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*Reminiscences*

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*of the*

**CONNOLLY  
ASSOCIATION**

*by*

*C. Desmond Greaves*

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AN EMERALD JUBILEE PAMPHLET

1938 - 1978

## INTRODUCTION

I WOULD not wish to offer this little work as more than it is. Its composition arose from the following circumstances. For several years now a distinguished Dublin academic has been working on a definitive history of the organisation. It became clear that it could not possibly be ready in time for the fortieth anniversary of the Association's foundation. Rather late in the day we asked if he would write a pamphlet. Again it was clear that it could not be ready in time.

The sole virtue of the effort that follows may be that it is ready on time. I hope it has other virtues, but of that others must judge. It is a work of journalism not of literature. It was written in a weekend. Obviously when time was so short I could not possibly attempt a potted history of the Association. But as a member since 1941, and on its executive council continuously since then, I have many memories. I formed a rough scheme and wrote my reminiscences. But I thought it desirable to prefix a brief account of the organisations which preceded the Connolly Association. Only in this section did I use printed sources. The rest is cuimhne cinn.

The moment it was finished fresh memories crowded into my mind. It must be regarded as jottings. No attempt is made to assess the achievement of the Association, though I would say that it played an important part in winning for James Connolly's work the recognition it now enjoys. I have stressed some of the policy questions that have faced the Association over the years. But there is nothing definitive in it at all. When the full history is completed we shall see how it all strikes an independent and impartial expert. The author will be satisfied if he has told the younger generation some part of a story that they can at present read nowhere else, and raised policy questions that are still of interest today.

## CHAPTER I

# ORIGIN

It is surprising that nobody has written a political history of the Irish in Britain. Of all exile communities they have been the best placed to influence the fortunes of the old country. There has been a continuous influx ever since the Industrial revolution made the north of England a magnet drawing labour from all over these islands. The Irish influx is an essential part of British working-class history. Because the immigrants, whatever they had been at home, became wage-earners when they crossed the channel, their power to defend themselves, or to aid their homeland, rose or fell with the fortunes of the working class. At all times Irish exiles have been active to some degree in the Labour movement, advancing Labour interests and simultaneously the cause of Irish freedom.

Of the contribution of the Irish there can be no doubt. John Doherty, a Donegal man, was described by the Webbs as "one of the acutest thinkers and stoutest leaders among the workmen of his time." He founded the first fully nation-wide trade union, the National Union of Cotton Spinners, in the year 1829. He led a strike in Hyde, Manchester, which lasted six months. He was the first man to suggest a "Grand General Union of all Trades."

A high degree of international unity was achieved readily enough in the skilled trades. Among the unskilled—if we are permitted to imply that any worker is without skill—things were not so easy. The sturdy Irish countrymen who had dug the canals and now built the railways, were often assailed by angry mobs composed of local men who felt they could do the work if given an opportunity. Migratory harvest workers were also on occasion given a hot reception. When the working-class movement was surging forward, tendencies towards unity prevailed to an increasing degree. In times of stagnation national antagonisms came to the fore. The exiles were fully aware that their presence on the British labour market was due to the English misgovernment of Ireland. Nor did they always better themselves. Some of the immigrants lived in appalling poverty and degradation.

During the era of Chartism a degree of working-class unity was achieved that has never been surpassed. In its inception the charter had the blessing of Daniel O'Connell. During a period when he had quarrelled with the Whigs, he attended a meeting from which was to be launched a petition incorporating a number of democratic demands. He said to Lovett: "This is your charter, agitate for it, and never

be content with anything else." O'Connell later became so bitter an opponent of Chartism that people forget that he gave it its name.

It was another Irishman, a Cork man, Feargus O'Connor, who founded the movement's newspaper, the Northern Star. A paper of this title had been published by Samuel Neilson as the main organ of the United Irishmen. The points of the Charter follow so closely the programme of the United Irishmen that a connection has been supposed. Arthur O'Connor, still alive in 1837, was Feargus's uncle. It was he who, when the Northern Star was suppressed, established the Irish Press in Dublin. The first Charter had no Irish plank. But the second included a demand for the "Repeal of the Union" for which O'Connell was now agitating.

It must be remembered that the bustling Northern towns in which the Chartists carried out their activities all had substantial Irish populations. It must be a quarter of a century since a Connolly Association member in Barnsley told me of the remarkable manuscript written by Peter Hoey that is preserved in the town library. The Chartists had a vision of a united democracy covering all these islands, in which the British workers would support Irish independence and the Irish would support the democracy of Britain. In pursuance of this general idea they began to start Chartist clubs in Ireland. Hoey tells of how he went home to his native Drogheda with this end in view. O'Connell's supporters drummed him out of the town and he was glad to get back to Barnsley. There is an important lesson here. The national question takes precedence. Because the policy of the British movement should be to accept Ireland's demand for independence, the British are precluded from organising anything on Irish soil, and this applies even when their agent is himself an Irishman.

This apart, the Connolly Association has always regarded Feargus O'Connor as one of its forerunners, and at the centenary of his death which fell in 1955, it organised two commemorations—one at his grave in Kensal Green cemetery, London, and another in the Arboretum of Nottingham, for which city he sat as a Member of Parliament. The headstone and the statue were renovated at the Association's expense, and the London oration was delivered by the late Sean Murray. There may still be knocking around copies of the pamphlet that was issued.

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Not long after Doherty was attempting to organise the working class nationally and preparing the way for Chartism, Karl Marx and his associates were working for an international organisation. They achieved their purpose in 1864 when the International Workingmen's Association was established. It was not restricted to convinced socialists.

Great changes had taken place in Ireland. The country had lost over two million of her population by starvation and emigration. Then came evictions. The immigrants flooded into Britain, and enormous Irish communities were established in Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Manchester and the East End of London. The Fenians were preparing for an insurrection and there were massive police raids in Dublin. Three years later an unsuccessful rising took place. Some of the Fenians, such as John Devoy, were members of the International, and Stephens seems to have been in touch with it in Paris. The aftermath of the Rising was a wave of arrests and imprisonments. In September two prominent Fenians, Kelly and Deasy, were arrested near Manchester. As they were being conveyed to jail in a Black Maria, local Fenians armed with revolvers, drove off the police escort and broke open the van. In blowing the lock they unintentionally killed Sergeant Brett. The incident took place near the railway bridge in Hyde Road which is therefore called locally the "Fenian Bridge". They were charged with murder, and defended by the Chartist lawyer Ernest Jones. I have often wondered if Engels had a hand in this. He was in touch with Fenian circles through his Irish wife. Allen, Larkin and O'Brien were executed and became known as the Manchester martyrs.

The following month an attempt was made to break a prominent Fenian out of Clerkenwell jail by exploding a barrel of gunpowder on the outside wall. The prisoner was not rescued, but four innocent people were killed, 120 injured, and many houses destroyed. The organisation disowned the outrage. It was not officially sanctioned, but that it could happen showed that discipline had begun to weaken and, needless to say, an anti-Irish frenzy was unleashed.

The leaders of the International refrained from joining the hue and cry against the Fenians, though in private correspondence they spoke of "stupidity". Instead Marx proposed that the English should give the Irish what they wanted, "self-government and independence from England". If you want to do away with Fenianism give them nothing to be Fenian about. Three days after the Clerkenwell explosion he told the German workers that "the English should demand separation and leave it to the Irish themselves to decide the question of land ownership". On the other hand the International declined to make itself "responsible for the stupidities which occur in every conspiracy". It could scarcely endorse "the idea of liberating Ireland by setting a London tailor's shop on fire".

The following March Marx wrote to Engels: "The present way in which the Irish treat political prisoners in Ireland is really worse than anything happening on the Continent, except in Russia". In April he explained that the set-back the

workers' party suffered in the general outcry for "law and order" was "only a penalty which England—and consequently the English working class—is paying for the great crime she has been committing for many centuries against Ireland". To a General Council meeting on November 23rd 1869 he said: "I repeat that political prisoners are not treated anywhere so badly as in England." The General Council was running a campaign for an amnesty within two years of their imprisonment. And next week he delivered his famous epigram, "Any nation that oppresses another forges its own chains." It was written in reference to Ireland.

The years 1870-72 were marked by considerable working-class activity in Ireland. Sections of the International were formed in Dublin and Cork, that in Cork being particularly active. But emigration continued. Members of the International came to Britain and groups of Irish workers in Britain formed associations which linked with Dublin rather than London. One of the Council members, Hales, moved "That in the opinion of the Council the formation of Irish Nationalist branches is opposed to the General Rules and principles of the Association." His indignation had been triggered off by the establishment of Irish sections in Liverpool and Middlesbrough.

Mottershead deplored Hales's animus. He "knew too well the domineering spirit with which Englishmen of the ignorant class treated their Irish brethren." The Irish representative McDonnell said that "to ask Irishmen to give up their nationality was to insult them." Engels did not mince his words. "The Irish section," he said, "were not only justified, but even under the necessity to state in the preamble to their rules that their first and most pressing duty, as Irishmen, was to establish their own national independence." He pointed out that the French, German, Italian and Polish sections in Britain did not come under the jurisdiction of the British Federal Council. "In a case like that of the Irish, true Internationalism must necessarily be based on a distinct national organisation." The fact that the Irish used the English language could not deprive them of their rights.

The leaders of the International understood that the follies committed in the name of Irish Republicanism were historically conditioned, and that while the Irish in Britain were driven by their future interests in the direction of socialism, they were compelled by their country's position to be nationalists. The principle they worked upon was to accept unreservedly the full Irish national demand, but to give it a legal form in which it could be urged upon the English Government.

In 1869, under the auspices of the International, the Land and Labour League was started as an independent working-

class party. It has received scant notice from historians. But many of the most advanced Irishmen joined it, and I remember being told thirty years ago, when visiting a very old man in Edinburgh, Conlon, who knew James Connolly's family well, that the Land and Labour League was "where we all came from."

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The year 1871 marked the beginning of mass political organisation in Britain. Following the failure of the Rising of 1867, while a handful of the Fenians sought alliances on the Left, most decided to bide their time and work within the framework of constitutional movements such as the amnesty committees and the Home Rule Association established by Isaac Butt in 1870. The first branch of this organisation on English soil was established at the end of 1871 in Liverpool by Denvir and Crilly. Branches in other cities were quickly established and amalgamated into a national organisation at a conference held in Manchester in January 1873. The headquarters of the organisation was first in Manchester, then in Birmingham, from 1875 for a period of years in Liverpool where its newspaper, "The United Irishman", was published, and finally in London.

The "Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain" was in business in British politics. It organised support for the Irish Parliamentary Party, but more particularly it mobilised the Irish vote in British constituencies. An elaborate electoral registration system was built up. It was thus possible for Parnell to throw the Irish behind one British political party or another as he decided. Only in Liverpool, where the Irish community was exceptionally large, was a Member of Parliament elected on a Home Rule ticket. He was T. P. O'Connor. Here there was a substantial body of Home Rule councillors. The tradition survived. In the election following the Labour Party's disgracing itself by passing the "Ireland Act" Mr Mac Hugh, a local schoolteacher, went up in Bootle. But, Ichabod! The glory of the Irish vote had departed. Yet even now you will see the ceremonial presentation of a bunch of shamrock to the Lord Mayor on St Patrick's Day.

From 1870 to 1890 the Irish question dominated British politics. The Home Rule Confederation, later the Land League of Great Britain, then the Irish Land League, built up an enormous organisation, especially after the "New Departure" brought the whole-hearted support of the Fenians. Since the aim became to win Irish independence through the British Parliament, the shop-window of Irish politics was in England to a degree that cannot be readily imagined now. The Parnell split was correspondingly disastrous, and when the factions

reunited at the end of the century, the movement had a weaker hold on the Irish than previously. Many of them joined the I.L.P., for example the Nunans in West London, whose son fought in 1916. Much the same occurred elsewhere, but to a less degree in Liverpool, thanks to the existence of the Irish group on the council. Nevertheless there were important examples of men from nationalist backgrounds who joined the I.L.P., for example, John Wolfe Tone Morrissey who influenced Larkin. In some cities Irish organisation never recovered. During the war the Connolly Association was in touch with an old Irish National League supporter in Newcastle, Peadar O'Grouke Fanning. I remember speaking with him at an open-air meeting in a park on the side of a hill. When I asked about organisation in Newcastle he simply repeated: "Oh, that will never be. Here the Parnell split was never healed." To him it seemed an adequate explanation. But it also throws light on the inner decay in the United Irish League, which made the emergence of Sinn Fein inevitable.

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Following the Parnell split, Irish national energies ran into alternative channels. The Fenians were forced from their dependence on the Parliamentarians. The centre of Irish life in Britain shifted to London, where a most impressive cultural development took place. Three organisations dominated the scene, the Gaelic League, the Irish Literary Society and the Irish Texts Society.

There had, of course, been Irish literary societies before the 'nineties. In Liverpool Denvir had founded the Irish Literary Institute in 1884. A leading figure in it was Dr Cummins, the translator of Freiligrath, another James Sexton, and P. L. Beasley, father of the biographer of Michael Collins. The Institute sent out speakers throughout the North of England. A Glasgow Society was set up in 1885. Among its presidents were Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and John Ferguson the publisher of Mitchel's History of Ireland.

But the London Society, established in 1892, included almost every famous name in the literary revival. This was because a number of its members, for example W. B. Yeats and Maud Gonne, used virtually to "commute" between London and Dublin. Then, even more than now, Irish writers had to seek their fortunes abroad, and London was the natural first port of call. The London Society survived for many years. I remember being brought to one of its meetings by Eoin O'Mahony (the "Pope") while he was engaged in the 1948 amnesty campaign. It used to meet in Doughty Street, in the flat occupied by two little old ladies, the Misses Dowling.

Although this was only fifty yards from my place in Northington Street, I did not join, though O'Mahoney urged me, and I think they were relieved. They did not want any nasty politics, and who was I to force them on them?

The London Gaelic League played an enormous part in the building up of the national organisation. Its leading figure was that talented worker and journalist W. P. Ryan, who was also active in the Literary Society. The main centre was in Southwark. W. P. Ryan returned to Ireland in 1906 to edit the "Peasant". His radical views on education led him into conflict with the clergy. He edited the "Nation" until it folded up and he returned to London in 1910. His son, Desmond Ryan, remained in Dublin until 1923, then came back to England and worked for a year on the "Daily Worker". His pamphlet, "Ireland, whose Ireland", had a very wide circulation. The London Gaelic League still exists, and now that there is so much interest in the Irish language, could, given imaginative leadership, regain its old prominence.

The Irish Texts Society began publication in 1899, but it is said to have been established before the Gaelic League. In the list of its distinguished editors appear names that are household words, like Douglas Hyde and Father Dineen. This is one of the most constructive societies that ever existed and it is still going strong. Its president, Mr Nadolig O'Connell, took the chair when Maolshaughlin O'Caolaigh addressed the Connolly Association summer school in 1978. I am not a sportsman so will only mention the G.A.A. I have the impression that, despite the better facilities, the enthusiasm for Gaelic games is not what it was. Thirty years ago camogie was played on Hampstead Heath. There has been a tendency to concentrate on fewer things. This is also true of Irish dancing. Thirty years ago country people all knew the "Haymakers' Jig". Today it is hard to get them up for the "Siege of Ennis". At the same time those who have specialised probably know far more today than their predecessors. Most people consider Comhaltas Ceolteoirí as a comparative newcomer. But I am fairly sure I came across a reference to its existence at the turn of the century. It must have been revived by people who knew of the original movement.

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When there was only one Irish political organisation in Britain to which all could belong, the Irish had great influence because they were united. After the Parnell split and the growth of alternative organisations, the scene was clouded by competition between them. Connolly's I.S.R.P. had a branch in Manchester and in the 'fifties Joseph Deighan, then our

president, rooted out some who recollected it. There does not seem to have been a London branch but J. E. C. Donnelly, later the publisher of "The Harp", Connolly's paper in the United States, then lived in London and corresponded.

Victimised members of the I.S.R.P. emigrated to London. The most famous of them was Con O'Lyhane, founder of the extremely sectish Socialist Party of Great Britain. Among others who broke away from the Social Democratic Federation was T. A. Jackson. He was one of the most remarkable men of his generation, and one of the very few Englishmen to espouse the Irish cause without possessing the slightest Irish background. In the 'forties he was described by the "Irish Press" as "the Englishman who knows more about Irish history than anybody in Ireland". This was hyperbole, but it was not only the great extent of his knowledge, but his deep insight that was valuable to us.

He was getting old when he presided over our 1942 Conference. He took up the list of nominations to the Executive but, instead of taking a vote, he read them out as the new Executive. Everybody was too surprised to do anything and we carried on for the next year with the Executive he had given us.

He never missed an Irish meeting. He always insisted on two fundamental things, first that the "natural" demand of the Irish people is for an independent Republic, and second that in the midst of all the crimes committed by the English establishment against the Irish, there were always those who protested. He had an Irishman's mind. It lit infallibly upon the significant historical details. One of his favourite themes was the **personal** continuity of the revolutionary movement in an unbroken chain of affiliation back to the first person who said "No" when tyranny was established.

After meetings we used to repair to the Enterprise or the Yorkshire Grey in Bloomsbury, and try to get Jackson talking about Connolly. But when Jackson knew him Connolly "was just one of the boys. He hadn't sorted himself out." Connolly left for the U.S.A. in 1903. Con O'Lyhane, who had been I.S.R.P. secretary in Cork, remained in London until 1914. He was the "baby" of the family though distinctly over six feet. He played a part as organiser of the stalwarts at the famous meeting at the Albert Hall when the students tried to sabotage Larkin's appeal for funds for the Dublin workers. It was through T. A. Jackson for the most part that the Marxist tradition of Connolly was transmitted to the Association. For though he met Connolly no more, he followed his writings carefully. He had a complete file of "The Workers' Republic". His landlady threw it in the bin one week when he could not pay his rent!

Whenever a new organisation was established in Ireland there was always somebody anxious to start a branch. The custom of the 20th century has differed from that of the 19th. Then people went for large broad umbrella organisations. Today the starting of new organisations has become an epidemic disease. Another product of the Parnell split was Arthur Griffith's Sinn Fein. Its branches were duly established in Britain, adding to the colour and confusion of the scene. This one was however destined to become an umbrella organisation itself, and the necessity arose for a parallel rather than a subordinate organisation in Britain. This was established by De Valera during early 1919 when he was hiding in Manchester after his escape from Lincoln jail.

The Irish Self-Determination League supported Dail Eireann. It held meetings and demonstrations, raised funds and issued a monthly periodical called the "Irish Exile". It is typical of the general neglect of the history of the Irish in Britain that no student seems to have been enterprising enough to record its story in a university thesis. It is part of the forgotten history of the Irish revolution, like the massive support from the advanced British workers. Within the I.S.D.L., however, there was something of the traditional U.I.L. hostility to labour. It was noted somewhat cynically that the dockers refused to load arms shipments to be used to fight Russia, but took no action when their Irish fellow trades unionists were on strike against transporting them to fight the Irish. The more advanced British workers founded the "Hands off Ireland Movement" which completely filled Manchester Free Trade Hall so that overflow meetings had to be held. Perhaps if the Republic had held out longer the unity which was growing might have been completed. But then the unity was needed to enable it to hold out.

The I.S.D.L., like its parent body Sinn Fein, split on the issue of the Treaty. The London section led by Sean MacCraith supported the Republicans. Liverpool mostly went Free State. Manchester remained Republican. A future editor of the "Irish Democrat", J. L. (Pat) Dooley, a member in South Yorkshire, as a lad of 16 moved the chairman out of the chair in order that an anti-Treaty resolution could be proposed. The British Government, which had been harassing all Irish nationalists impartially, soon concentrated on the Republicans. The Home Secretary, Lord Bridgeman, brother of the great anti-imperialist Reginald Bridgeman, deported the leaders of the anti-Treaty I.S.D.L. The deportations were challenged in the courts. The Home Secretary was sued for damages and lost. The costs and damages came to something over a million pounds, for the Bridgeman deportations were illegal. The Treasury had to foot the bill and the Bridgeman Indemnity Act was passed to enable it to do so.

Sean MacCraith described to me how he returned to London to find the organisation in ruins and with several thousand pounds of debts round its neck. He organised a fund-raising committee of London Irishmen and women which worked hard holding dances, jumble sales and twenty-fives drives. Finally, by 1927 the debt was cleared. The anti-Treaty members of the I.S.D.L. remained the political leaders of the Irish in London for two decades, but eventually fresh emigrants came over from Ireland, to whom they were not attuned. Molly Downes of Galway came from that circle and while I do not recall whether she joined the Connolly Association, she was present at all our functions. Whenever she entered the room her first words were spoken in Irish. She was a great character.

Britain became something of a museum of Irish organisations. In the north-east and in Liverpool there were remnants of the U.I.L. Scattered throughout Lancashire were survivals of Davitt's "Irish Democratic League". One of these became the Warrington Irish Club. There were Sinn Fein Clubs too, Roger Casement Cumann in Southwark being the most progressive. Its leader, J. H. Fowler, had a bookshop at St Giles's Circus. In Scotland there were Fianna Fail Clubs. The I.S.D.L. members who were still on speaking terms constituted themselves the "Old I.R.A.". The socialists were in the Irish Section of the League against Imperialism which had been founded by Reginald Bridgeman. But most English people believed the Irish question had been settled. For this reason some of them, like Hales of old, were impatient that Irishmen still clung to their own organisations.

## EARLY DAYS

The Wall Street crash of 1929 heralded the great slump of the early 'thirties. International financial institutions of the highest prestige went down like ninepins. Unemployment soared, and immigration from Ireland was almost cut off. Indeed in 1932 for the first time for over a century there was a net reflux into Ireland. The few who crossed the channel were liable to be confronted with notices outside the factories reading "No Irish need apply". These were still to be seen in places until the second world war brought in its train the great shortage of labour.

The depression affected Ireland more seriously than Britain. For one thing the economy was disrupted by partition. For another, when De Valera, coming to power in 1932, began to revise the "Treaty" in Ireland's favour, the British Government imposed economic sanctions. The "economic war" continued until 1938, when De Valera secured the return of the "Treaty" ports, and thus made possible Irish neutrality when war broke out. When trade began to improve in 1933, there were several years' potential emigrants queued up for the gangway.

They came from a changing Ireland, where a native government was showing its independence of Britain in both domestic and international affairs. The Republican movement had revived, and one section had found in the experience of the slump the justification of its political theses. These took the initiative in establishing the Republican Congress, in 1934. It was the insight of Peadar O'Donnell that the Republic of 1919 had been destroyed because while the workers and small farmers supported it, all the policy decisions were taken by the middle class. The common people got nothing for their support and thus had nothing to defend when the Republic came under attack. The aim of the Congress was to realize "Labour-Republican unity", and not only the Labour Party and the Communist Party supported it, but a variety of other groupings including representatives of County Councils.

Some of its members inevitably emigrated, among them impecunious students like Charles Donnelly and Leslie Daiken. Donnelly had been thrown out of home by his devout Catholic parents when he embraced Communism while at Trinity College. His Communism was, it must be said, of a peculiarly strident brand, and would probably today be classified as one of the fifty-seven varieties of Trotskyism. Left and "ultra-left" were not so clearly differentiated then as they are today. He would be scarcely twenty, but was a fine poet. His poems have never been published. Daiken told me that he sent them to an American publisher without taking the precaution of making

copies. They went astray. Donnelly was particularly interested in military theory and was said by experts to be very knowledgeable. He established a London branch of the Republican Congress, which fitted loosely into the general left-wing and anti-fascist movement of those days.

Donnelly came from a Nationalist rather than a Republican background. He had been brought up in County Tyrone. With nothing to indicate to him that the attainment of national independence is a **part** of the transition to socialism, and learning about Communism, he cast away what was sound in his own past. He thus adopted a position which has been termed by theorists "imperialist economism". Economism is the theory that Trade Unions and other Labour organisations should confine themselves to questions of wages, hours and conditions and avoid democratic issues. "Imperialist economism" naturally follows from this theory—the subject people are told to concentrate on getting socialism, and not be "led away" by nationalism.

George Gilmore tells the story of being sent to London on behalf of the Dublin Executive. Indian members of the League against Imperialism were present. Gilmore offered the classical Marxian thesis that national independence took precedence over the establishment of socialism. To his surprise he heard Donnelly take the opposite view, and suggest that the English should remain in India until that country was ready for socialism. Applied to Ireland the reasoning would mean that England should not vacate the six counties until they were ready for socialism. How would they be got ready for socialism? And who was to establish it, the people or the colonial power that had not got socialism itself? Obviously the implication of "imperialist economism" is that the subject people possess no initiative. The initiative is exclusively in the hands of the colonial power. This nonsense re-emerged at intervals over the years, again and again.

Gilmore was reluctantly compelled to dissociate the Congress from Donnelly's position while obtaining the warmest regard for the young man. It can be seen at a flash why the London branch remained a comparatively small group, very much an appendage of the British "Left". Nevertheless it continued to issue a duplicated paper called "Irish Front". Everything on the "Left" was a "front" in those days. At the same time they were days of mass awakening when young people were as fired with hope as they might well have been chilled with foreboding could they have foreseen the future. Leslie Daiken was the Editor of "Irish Front". He was a poet himself and became an expert on children's toys. When he decided to settle in Israel, being a Jew, he gave me an almost complete set which I had microfilmed and deposited in the National Library.

The Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936. The International Brigade was organised. Its status in Spanish law was that of a Foreign Legion. The English Government applied the Foreign Enlistment Act against those who wished to join it, but they travelled via France, then under the Popular Front. There was no Irish battalion; most Irishmen joined the British Battalion. These included Frank Ryan, Michael O'Riordan, Jim O'Regan and others. Some objected on national grounds, and these included the "ultra-left" Charlie Donnelly whose innate nationalism came out when a military decision had to be taken. He joined the Irish Section of the American (Abraham Lincoln) Battalion. With him was the Civil War veteran Pat MacLoughlin who died only a few years ago in Liverpool. Ewart Milne went out to drive an ambulance. Frank Ryan was captured and disappeared for several years. Before the Brigade was withdrawn in December 1938, many fine Irishmen had lost their lives, including Charlie Donnelly himself.

War preparations meant more work, and there was now a steady influx of Irish immigrants. I remember being unable to get a berth one night and staying on deck with a crowd of them. There were mutters of concern at the queer craft decorating Liverpool Bay. "I hope the war isn't after starting" said one of them. It was not. But six weeks later, in September 1939 it began. It was like a forest fire, smouldering to begin with, gradually gaining intensity and ending in a consuming holocaust. The night before England declared war on Germany produced the most spectacular thunderstorm I have ever seen.

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By now the Republican Congress had split. The Republicans (no longer in the official body and the subject of much abuse) had insisted on "The Republic", the Labour Party on "The Workers' Republic". Sean Murray proposed the sensible compromise of "an Irish Republic" which would indicate the road without specifying the end of it. But they would have none of it. In effect the Republican Congress ceased to exist and its London Branch had nothing to be a branch of. It had not split. I would think however that its orientation would be towards the "Workers' Republic" in view of its general "ultra-left" tendency. It was decided to found a new organisation that would be based in Britain.

This was the origin of the "Connolly Clubs" and an inaugural conference was held on 4th September 1938 at the Engineers' Hall, Doughty Street, Bloomsbury. Though the intention was to operate throughout Britain I am unaware of anybody's attending from outside London. Roddy Connolly accepted the Presidency. The first Secretary was Michael

MacInerney. A number of London members are still with us, for example Elsie O'Dowling (then Timbey), Bob Fairley and John Guilfoyle. The membership consisted partly of former Republicans, wounded soldiers of previous political contests, who had arrived at a somewhat dogmatic form of socialism. But there were others of Labour background who were appreciating the importance of the national question for the first time. There was much crudity in their approach. One of them described the Clubs' policy as "socialism in green paint". But there were also uncommitted people who sought a political organisation through which to express their patriotism.

In his book "The Irish in Britain", J. Archer Jackson says that the London Branch of the Republican Congress amalgamated with the I.S.D.L. But the I.S.D.L. had been long defunct. Some of its former members joined, for example Pat Dooley. Ben Owens had been active in the movement in Scotland. Looking back I would say that he had the soundest political head, though he was heeded little enough. He realised the importance of the ordinary people who joined because they were Irish. He had a cafe at the King's Cross end of Gray's Inn Road, near to our present headquarters. He secured the lease of a large room in an adjoining building, and engaged Tom Hughes to lay a dance floor. But the young people wanted their politics neat. Owens used to say to me that he thought the prospect of making the Connolly Club a mass organisation was lost in the first few months. He wanted it to develop as an integral part of the Irish community, advanced enough to promote its orientation towards the Labour movement, but not so far advanced as to be out of sight. Others envisaged it as a lobster pot from which the captured crustaceans were scooped up into Labour organisations.

Many times in the early years I remember debates over what course Irish people in Britain should take if they happened to be socialists. Should they forget their nationality and concentrate on getting a socialist Britain? This was of course imperialist economism, and moreover ignored the fact that the freedom of Ireland was a factor in defeating capitalism in Britain. There were of course two ways of regarding the Irish question. Men like T. A. Jackson understood the need actually to get Ireland free for the sake of the British as well as for the Irish. Those who did not think about the matter clearly, thought that if the English socialists made a declaration for Irish independence that was enough. The Irish would embrace socialism. That also was imperialist economism. The subject is of immense importance but space forbids its development beyond the observation that James Connolly attributed the generally anti-socialist tendencies of the Irish in America to the way in which the Irish who became socialist at once

immersed themselves in purely American affairs. Other nations could not do so because of the language barrier. The problem is part of the consequences of the destruction of the Irish language in the nineteenth century. Owens, by the way, was a Castlewellan man, who had been attracted to Socialism by Pat Devine while an engineering apprentice in Motherwell. When I knew him he was a member of Paddington Labour Party, but used to give large sums to the Daily Worker. He never received the slightest recognition.

The return of the International Brigaders brought fresh forces to the Clubs. These included Alec Digges, Ewart Milne, Seán Mulgrew, Jim Prendergast, Bob Doyle, Sean Dowling and Pat MacLoughlin. Some spent a spell in Ireland but, unable to find work, came back to London feeling bitter. Others did not get beyond London. Some of them were anti-clerical because of the rôle of the church in Spain. There was also a touch of demoralisation. The reason given for the withdrawal of the Brigade had been that the Spanish Army was now able to defeat the Fascists without it. But within weeks it was obvious that the Republic was on its last legs. Those mentioned above all played an important constructive part in the affairs of the Association. But taken as a whole the new recruits strengthened the leftist tendency I have referred to.

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The Connolly Club published the first issue of its monthly paper in January 1939. A few months later Ben Owens found the printer in Derby who still produces it today. The Editor was Michael MacInerney. I remember the first editorial meeting I attended two years later. We all sat where we could in George Musgrove's flat in Red Lion Square, MacInerney got scissors and cut clippings from newspapers which he handed round. "Here now," he would say, "take this and write something about that". He had great dynamism. Everybody with a Gaelicisable name had to Gaelicise it. At a dance he could energise the political wall-flowers into prancing triffids. After he returned to Ireland Sean Dowling was less successful in his technique. I remember his looking helplessly round St. Martin's School of Art, while the women awaited the return of their prospective partners from a local place of refreshment, and exploding "get on the f--g floor!"

The paper lacked technical sophistication. The pages were of the size they are now, but carried three wide columns. It was not laid out but continued from column to column like the old provincial newspapers. MacInerney wrote most of the Editorial matter himself. Flanagan of the Daily Worker, Desmond Ryan and others lent a hand. The first issue was financed by a donation of £25 from Eamon Martin who was then living in London. The first editorial urged all Irish

workers, in their own interests, to join their appropriate trade unions.

But that very month the I.R.A. declared war on England and the bombs started to go off. Friends in the Labour movement thought that if the Connolly Club could advise Irish people to join Trade Unions they could advise the I.R.A. not to let off bombs. They did not understand that while most of the Irish in London were opposed to the bombs that threatened to bring a witch-hunt on them, they would think it unpatriotic to say so in the hearing of the English. There was much heart-burning over the issue. In the end the paper came out with a headline denouncing the bombing, and the Club lost face among the Irish.

When war broke out the Club opposed it and demanded that the neutrality of the twenty-six counties should be extended to the six. It seemed obvious to the Irish that the war was imperialist, though in fact there was a popular aspect hidden within it. Would there be more or less action if people could more easily see the duality of things? The blackout came at once, but no bombs, only false alarms. Then in the spring of 1940 the real war started. After the Battle of Britain the blitz began in earnest. Organisation became increasingly difficult. One after another our members were threatened with conscription.

Prendergast had been employed as an organiser at a few shillings a week. With Ewart Milne he ran the "Release Frank Ryan Committee" for it was believed that Ryan was in a Spanish jail. This was a tremendous campaign and before our office was "vandalised" in the fifties there were trunk loads of correspondence. Prendergast went down country and spoke at open air meetings in Birmingham and Liverpool. I have little doubt it was he who recruited Johnny Griffin in Birmingham and Bill O'Toole in Birkenhead, not to mention the members of the Carroll family. He was a popular speaker, and like many whose eloquence came from their feelings, he was never at a loss for a telling phrase. His fatal weakness was vanity. He returned to Ireland early in 1941. Shortly after his departure I joined the Editorial Committee. I recall one meeting in the midst of the really big air-raids, that is to say early in May 1941, when we heard a very distant siren and the very faint crunch of a very distant bomb. I left Theobalds Road sure of a quiet night. When I reached Woolwich I found my digs had been blown to bits by a landmine. Yet nobody in the house was killed. The landlady was in a shelter, and her son who had been watching the mine descending on its parachute through the open door, was blown into a field along with the family cat, and did not suffer a scratch. What had happened to my possessions? I didn't give a damn.

Soon after this the raids ceased. There were rumours that Hitler was going to move East. When the invasion of Russia came the Editorial Committee had many sittings. Dooley thought the war was still imperialist and would not consider supporting Churchill. I disagreed, and eventually won them all round. Of course what had happened was that the popular aspect that had always been in the war had come to predominate, and now the imperialist aspect, while still remaining, was secondary. We were all young and unversed in political thinking. More or less by trial and error we took the measure of things. We supported the war; we defended the right of Ireland to be neutral; we opposed the conscription of Irishmen; and we took up Irish people's grievances.

I became secretary of the Exiles Advisory Service. I had three shorthand typists to whom I dictated letters one evening and received them back for signature three evenings later. Airfields were being built and the Government readily agreed to De Valera's demand that if men were to be allowed to emigrate they must be exempt from conscription. The most widespread grievance was the refusal of lodging allowances. But there were also cases of conscription. An Irishman who was called up was entitled to the alternative of returning to Ireland. But sometimes he was not told of this. I remember an occasion when Pat Dooley released a man by telephone. He rang up his Commanding Officer to complain. The officer turned out to be an Irishman and the man was out of the Army within days.

When MacInerney returned to Ireland, Musgrave became Editor. But towards the end of 1941 he decided to go home. The alternative was conscription. It was agreed that Dooley should edit the paper. But a few days before Christmas Dooley suddenly received calling up papers despite his being over age. I was left with the paper on my hands and spent a very unhappy Christmas making whatever job of it I could. But within a few weeks back stepped Dooley, on top of the world. His wife had tackled the authorities and bullied them into releasing him. How she did it I do not know.

Dooley transformed the paper in the two years that he had it. He introduced layout and illustrations. He was a municipal clerk by occupation but had always wanted to be a journalist. He possessed an undoubted flair. Among those added to the committee were a North Leitrim man, Patrick Clancy and a South Leitrim man Patrick Early. It must have been towards the end of the war that Flann Campbell and Sylvester Maitland arrived. When Dooley left to take up a journalistic appointment, Campbell became Editor. The last action that Dooley took as Editor was to have the name of the paper changed from Irish Freedom to Irish Democrat.

The Association probably reached its largest membership during the last phases of the war. I remember going to Glasgow looking for orders for the paper. I showed it to the manager of Collets. He placed an order for three thousand on the spot. Dooley nearly fell off his chair. We had branches in Coventry, Redditch, Worcester and Gloucester, the secretary of the last being Mr Gormley who still buys the paper in West London. The local clubs had been united into a single Association. Flann Campbell spent one of his holidays touring the camp sites of East Anglia at the invitation of the A.U.B.T.W. and holding Trade Union recruiting meetings. Once a month Dooley would send out the subscription copies. They were piled so high on the table in our offices in Southampton Row that not only were Mollie O'Leary and May Hayes invisible, but Dooley himself, who was by no means a small man. I think that for a time he worked as an Air Raid Precautions organiser and edited the paper as his shifts allowed.

The office in Southampton Row was on the sixth floor. There was no lift during the evening. Nor, during the blackout, was there any lighting on the stairs. We memorised the number of steps in the eighteen flights and sometimes came up at a trot and down at a run.

Our activities did not escape notice in Ireland. Mr James Dillon who had opposed Ireland's neutrality chose to ask De Valera in the Dail whether he would condemn our "communist" activities. De Valera replied that he was not satisfied that our activities were communist. But, he went on, even if they were "here are people who are interested in this country. Can I be sure that their interest is only a communist interest?" This was a grim presage of the dark days that were to come.

Among those who were active during the war period I should mention Packy Early of Carrick on Shannon, and Steve Farrelly and his wife. Bridget Malone was I think a matron in a hospital. She did not relish returning to County Clare when she retired. She enjoyed the anonymity of London. "You could stand outside Hyde Park" she would say, "and pluck a goose, and nobody would take a glance at the feathers". Jack Judge came from Birmingham during the "flying bombs". These did not reach North of St. Albans and I asked him why he was coming into the danger zone. He had been a Sinn Fein councillor in the Co. Mayo and his reply was characteristic, "We escaped the bullets so we won't be afraid of the bombs". He used to sing "The West's awake" at our social evenings, and gave a recitation from the Land League days that I heard from nobody else. When a motorcar narrowly missed us at Hyde Park he said "Jasus! They'd take the legs from under your feet and leave you standing on your arse." He was full

of such witticisms. Then there were Higgins and Hickey who did not hit it off, and Albert French who I think returned to Belfast.

I will never forget the day the war ended. There were bonfires everywhere. But where were we to get whiskey? I think I had found the General Secretaryship too much for me by that time, so that Clancy had taken it over. I suggested going into the City where there was normally no evening trade. I must be forgiven for forgetting who was present, Clancy I am sure of, almost certainly Campbell, and Elsie O'Dowling. We found an obscure establishment near Ludgate Circus where bottle after bottle of Vat 69, the inestimable, the unimaginable, came out from a secret hoard. We finished the night at Elsie O'Dowling's flat where she produced long hidden stores of champagne. Nobody bothered what they spent. Old women had dragged their furniture into the streets when the bonfires burned low. Fire engines were busy all night. Was it because Germany had been defeated? Not a bit of it. It was because at last there was peace. Today radio commentators speak gaily of a third world war. That is because they are too young to remember the second one.

## READJUSTMENT

WHEN the war ended Pat Dooley was in Manchester where he established a branch of the Association. The leading lights were Tommy Watters, Frank Carroll, Eddie Lenehan, who personally sold over a thousand copies of the paper every month, and Jimmy McGill. Pat Devine was in Manchester around this time and gave strong support. The old Irish tradition lingered longer there than elsewhere, possibly because Hulme and Moss Side were not badly bombed as were Scotland Road and the East End. There were some old Fenians like Seamus Barrett, and many veterans of the tan and civil wars. Barrett was very friendly to the Association and it was largely his influence that kept the annual commemoration of the Manchester Martyrs alive.

There is no doubt we were slow to adjust to post-war conditions. There had been much official propaganda about a brave new world. The people took the precaution of entrusting its realisation to the Labour Party. There was as much jubilation in Dublin as in London when Attlee was swept to power with an enormous majority. To say that a generation was shamefully betrayed is to put matters mildly.

During the war the issue of partition had been left in suspense, even in the six counties. When it was raised again it was in a 'cold war' context and the shade of Charlie Donnelly must have chuckled when the notion of a United Ireland in return for the abandonment of neutrality was mooted, and we drew back from the one because of the other. It was because of suspected international implications that the Association made what is to my mind the greatest mistake of its history, namely to hold aloof from the Anti-Partition League when it was established. If we had gone right in to it and put the Democrat at its disposal we might have helped to prevent the betrayal that took place. Another factor was that the Labour Movement in the six counties spoke with a somewhat uncertain voice.

Our orientation throughout this period was exclusively towards the Irish Labour Movement and in particular young Jim Larkin. Pat Dooley spoke at the Connolly Commemoration in O'Connell Street. I addressed the Executive of the Dublin Trades Council on the economic problems of emigrants. I learned then that the movement in Ireland could do little about encouraging trade unionism among exiles because emigrants changed their occupations.

The great flood of emigration began immediately after the war, but its significance for Ireland did not strike us at the

time. I remember attending an Easter Commemoration at Arigna in 1947. There were more police than marchers. We all thought the Stephen Hayes affair had finished Irish Republicanism. It is a rash man who predicts that while England holds Irish territory. What I remember most is a rate-collector's telling me that there were only three children in a townland of two hundred houses. Leitrim was the first county to be depopulated. Then it was the turn of Galway and Mayo, Kerry and West Cork. The disease spread to Cavan, Monaghan and Longford and began to affect even the rich lands of Limerick. The Donegal men went to Scotland, the westerners to Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham, the Kerymen and Corkmen to London. Dublin tradesmen came over too. There was work for everybody, in demolition and reconstruction. Connolly Association members led the squatters who occupied an empty hotel in the West End, when the authorities failed to provide adequate accommodation. Another campaign we waged was for the re-opening of the Fishguard-Rosslare service. People could not get home for holidays. Conditions on the boats were savage. Our orientation was very much to economic issues.

But even in its apparent eclipse the Republican movement was reviving. There was disillusionment with Fianna Fail. Sean MacBride was agitating about the conditions in Port Laoise jail. Together with Noel Hartnett he founded a new party, Clann na Poblachta, which did very well at the General Election of 1948. But they couldn't wait. MacBride persuaded Labour to join a coalition with Clann na Poblachta and Fine Gael. As O'Casey put it, "Their backsides were itching for the plush seats of office."

De Valera had always been very chary of completely cutting the painter with England. He feared a loss of bargaining power in his efforts to regain the six counties. He had already established a *de facto* independence of twenty-six counties by remaining neutral during the war. But now the coalition had to show results. Costello, of all people, took the twenty-six counties out of the Commonwealth. In practice it made little difference. But the reaction of the London Government was hysterical.

They passed the Ireland Act. It was carried against a massive revolt on the Labour benches, and became law thanks to Tory votes. Its most consistent opponent was William Gallacher, who claimed it was unconstitutional as it purported to bind future Parliaments. It declared that the six counties would not cease to be part of the King of England's dominions without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. Now this Parliament only existed thanks to a statute of the imperial Parliament. So where was the sovereignty of Parliament if the Act was worth the paper it was written on?

Its architect was Herbert Morrison. He was a guttersnipe. I remember that around this time our West London branch held a meeting at the Porchester Hall. Morrison was present at some

function and passed a group of our members. As he did so he put his finger to his nose in a vulgar gesture and snarled "Strong smell of IRA round here." One of the critics of the Act was Hugh Delargy. He had been a Manchester city councillor and a protégé of Seamus Barrett. When he was elected in 1945, Elsie O'Dowling lent him Sean Dowling's flat while he waited six months for his first pay. During the war he used to attend the Connolly Association's dances in a lieutenant's dress uniform. He tackled Morrison in a corridor when the Bill was published. Morrison called him a "young pup" and indicated that from then on preferment was not for him. This was a bad blow, for Delargy was ambitious. I was told by a Member—Mulvey I think—that he tried to curry favour by whispering slanders against the Connolly Association. Later he tried to attach himself to Aneurin Bevan. But he remained a backbencher till he died. To revolt on Ireland was bad enough. To beard Morrison was worse. Delargy was destroyed. It was a pity, for he was not without ability.

It was at the end of 1947 that the Association was at its lowest ebb. Campbell had returned to teaching. Maitland became editor. He was a Northerner who had never made contact with nationalism or republicanism. But he possessed the rugged radicalism that informed men like Samuel Neilson and Jamie Hope. It was not his fault if the times were against us. We became finally unable to pay his wages at the end of November and the paper was in real danger. We persuaded Campbell to bring out the December issue, which he did at great personal inconvenience, after which I became editor in name, though for some months the technical work was done by Jack Bennett. The circulation manager was Bill Burke whose energy was unlimited. Gradually we got the circulation back, assisted as we were by the new national issues that were arising.

It was some time in 1947, I think, that Eoin O'Mahoney started his campaign to secure an amnesty for the men imprisoned for the bombings of 1939. He invited us to assist and we did so. Information was smuggled out to us that 'Rory O'Connor' and 'Conor MacNessa' had been put in the punishment cells for an attempted escape. As I hesitated to publish the story without verification I decided to visit the prison myself. But the only prisoner I knew personally was Jim O'Regan, though I knew Eddie Connell's parents. I took the bull by the horns and went to see the Prison Commissioners. Tall, horse-faced, retired policemen, at least in appearance and manner, they could not understand why a "respectable citizen" should want to visit "these thugs." I let them say what they wished. At the prison, Leo Duignan of Co. Leitrim risked a charge of mutiny to tell me the story was a true one. I admired his courage. When a day or so later the paper came out there was a furore. Mac-

Nessa, whose real name was Collins, told me afterwards that a Home Office official went down to Parkhurst and insisted that they be returned to the normal cells. It couldn't happen today. They'd clap the visitor in the cells along with the convict!

We secured the support of the London Trades Council for the amnesty, and held a great meeting in the Holborn Hall which the High Commissioner Dulanty attended. It was addressed among others by Jim Larkin, Desmond Donnelly, who I think had just fought a by-election in East Down, Eoin O'Mahoney and the actor, Liam Redmond. Dooley was the chairman. The last prisoners, Collins and McCabe, were released at the end of the year and we held a celebration in the Garibaldi restaurant. These two refused to have anything to do with the Prisoners' Aid Committee and we felt very pleased at the time. But what an amount of time was wasted in these rivalries between Irish organisations.

Early in 1948 Dooley, who was on the London Committee of the Anti-Partition League, was challenged by Frank Lee of the "old IRA" on the grounds of his left-wing affiliations. Lee said that in the course of his work for the prisoners he came into contact with the police and one of the detectives had asked him whether the Irish were turning to Communism. He assured the detective that they were not. But then seemingly he thought of Dooley. He was anxious that Dooley should retire from the committee. Since Dooley had been one of its first members and had drafted its constitution he was naturally disinclined to oblige. But Lee pressed the matter and Dooley left. It was silly to get angry with Lee. His experience was limited. But Dooley's wrath knew no bounds.

He was furious and wanted me to publish a denunciation written by himself which in effect accused Lee of being an informer. When I objected to publishing a libel, Dooley had me outvoted at the Editorial meeting. All I could do was to send the copy to our solicitors with an invitation to use the blue pencil freely. But there was still a clear implication that Lee had helped the police. Of course, Dooley should have raised his objection on political grounds for there was nothing in the Constitution of the A.P.L. to debar him. I was told long afterwards by Miles Mordaunt, a colourful character who had fought in the Four Courts by accident, that Lee wanted to sue us for libel. But his solicitor explained to him "Mr. Lee, in Ireland if you give information to the police the ordinary reasonable man would look askance at you. But in England it is the duty of every citizen to help the police. You did your duty as a citizen, Mr. Lee. You wouldn't get a penny." Lee knew, of course, that Dooley was responsible and never spoke to him again. Years afterwards I put it on record that I thought Dooley's attack unfair. Lee was no informer. But it is remarkable how his fear of Communism blinded him to the construction that could be placed on his action. Soon after this, Dooley used his majority

on the Editorial committee to get us embroiled with the Bishop of Galway over the Mindszenty affair. He was a man of the emotions.

During the late forties and early fifties the "cold war" was in full blast, and people really believed that the Russians were going to eat them. After the war unemployment rose steeply in the six counties and since it bore hardest on the Catholics, there was considerable emigration. Among the seasoned ranks of Mayo and Galwaymen in our meetings in Hyde Park an increasing number of young Northerners appeared. These objected to our flying the tricolour. One of them look up with horror-filled eyes and lamented "Look at that! Isn't it terrible! The Holy Pope gave us that flag!" This was the extent of his knowledge of Irish history. But at bottom they were good lads and I knew it by instinct.

Some of our speakers were too far to the "left." One was so anti-clerical that we had to stop him from speaking. It was years before he forgave us. But the youngsters were turning to physical violence. It was clear also that quasi-Fascist forces were making use of them. To one of the most vociferous I said on one occasion "The time will come when you'll be glad of us." For once a prophecy came true. One of the objectors actually helped us out with the paper sales when a seller failed to turn up at a dance hall. For the time being, however, we were enemies. One day there was a concerted attack on the platform. Bill Burke was kicked on the shin and it was hard to restrain him from retaliating. The Mooneys were knocked off the platform. It went down several times and it finally got so rickety that it would only hold a lightweight, a young man called Quinn. Finally it was put out of action and the fighting continued over the possession of the remains.

Two policemen arrived and I was quite sure that they were going to arrest us, not the disturbers of the peace. But the probable behaviour of police in England was beyond the Belfastmen's experience. I saw the two young bobbies rolling on the ground where the mob were trying to bounce them on their bottoms. This created a diversion and we beat a hasty retreat through crowds lined up as if at a racecourse. "Is that the corpse you have there?" called a Mayo voice as the cortege filed out.

I noticed, incidentally, that the young Belfastmen did little of the real fighting. The platform was finally smashed when a group of burly characters we had never seen before appeared on the scene. There had been some Fascist penetration of the Paddington Branch of the Anti-Partition League and May Hayes had unsuccessfully tried to persuade Captain Harrison to do something about it. That is possibly where the newcomers came from. The Fascists were then talking of "Ireland's right to unite on joining European Union." She has joined it, but we still wait for unity.

We repaired to Fred O'Shea's house to assess the damage. The platform of course could never be used again. The platforms used to be stored by an old ex-soldier called "Khaki Joe," who received a consideration for bringing them to the Park on a handcart. We reflected on the coincidence that today he had been an hour late with ours. Mrs. Mooney had broken the strap of a new handbag belabouring one of the attackers. Most of us said to ourselves "I'm virtually unhurt." Next morning we were merely thankful there were no serious injuries. It is amazing how wounds are unfelt in the heat of battle.

We sent out 1,500 circulars next night calling on all organisations who stood for Free Speech to rally to our support. I heard that the minute the fracas was over, Sean O'Faolain's sister had jumped on a chair and given our attackers a piece of her mind. The attacks went on for several months, but in the end we wore them down, and the Belfast men became quite friendly. Soon after this I left industry for good in order to concentrate on the paper. Some of the names we see now began to appear, Gerard Curran, the indefatigable Pat Bond, and Eamonn MacLaughlin. Clancy and Campbell remained active and we built up a formidable team of speakers. But the supreme incarnation of the Connolly Association was and remains Pat Bond.

During the days of the "cold war" all our speakers enjoyed going to Birmingham. There and in Coventry were the most advanced Irish in the country and it is tragic that we were never able to provide them with a decent leadership. There was no heckling in the Bull Ring even at the height of the witch-hunt. At the suggestion of friends in the Labour movement we held an "Irish Week," during which we held meetings at factory gates each lunch time and each evening at the Bull Ring or some other stance. We did this for several years in succession. On one occasion the meeting began in the afternoon, broke for tea, and continued all evening. Cathal MacLiam, who became literary editor, attended that one. I think it was in the second year that Justin Keating went to Birmingham. In those days the open-air meeting was the principal form of "alternative" communication. The authorities hated it and at the first opportunity turned our meeting places into car-parks.

We established a branch in Nottingham. It was based on the Connolly family and Chris Maguire. But the most important recruit of the early fifties was Joe Deighan who breathed fresh life into the Manchester branch. This was at that time led by Danny Kilcommins and Pat Kilroy who had come over from the Anti-Partition League. Joe Deighan understood the national question, a qualification which while virtually absent among the English, is rarer than might be expected among the Irish. He was a Belfast man, and had been president of the Gaelic League. He was saturated in Irish History and knew the need to understand how the exiles felt. He would converse in Irish

while selling the Democrat. He was very hurt one night in Aunty's Bar when a Donegal man said "You're not one of us." Some too literary word had betrayed the townsman. The remark was an unintended compliment—he was close enough to provoke it. He was a magnificent worker, a northern counterpart of Pat Bond.

Regular meetings were held at Platt Fields. Deighan and Kilcommins were forceful speakers. A Mayo man, Tommy Henry was witty and whimsical. During the slump he had bought a few old airguns that would not shoot straight, set up a stall on Blackpool shore, hung coconuts on hooks and charged sixpence a shot. He called the show "The Diddlums." Asked by an Englishman if he didn't think the Catholic Church had too much power in Ireland he replied that it hadn't half enough. "What else could you say to a fool like that?" he spluttered when he got down. Deighan's principal lieutenant was Michael Crowe, who organised the paper sales. These were for several years at the level of 1,500 a month. The Manchester branch fully understood the importance of the Irish Democrat and made it the centre of their work.

Not only in the Irish Community Deighan built up an unassailable position. He was a member of Manchester Trades Council, and was one of the few able to explain to them the connection between their support for the Irish national demand and the recruitment of Irishmen into trade unions. It was a bad day when he left Manchester.

In Glasgow we were less successful. The reason was very simple. We understood England but we did not understand Scotland. We had very successful meetings in Dundee and won members in Edinburgh. But in Glasgow where we once sold over 2,000 papers in one "Irish Week" we could never establish an organisation. On one occasion we decided to hold a meeting on a piece of waste ground at the Gallowgate which was used by a man who was trussed up in a bag and delighted the crowd when he released himself. We hoisted the tricolour and had a crowd listening quietly when police arrived with the intention of arresting the lot of us. Indeed, Justin Keating, MacKendry and myself were bundled off to the barracks. But Cathal MacLiam slipped away and went to Peter Cregan's bookshop from which he organised a "telephone-in" campaign. We heard the telephone incessantly ringing while we were "inside." The charges were bizarre. One was that of "causing a crowd to collect." Another was of pulling a button off a policeman's uniform. The sergeant asked, "Which button?" We rather thought at that point that the charges would not be proceeded with. They were not. Perhaps it was a pity as it would have made the Democrat in Glasgow. The practice was for a person arrested to say "Not guilty; reserve my defence; nothing to say." But Keating, who wouldn't be more than twenty-one, made quite a passable "speech from the dock" and the sergeant had to write it all down.

## CIVIL RIGHTS

We used to hold meetings at Dunmore Street. But after the Arborfield raid the police objected to our displaying the Tricolour. I was told that the order had come from the Secretary of State for Scotland. It was clear that Scotland was quite a different place from England or the twenty-six counties. The arm of authority was far harsher. You could not discuss matters as you could with a London policeman, who had, of course, higher educational qualifications. We had meetings stopped at Govan and Greenock. The sectarian issue clouded everything. When we addressed meetings at factory gates we were invariably asked about Celtic and Rangers. In this atmosphere no literate Irish leadership could come and despite splendid meetings we never established ourselves. There was goodwill, but nobody knew what we were talking about. The Labour movement was terrified of the sectarian issues, and small blame to them.

In the middle fifties Eamonn Lyons and Eamonn MacLaughlin were the General Secretaries. Lyons emigrated to Australia. We held a conference on the subject of trade union recruitment. Seven General Secretaries wrote in the Irish Democrat. But the old issue of nationalism and socialism came up again as the result of the I.R.A. campaign on the border. It was strange that while this was going on a group of "ultra-lefts" appeared to peddle the theory that the force of Irish nationalism was spent. These were for the most part disillusioned Republicans. But there was a non-political element in it too and I was very surprised when years afterwards I discovered what it had been. It was in the struggle against the "ultra-leftists" who in many cases were personally most worthy people, that the most promising youngsters sharpened their wits, Sean Redmond, his brother Tom, Cal O'Herlihy and others. The opposition was concentrated in one branch. After their defeat at annual conference, for which Eamonn MacLaughlin deserves the credit, we disbanded it. The ghost of "imperialist economism" was finally laid. It must do its haunting outside the Association.

The present constitution was drawn up in 1956 and adopted at our Birmingham Conference. It should have got rid of the last vestiges of "ultra-leftism", but that tendency was still able to fight a rearguard action. The Association's purpose was to organise the Irish for two aims, first their own defence, second the freedom of their country. The **means** by which these objects were to be achieved were association with the labour movement. It was no part of the Association's purpose to bring about socialism in Ireland. But it was not indifferent to the aims of Irish socialists. Its practical contribution to socialism in Ireland was its effort to promote national independence. Apart from that its handling of socialism in Ireland was to be educational. The education was to be broadly republican, but giving particular prominence to the teachings of James Connolly. The 1956 Constitution is still in force.

Many people failed to understand the Connolly Association's attitude to the Republicans during the troubles of 1956-61. Mr Harold Binks of the Irish T.U.C. called on us specially to ask us to cease supporting Sinn Fein. We met on cordial terms and we parted on cordial terms, but he could not understand our position. Perhaps we did not understand his, for if he thought we were supporting violence, we thought he was offering sorely oppressed people no avenue of hope. It was no use saying "Lay down your arms and leave it all to the Trade Union movement" if the Trade Union movement had not a policy for getting these oppressed people what they wanted. They would not lay them down.

Nor would they have laid them down at the Connolly Association's prompting. The violence was a fact of life. We regretted it. But we had not started it and we were in no position to stop it. We did however know its cause, which was the continued partition of Ireland, the denial of the right of the majority of the Irish people to rule the whole of their country. This was accompanied by the cruel oppression of that part of the majority that had been placed in a minority position. The way to get rid of the I.R.A. was to give people nothing to I.R.A. about.

When two young Republicans, Mallon and Talbot, were charged with murdering Sergeant Ovens by blowing him up with a booby-trap bomb, they pleaded not guilty and alleged that they had been tortured. We decided to send a legal observer to the trial and Ralph Millner suggested John Hostettler, a rising young lawyer. The National Council for Civil Liberties sent an envoy too, but she returned with a report that all that was happening was that one set of Fascists were fighting another. Even the worthiest English people could be stone blind to the national question. The trial was postponed twice, but Hostettler went back. During the intervals we directed quite a spotlight on events in Belfast. Finally an all-Protestant jury acquitted the two young men, who were re-arrested on another charge as they left the court without a stain on their characters. It would be understandable if their reaction was "if they are determined to get us, they'll get us for something". We published a pamphlet called "Torture Trial". It was written by Hostettler and had quite an impact on the Labour movement. He addressed meetings in London, Birmingham and Nottingham.

The six-county Government had introduced internment and

over 170 men were in jail without charge or trial. At first we demanded that these men be brought to trial or released. When it was clear that the Government had no intention of trying them we simply demanded an amnesty. I went to Belfast and met first Jimmy Steele. He struck me as a man of splendid integrity. It was a tragedy when his only child was killed in a road accident. Sean Morrissey put me in touch with Art MacMillan to whom I put our proposition, namely that he should obtain for us particulars of the prisoners' Trade Unions, and we would draw to the attention of those unions the plight of their members. MacMillan speedily provided the information and the pressure on Stormont began to build up. Some of the Unions were very responsive, particularly the A.E.U.

Contact with the Falls Road people brought home to us what a truly appalling regime existed in the six counties. But what could be done about it? Whenever our friends in Parliament asked a question they were told that the British Government had no power to intervene. This was a trick reply as I will later show. Since the collapse of Delargy's "Friends of Ireland" group, the first M.P. to assist us was Maurice Orbach. Then we got support from Marcus Lipton. The British press was running scare stories about Irish immigrants bringing in tuberculosis. Gerard Curran who had experience as a health worker introduced us to Dr MacDonald who proved that they caught the disease after they arrived here. Marcus Lipton then brought the issue up at the Labour Party health committee and he became a firm friend of the Association until his death earlier this year. But neither he nor anybody else could make any headway on the question of the six counties.

At some point I bought a copy of the Government of Ireland Act and noticed Section 75 which reserved to the Westminster Parliament control over every person, matter and thing in the six counties. How then was it that the British Government had no power to act? I wrote to Leslie Hale. He thought the Government of Ireland Act was like the British North America Act which reserves British sovereignty in Canada. But there was now no power to enforce it. I pointed out that the British had troops in Northern Ireland. So that explanation was out.

Finally I asked Ralph Millner if D. N. Pritt would see us. I had worked for him in the Hammersmith election when he lost his seat. We had at any rate met. He agreed to see us. How little people knew about the Irish question was illustrated by his offering me Hale's explanation, and being genuinely surprised when I mentioned article 75. His clerk brought it down from a remote shelf. "Ha!" said Pritt, "Now I see why they say the Government has no power. Power is reserved not to

the Government but to Parliament." He grew quite enthusiastic. "Now suppose we ask how can Parliament make use of its power, and suppose they say 'You go and find out'. There is a motion. Or a Bill. Let me see, whom could you ask to move on this." He did not apparently think much of his former colleagues. "What about that rogue X"? "What about that scoundrel Y"? I particularly remember "What about Sir No-good Thomas?" However we had what we wanted.

We decided to go for a public enquiry into the working of the Government of Ireland Act. This side-stepped the difficulty but brought the contents of the Act to public notice. It must have been in 1960 that we felt strong enough to appoint another full-time organiser. This was Anthony Coughlan. He organised the first cross-country march from London to Birmingham. We stopped at St. Albans, Luton, Bedford, Northampton, Coventry and Birmingham, arriving at our destination in torrential rain. Later we marched from Liverpool to Nottingham, and after Anthony Coughlan had gone back to Ireland, Sean Redmond who replaced him organised a march from Liverpool to London, via Warrington, Manchester, Stockport, the Potteries, Stafford, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Coventry, Banbury, Oxford, Reading and Slough, ending up at Hyde Park for a demonstration. At every stop we held open air meetings, made contact with local trade unionists and spoke to the press. Among those who took part were Chris Sullivan, Tom Redmond, Sean's younger brother, Joe Deighan, John McClelland, secretary of the revived Liverpool branch, and Michael Keane. We had a good reception but people found it hard to visualise the conditions we were describing.

When in 1962 the Ulster Covenant Jubilee was celebrated we decided to send a deputation. By now we had realised that the main organisation representing the oppressed minority was the Nationalist Party. We must work with them if our approach was not to be sectish and amateur. Cahir Healy welcomed us with open arms. We arranged to send a delegation to see the fun. Marcus Lipton agreed to go, and the others were John Eber of the Movement for Colonial Freedom and Betty Harrison of the Tobacco Workers' Union.

I went over early and found to my dismay that the N.C.C.L. had sent somebody over to interview Eddie MacAteer. They had at last become interested, largely thanks to Sean Redmond's work. But they did not consult him. The Orange and Green Talks were in progress. MacAteer decided to make a demonstration of his ecumenism. He wanted nothing to do with anything that would strain relations between north and south. He had television cameras lined up for the unfortunate visitor. In later years others who had come to a new and complete understanding of the Irish question rushed in where angels

feared to tread. Subsequently of course the N.C.C.L. did magnificent work in this field. But that did not help in 1962.

I was in a dilemma. The pitch had been queered. However the local Belfast people advised me to ring Cahir Healy. I did so. He knew exactly what to do. He said come to Enniskillen yourself and bring Marcus Lipton. But keep the others away. Don't mix it. Send them to Derry. Gerry Fitt provided us with transport. Eber drove us to Omagh from where we went by bus to Enniskillen. Lipton was shown the appalling living conditions of the Catholics, and made thorough-going enquiries. Next day we watched the Orange parade. Lipton had his notebook and jotted down material for questions. Why was the G.P.O. shut when it was an imperial service? "I want stamps," he said, "to write letters—to my constituents." I think it was on this occasion that he met the Republicans, Liam MacMillan among them. MacMillan was a fine character and deeply impressed Lipton. It was terrible that he should fall a victim to a feud which should never have taken place. Back in London the delegation reported to a meeting at St. Pancras Town Hall. Lipton then asked his questions, and it was in most cases not "proper" for the Government to reply. Betty Harrison was warmly applauded by the Liverpool branch of her Union which up to now had been cool towards her.

I believe the Irish contributed largely to the defeat of the Home Secretary, Henry Brooke. We concentrated all our forces against him in Hampstead. Indeed Ben Parkin was worried that we were taking his canvassers away. But, he reassured himself, the Tories would probably have to take some of theirs away too. Brooke had refused to intervene in favour of the prisoners.

During our frequent visits to Belfast Deighan and I had become acquainted with Sean Caughey who ran a Civil Liberties Committee. It was this, if I remember aright, that was the host organisation when our delegation went over, though Fitt and Austin Currie, then a student, helped. It struck us that if we took up the Civil Rights issue in a big way we would help the cause of democracy in the six counties. We found the Republicans inclined to be defeatist. The long years of sectarian isolation had left their mark. It required only that they detach one quarter of the Protestants from their Unionist allegiance to topple the regime. Stormont could then be used against imperialism. But they were inclined to regard this as an impractical dream. That is one reason they were hesitant about politics. Deighan and I consulted Betty Sinclair and Billy McCulloch. It happened that they were thinking along the same lines. Billy's last words to Deighan as we parted were, "Waal, Joe, I think I'll faire a shat." He did. He moved the resolution that the Trades Council should call a

Conference on the subject of Civil Rights. It met on 8th May 1965 and was a historic event.

From 1965 onward domestic matters prevented my any longer giving full time attention to the affairs of the Association, though I continued to edit the paper, and spent half my time at it. This is therefore the place to pay a tribute to Sean Redmond on whom for the next few years the responsibility devolved. His shrewd political brain could estimate any situation, and he had the important ability to judge political character. This is essential in a leader, nowhere more than in Irish politics. His work on the executives of the M.C.F. (now Liberation) and the N.C.C.L. was notable. He ensured that we held the initiative during the formative days of the Civil Rights Campaign. About this time Jane Tate became Treasurer, as she believed "temporarily."

In 1968 we began to consider the possibility of comprehensive legislation to right the wrongs of the nationalist people in the six counties. The idea of a Bill of Rights was presented at a meeting in Trafalgar Square in the summer of that year. Some time later we drafted a bill and discussed it with Fenner Brockway and Geoffrey Bing at a meeting in the House of Lords. John Platts Mills put down his work to spend a hectic afternoon helping with this. We had to have the draft ready in twenty-four hours as there was a move to promote some innocuous measures that dealt with nothing but proportional representation. The principle we worked on was simple. We asked the nationalists what grievances they wanted removed and drafted a comprehensive Bill to remove them. We were in constant touch with them, and indeed when their deputation came to the British House of Commons, we arranged with our friends in Parliament to have meetings for them.

Looking back I would say the Civil Rights movement failed to achieve its object because between 1965 and 1968 control passed from the Trade Unionists to the Republicans. Whereas the Trade Unionists would have known how to resist the "ultra-left", the Republicans did not. The extension of education was taking an increasing number of young Catholics to universities. There they were carried away by the student demonstrations in Paris, which people whose opinion I respect tell me were escalated by provocateurs. In my opinion the first demonstration at Dungannon went too far. Mrs MacAliskey can sneer at Betty Sinclair, but Betty Sinclair was right. The Civil Rights strategy had been carefully thought out with a view to providing political evolution in the six counties. The "ultra-left" transformed it into a sectarian conflict, whatever about their high-flown socialist theories. The Burntollet march was a disaster. Instead of uniting the people they created a riot. The local Government were unable to control them, but

they had not a hope of controlling the Government. So the colonial power stepped in. Of course the "People's Democracy" had not a political idea in their heads.

Their propaganda ran like wild fire through the English Universities. It was natural of course for students to seek in political situations what they had read in books. They at one time had the idea that it would be possible to topple Stormont and replace it with a kind of revolutionary Government — before Irish National Independence had been won!

The Campaign for Democracy in Ulster also wanted to get rid of Stormont. But their illusion was a different one. They thought that direct rule meant civil rights. They showed a touching faith in the rulers of Britain. But I am not sure that some of them did not feel it was coming any way, and they might as well be on the winning side. I hope I am wrong in this. It merely crossed my mind. We had a working dinner with Fenner Brockway and Barbara Haq, and I think they were convinced that we were right. But at that time Labour was in opposition. "Liberation" was always steady as a rock.

Nobody today would suggest that Direct Rule has been a scrap more liberal than Stormont at its worst. Of course the only bases for a liberal democracy is a United Ireland.

When the split took place in the Republican movement the Connolly Association deplored it. The "Officials" were moving in a direction that we in general approved. But they had moved too fast and underestimated the gut reaction of the old Republicans. If they had concentrated on Civil Rights in the North and let things ride in the twenty-six counties, there might have come changes in the North that would justify their policy in the south. But they had nobody to tell them "don't mix it". The split extended to Britain and the "officials" who came closer to the Labour movement created a feeling against the "Provisionals" which had the effect of diverting attention from the primary responsibility of British imperialism, though that was of course not their intention.

The disastrous bomb outrage in Birmingham did the Irish movement in Britain more harm than a regiment of cavalry. I have never been satisfied that the right men were convicted for it. But the witch-hunt that followed threw the Irish movement back decades. Indeed only now are the Irish beginning to recover their confidence. The Connolly Association has weathered the storm. On the weekend after the explosion Mark Clinton was out with the Irish Democrat as usual. The indefatigable Pat Bond was on his rounds in South London despite the fact that one of his members had been beaten up by his own workmates, and he a shop steward.

When Sean Redmond went back to Ireland the office was run on a part time basis by Mrs Stella Bond. Charlie

Cunningham came in almost every evening. The Manchester Branch fell on evil days when Michael Crowe left for Newcastle. Liverpool suffered the same fate when McClelland returned to Belfast. Indeed since the immigration stopped in 1970, the tendency is for the Association to lose members by return to Ireland. This is natural enough since those who choose to keep contact with the Home Country are the most likely to return to it.

When the Association moved to its present premises a room was set aside for a bookshop. This was manned by Peter Mulligan, then by Brian Crowley. Toni Curran spent a year in it and now it is managed by Noel Moynihan. It contains the largest stock of Irish books in Britain.

In May 1977 after a few years without a full-time worker the Association appointed Eddie Cowman organiser. Slowly the work has expanded. For the past five years a successful summer school has been held in London or Oxford, where Barry Riordan still holds the fort. The James Connolly Memorial badge which was Chris Sullivan's bright idea, sells thousands of copies and can be seen in surprising places. Our current efforts are directed towards securing the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and winning support for a Government announcement that it favours and is willing to work in the direction of a United Ireland. Mr Jack Lynch's conversion to this point of view is very welcome.

What of the future? It would be over-optimistic to expect speedy changes. The rulers of England view Ireland in relation to a global strategy the main element of which is hatred of what they call the "East". They are able quite quickly to switch support from constitutionalists to guerrillas when they think the alternative might be Cubans, but they think they can hold the six counties themselves. It would require a massive swing of public opinion in Britain to alter their course.

How could such a change of public opinion come about? There are a number of Members of Parliament who are encouraging it. The political Labour movement could be brought to play a part, though the amateurism of the "ultra-left", where inexperience is not accompanied by modesty, does not help. The trade union movement has a part to play too, but suffers from the difficulty that those trade unionists who are against partition understandably tend to join unions not affiliated to the British T.U.C., so that at higher levels at any rate most of the information comes from the partitionist side. The result is that the central issue cannot readily be broached at the present time. The only section not inhibited in any way would seem to be the Irish in Britain, and it may be that the time has come when the Government in Dublin should think more about them and help to promote their organisation and raise their morale, as was done in the past.

If the Irish in Britain were conscientiously set out to work as the ambassadors of Irish freedom, they could educate and influence an ever-widening circle of British democrats, and that is what the Connolly Association exists to promote. It would not be hard to prove that whatever has been done in this direction is more due to the Connolly Association than to anything else.

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In concluding these reminiscences I should emphasise that reminiscences they are. Except for the first chapter, designed to show how old are the problems we have to deal with, I have relied entirely on my memory and have not had the time, if the job was to be done at all, even to consult the files of the Irish Democrat. There will quite certainly be inaccuracies. Not everybody will agree with my judgments, but that will not cause heavy mortality. There are subjects I have scarcely touched, such as the Association's cultural work. Nor have I paid adequate tribute to trade unionists like George Smith and George Anthony of the TGWU and AUEW, whose committees have always backed us up. Especially we have been helped by the Irish members of UCATT. The Association has attempted to concern itself with every issue that arises from the presence of an Irish community in Britain, and to develop it in a way which promotes the independence of Ireland and the welfare of the common people in Britain.

There has been a strengthening of the bonds of nationality in the past five years. Irish language classes have sprung up everywhere. People who formerly would not speak to each other now find that in the last analysis their views scarcely differ. In spite of all difficulties there is room for hope. As long as there is an Irish community in Britain, and as long as the English establishment holds a part of Ireland, there will be a continuing need for the Connolly Association. We hope that in the fortieth year of our existence there will be an influx of new members.

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