomach was never better. Forgetting the dizziness and the cramps at the end, he said the only bad effect was that he fainted when he drank a pint! (*Out of the Limelight*.)
- 24 Alan Murdoch (*Irish Times*, 10 Mar 1987) pointed to "the current shareholders' shortage of investment capital". The state had, by that January, "committed more than £6 million to the rescue of the mills since 1981. Estimates of what it would need to bring the plant back to viability ranged from £6 million to over £10 million. Foir Teo. predicted that its own funding of the mills could easily reach £12 million." According to his namesake Bill Murdoch (*Irish Times*, 23 Feb 1987) equity finance from the founding shareholders was perhaps as low as £12,750, and shareholders' funds were £300,000 compared with borrowings of £8 million!
- 25 Peter Keating, then the FWUI official (and now a retired SIPTU official), should also figure highly in the roundup (cf part one).

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