

IRELAND AND BRITISH REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

a new interpretation

CONTENTS

Prefatory: Introducing a series of pamphlets	1
A. From the Civil Wars to the Industrial Revolution	5
B. The revolutionary period 1789-1803	6
C. Chartism and Famine	8
D. Ireland and the birth of scientific socialism	10
E. 'Easy politics' and the age of independence	13
F. Ireland, the Red Clydeside and the British revolution ..	15
G. The Irish and the CPGB	20
H. The dearth of theory	22

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"Under a socialist system, every nation will be the supreme arbiter of its own destinies, national and international; it will be forced into no alliance against its will, but will have its independence guaranteed and its freedom respected by the enlightened self-interest of the social democracy of the world."

"The internationalism of the future will be based upon the free federation of free peoples and cannot be realised through the subjugation of the smaller by the larger political unit."

JAMES CONNOLLY

"Ours is an age of independence when the oppressed and humiliated people have appeared as the masters of the world and are pushing the wheels of history with vigour according to their own will and demand. The people of the world oppose all forms of domination and subordination and call for independence, and many countries are taking the road to national independence and sovereignty. This is the main trend of our times which no force can stop."

KIM IL SUNG, 1980

Prefaratory: Introducing a series of Pamphlets

"Lu Hsun was a man of unyielding integrity, free from all sycophancy or obsequiousness; this quality is invaluable among colonial and semi-colonial peoples.

This thumbnail sketch by Mao of the qualities demanded of revolutionaries in an oppressed country comes over with such force because it has been the oppressed peoples and their national liberation struggles which have become the motive force of history in our time.

We, by contrast, in this oldest of all imperialist countries, have for long lived in the absence of any revolutionary social force that could begin to delineate the qualities required of us with anything like the firm conviction and sharp precision of Mao's few masterly strokes of the pen. It has been with the animation of such noble qualities that the oppressed peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America have, in our time redrawn the political map of the world, so that now "ours is an age of independence when the oppressed and humiliated people have appeared as the masters of the world and are pushing the wheels of history with vigour according to their own will and demand. The people of the world oppose all forms of domination and subordination and call for independence, and many countries are taking the road to national independence and sovereignty. This is the main trend of our times which no force can stop". (Kim Il Sung, Report to the Sixth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea).

The present series of pamphlets aims to explore some of the avenues which hold the promise of an equivalent ethos for the British revolution - a revolution whose context is so diametrically opposite to that of the national liberation struggles which have in our time been at the forefront of the struggle against oppression. The pamphlets will explore three main avenues or sources for a revolutionary ideology for our time - an ideology that can counter the corrosive effects of that racist, colonialist mentality which finds its way everywhere in Britain, including into the far 'left'. These three sources are:

* Irish republicanism, in particular, in the form of the scientific socialist tradition articulated within it by James Connolly;

* the Asian communist tradition which has been most familiar in the form of Mao Zedong Thought, but which is also articulated in a form which is particularly relevant for our time and circumstances in the form of Kim Il Sung's Juche Idea;

* the new world of rebellion, perhaps most conveniently termed 'black power', that has emerged onto the political scene in this country as a result of the recent youth uprisings led by black and Asian youth, uprisings which reintroduced into this country the factor of class struggle in the sense originally understood by Marx and Engels - street fighting and the developing organisation of violence as the only path to social advance by the oppressed.

In a nutshell, the ideology put forward here is that of supporting the oppressed when they rise up.

The pamphlets will of necessity put over their arguments in polemic with the British 'left', a largely middle class social force which has traditionally had singularly little to do with any of the above three component parts of the ideology here propounded.

It should be the starting-point of true revolutionaries that they unconditionally support the oppressed when they rise up. And yet there are always those who, even under the banner of 'communism', habitually raise a host of pretexts and excuses not to support any actual rising when it occurs. Revolutionaries should give support to the oppressed in struggle as the first priority, and then put forward their own particular arguments within the context of building that support. It is the mark of the middle class left that it reverses this process. Before lifting a finger to lend support, they come up with a mountain of grumblings, conditions and petty objections: those who have risen are 'undisciplined', we 'cannot condone their errors in tactics', there were 'Trotskyists involved' (or 'there were no Trotskyists involved), there was 'no communist leadership', the action was 'premature' (or 'too late'), those who rose had a 'bad style of work', 'failed to unite with all who could have been united', and so on ad infinitum - there is simply no limit to the number of excuses that the adroit fingers of the middle class left are capable of pulling out of the hat for not supporting the oppressed when they rise up.

The most glaringly dire result of this middle class asphyxia that afflicts the British left every time that circumstances call upon it to react has been its failure to respond politically and ideologically to the new revolutionary force in society represented by the youth uprisings led by black youth. People who have for years talked of Marxist conceptions of confrontation with the forces of the state, or even of national oppression in the era of imperialism, must be numbered in thousands in this country. And yet when the youth of many towns, led by black youth, rose against the imperialist state, these 'Marxists' were caught politically and ideologically hopping. The middle class left had nothing intelligent to say about the risings, and almost all 'leftists' have utterly failed to undertake the urgent and profound redeployment of their priorities that the emergence onto the political stage of this new revolutionary force should have dictated to them.

For the youth uprisings, taking place as they have done in the context of a political upsurge in the Irish Republican Movement and its repercussions among the Irish national minority in Britain, have introduced a powerful new anti-imperialist force of incalculable significance for the British revolution. The failure of the middle class left to rally round these new forces for revolution is the result of the persistence within the left of colonialist mentality. The present series of pamphlets will aim to supplant this mentality with an alternative revolutionary ethos that upholds Connollyism, the Asian communist tradition and the worldwide struggle for independence of which that tradition is a part, and the youth uprisings led by black youth.

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At the moment an extremely serious situation faces revolutionaries in this country. Argentina's spirited struggle to get the British out of the South Atlantic has left Thatcher's government in a state of colonialist hysteria. British imperialism, already badly shaken near home by the Irish Republican upsurge and actually at home by the youth uprisings led by black youth, has now also been humiliated internationally. A humiliated and shaken ruling class starts to become an increasingly repressive ruling class, and sure enough democratic rights in this country are already being withdrawn by the week.

Hardly anyone on what is charitably referred to as the British 'left' is doing anything about this attack on democratic rights whatsoever. For instance, the Labour Party announced a series of weekly demonstrations

against Thatcher's invasion of the Malvinas, and yet called it off without a whimper after the first demonstration on finding that the police were going to arrest demonstrators!

A brighter ray has been shed by successes surrounding such national minority struggles as those of the Bradford 12. The conscious political organisation that has surrounded such struggles is bound eventually to crystallize into the new elements for a future leadership amongst whom the revolutionary party of the future will be built, based most firmly amongst the most revolutionary sections of the working and oppressed.

There is only one group on the British left that has so far made fairly consistent progress in word and action in identifying with these and others of the most revolutionary forces in our society. This is the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), originally a small splinter group from the SWP. The RCG, along with its newspaper, "Fight racism! Fight imperialism!" was the only British left group not to be caught hopping, ideologically speaking, by the youth uprisings of last year. Now once again in the current situation the RCG has distinguished itself by being just about the only British left group to say No to Thatcher's attack on democratic rights. While I have been working on this pamphlet, the activists grouped round the RCG have week by week been hauled off to police stations for refusing to call off the basic routine of democratic political life (street meetings, leafleting, petitioning, etc).

The RCG has pointed out that without democratic rights no democratic political force will be able to do anything. They have in addition drawn attention to the internationalist essence of the struggle for these rights. For it is utter hypocrisy when those on the British 'left' call on Irish, black and Asian working and oppressed people to work with them politically without at the same time demonstrating in practice their determination to defend those with whom they work against the particularly threatening forms of suppression to which such super-oppressed groups are constantly exposed. Without evidence of such determination, such oppressed groups will understandably and indeed correctly abstain from involvement with the British 'left'. And if that is going to be the case, then there will be no revolutionary movement in this country. For it is only by making one's appeal to such super-exploited sections that a soundly anti-imperialist social force can be found that is capable of defending democratic rights and rekindling the spirit of genuine class struggle generally.

If the struggles mounted by groups such as the RCG are not supported, then the British left will have been swept off the streets and will no longer be in any position to fulfil its internationalist duties or even to prevent its own annihilation. If swept off the streets, it will be of no avail for any group to shut the door of its office or bookshop behind it and hope for the best - for in that case the left bookshops and the left meetings and the left press of all shapes and hues will be subject to suppression. British colonialism has lost a lot of face and a lot of blood from the South Atlantic to Belfast and Brixton, and will be in no mood for magnanimity towards such weak forces as the British 'left' if it finds that it can crush them without their uttering a whimper.

It is with an element of mortification that I write these complimentary words about the RCG, a group of which I am not a member and of which, as things stand, I do not suppose I ever will be a member. For the RCG is a group which utterly fails to uphold the Asian communist tradition, and which appears to be consolidated around a supercilious disdain for the independence struggles of the most oppressed countries of the world of which that tradition is a part. Such unspeakable chauvinism with regard to the genuinely independent anti-imperialist forces of the most oppressed on a world scale sits very uncomfortably with the RCG's spirited struggle

against the equivalent chauvinism locally. These pamphlets are therefore put forward not only with mortification, but with hope - the hope that the activists currently grouped round the RCG will pay attention to them and come to take more account of Asian communism as being on a world scale the most crucial manifestation of the revolutionary communist tradition in recent decades, and the original homeland of much of the anti-revisionist ideology propounded locally by the RCG and its supporters.

As for the British Maoist left, the pamphlets aim to draw their attention to the significance of the struggles of those few such as the RCG who are making a conscious, political stand against the imperialist state. 'Adherents' of the Asian communist tradition who fail to rise to their duties at this juncture and who fail to shift their priorities to the defence of such vanguard forces uphold the banner of Asian communism on false pretences. They might just as well throw their banner down a well for all the good they will in that case do in rallying the revolutionary vanguard forces in this country for an all-round, independent anti-imperialist position.

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The arguments presented in the present pamphlet are hastily drafted, uneasily lumped together, and unevenly researched, and are bound to make difficult reading. I hope that those who undertake to read it will take it in the spirit in which it is offered - as an attempt to share these nascent and crudely-formulated ideas rather than sitting on them indefinitely.

IRELAND AND BRITISH REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY - A new interpretation

A. From the Civil Wars to the Industrial Revolution.

The high point of the revolutionary movement in Britain in the 1640s is generally agreed to have occurred in the year 1649. In this year, the democratic, communistic and millenarian movements associated with the Levellers and others came close to establishing, in alliance with the radical urban forces, a form of state power which could have changed the aspect of European history to an incalculable degree. However, by the end of that year, the die had been cast, and Britain was already on the inclined plane that was to lead it slowly but surely into the sewer of the 'Whig Century' - that sordid and corrupt give-and-take between the rising forces of the big bourgeoisie and the resilient aristocratic landowning interests that in one shape or form dominated the political scene until the time of the French revolution.

And that fateful year of 1649 which saw the defeat of democracy in England was precisely the year which saw Cromwell's invasion of Ireland.

The Irish independence of the 1640s had been wrenched out of the hands of the English while the latter were preoccupied with the Civil Wars. The great insurrection of 1641 "marked the last appearance of the Irish clan system, founded upon common property and a democratic social organisation, as a rival to the politico-social order of capitalist feudalism... This magnificent movement of the Irish clans ... attained to such proportions that it held sway over and made laws for the greater part of Ireland ..." (Connolly, Labour in Irish history, Chapter 8). Such an independent and revolutionary force existing in Ireland constituted a potential base and focus for a continuation of revolutionary warfare against feudalism and feudalism's new allies in the bourgeois camp that could have enabled the revolutionary forces to come to power in England also. Cromwell's invasion of Ireland was reaction's master stroke.

Cromwell managed to divert precisely those sections of the revolutionary bourgeois army that had displayed the greatest egalitarianism in the English context into a murderous war of extermination against a subject people. Since Marius the general of the early Roman republic, foreign conquest and the promise of land allotments to a turbulent soldiery have been a constant tactic of a ruling class which has come to power on the basis of popular rebellion at the stage when that ruling class wants its erstwhile supporters out of the way.

"In that mutual slaughter of the last representatives of the communism of primitive society" (i.e. the Irish clans) "and the first representatives of the communism of the future" (i.e. the Levellers) "lies the essential tragedy of the English revolution and of the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland." Thus speaks T A Jackson in Ireland her own, (Chapter 3). While Jackson here correctly identifies the political forces in conflict, his conclusions are utterly lame. What we have here is not an "essential tragedy". Historical materialism does not find "tragedy" at the essence of epoch-making events, but the struggle of oppressed against oppressor. Jackson's reversion to an Aeschylean view of history might be quite touching if it did not let English colonialist domination off the hook. For what lies at the essence of this matter is not tragedy but shame - the shame of England that even the best it has produced for democracy has always been 5

corrupted and sent to oblivion by its acquiescence in, and even participation in, the domination of Ireland and other oppressed peoples.

Again in the early 1680s a mighty egalitarian peasant movement swept the West of England, such as could have led to a far more democratic order for the coming social upheavals that resulted in the extension of the capitalist mode of production throughout England's economy. But the acquiescence of its predecessors in the ruin of Ireland had already sealed its fate. For the levelling movements of the 1640s had, by associating with the Cromwellian conquest, dug a big enough grave not only for their own movements but for those of all who would come after them in England for centuries. The Western rebellion - the last great armed uprising of the oppressed in England - was suppressed at Sedgemoor in 1685, and the rebels massacred by an army composed largely of Irishmen, and officered by Catholic generals such as Sarsfield. Thus did the Irish and Catholicism become identified by the lower orders in England as the feared strong arm of feudal despotic rule.

In this way the allegiance of the English lower orders to the domination of Ireland by their 'own' bourgeoisie was secured. When Ireland rose again, their acquiescence in the suppression of the rising by William of Orange was thus assured. Equally assured was the historical nemesis wreaked on the oppressed in England for this acquiescence. For the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 which spelt doom for Ireland's independence also ushered in the 'Whig Century' which sealed the political fate of the English lower orders and culminated in their impotence to resist the unspeakable horrors of the Industrial Revolution, that orgy of capitalist enslavement in which the Whig Century was to end. Turfed out of their peasant holdings, deprived by force and fraud of all their remaining rights on the land, confined in poor houses and - worse - in the early factories, taking refuge among the stench of the urban ghettos subject to plague ... Thus did the consequences of acquiescence in the domination of Ireland work themselves out for the oppressed of England.

What a sobering historical lesson! The message to our labour movement of today is clear: If you want yet more centuries of destitution and enslavement to capital, then your road is clear: just sit back and condone the suppression of today's Irish nationalist movement, and history will most surely deliver to you all the destitution, degradation and shame you could desire, as indeed it meted out to your predecessors before you.

On top of all the suffering lies the shame which history bequeathed to these wretched English dupes of Orange Protestant chauvinism. For whatever they suffered, the Irish suffered worse. Eighteenth century travellers in Ireland are unanimous that the Irish were treated worse than pack animals by the colonialist occupiers. 'Housing' conditions in Ireland reverted to nests of straw such as must have been almost unknown since before the dawn of the Neolithic era, and which must have made the sewerless shacks of Manchester seem a paradise. Actual nudity was a common condition among the destitute. Thus far did English colonial rule go to ensure that even while dragging England's working masses through the hell of the Industrial Revolution it was still possible to assure them that they were nevertheless part of a race of rulers!

B. The revolutionary period 1789-1803

The salvos of the French revolution of 1789 awoke revolutionary democratic opinion even in this Western heartland of reactionary despotism and colonialist chauvinism. Something of a Jacobin period occurred in Britain in the early and mid-1790s, with Corresponding Societies and other revolutionary organisations leading radical mass movements in Edinburgh, London and other towns. The equivalent movement in Ireland was the Society of United Irishmen

in its early, pre-insurrectionary phase (1791-96). The United Irishmen attempted to build links with these movements, and in the case of the Scottish movement achieved some success. The showdown between the authorities and the movement in Scotland occurred, significantly, precisely over this question of their Ireland link. The Scots leader, Thomas Muir, was sentenced to transportation for having read an Address from the United Irishmen to a convention in Edinburgh. Such examples of internationalism are a proof of the genuine democratic credentials of this early Jacobin movement. They also explain the ferocity with which it was suppressed. The dire consequence of this defeat was to give Britain a free hand in its anti-republican crusade against revolutionary France.

The ferocity of repression in this country was as ever in the annals of English history surpassed by the savagery perpetrated upon the Irish people. From 1796, the year of the first attempted French landing in Ireland, the scale of England's atrocities became such as to assume the character of a provocation to the Irish to rise. This important point is passed over in silence in standard assessments of the period, but is attested to even by so seasoned and level-headed a revolutionary democrat as Arthur O'Connor as early as 1795. Britain's rulers wanted an Irish rising at this time, and as soon as possible, too. The democratic movement at home had been no ordinary one, but had been consciously internationalist with respect to Ireland's struggle for independence. Such is the sure grasp of tactics that England's rulers have, and such is the viciousness to which it will stoop to ensure the success of its cynical calculations; 'Let the Irish arise now, when our rear has become safe'.

Sure enough, once the Irish rebellion of 1798 had been drowned in blood, the pressure on democracy at home could be eased appreciably, and even a certain tentative Jacobin revival occurred in Britain.

At this point there was a lurch for British colonial rule. It had miscalculated the depth of the roots of Irish rebellion. In addition it had calculated without an insurrectionary section of the democratic movement in Britain that came to be associated with a certain Colonel Despard. In 1803 a concerted push for insurrection occurred simultaneously in both countries.

In Ireland, the leader of the 'conspiracy', Robert Emmet, became for all time a symbol of the fact that however ruthlessly Britain may quench the flames of Irish rebellion, there will nevertheless always arise from the ashes of defeat the phoenix, the Robert Emmet, who will revive the struggle.

Colonel Despard's parallel 'conspiracy' has been more effectively obliterated from the bourgeois historical record, and indeed from the annals of the British revolution which is so much less history-conscious than the Irish republican movement. Despard and his principal followers were executed on the charge of having attempted to assassinate the king. Nevertheless, research into the period reveals the hollowness of colonialism's dismissive attitude to his revolutionary activities. It is clear that he and his followers constituted a serious and determined force (see, for instance, E P Thompson's account in Making of the English working class).

A historical overview of the revolutionary period 1789-1803 reveals a series of such 'near-misses' in which the revolutionary jigsaw never quite fitted together. It would be tempting to refer to such a series of mishaps by Jackson's term 'tragedy' were not the diabolical schemings of British ruling circles so evident below the surface:

* the early democratic struggles in England and Scotland were suppressed by the mid-1790s;

* the French military alliance with Irish republicanism did not come into effect until 1796;

- * the Irish rebellion came in 1798, by which time French military aid was on a vastly reduced scale and in any case came at the wrong time of the year;
- * the great naval mutinies in the British fleet (which saw sections of the British navy declaring for the United Irishmen, so widespread had Irish recruitment been !) had already passed their peak by the end of 1797;
- * the Jacobin movement in Britain was not back on its feet until the early 1800s;
- * by this time France had long ceased placing its eggs in the republican basket, and had diverted its attention to imperialist rivalry with Britain in the East;
- * this change in France's orientation was signalled by Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798, precisely the year when Ireland arose ...

The crucial sledgehammer blows of British colonialist policy in this kaleidoscope of missed revolutionary opportunities were directed to ensure that the repercussions of the showdown in Ireland were minimised by being separated in time from any major showdown at home.

So long as that central task could be accomplished, British colonial rule could survive the other threats, or even a conjuncture of two or three of them simultaneously.

Such is the historical imperative directed at us as revolutionaries in Britain today to ensure that the showdown over Ireland's independence shall next occur in step and in coordination with a showdown of revolutionary forces here with the British imperialist state, so that next time round we can tip Britain's rulers over the edge.

C. Chartism and Famine

The internationalist orientation of the Jacobin movement in Britain was a passing phenomenon. The class struggles following on the end of the Napoleonic Wars (the Peterloo massacre, etc.) met with no leading core to steer them in an internationalist direction with respect to Ireland's independence. And yet the basis for the stormy proletarian struggles of the 1820s in Lancashire, Scotland and elsewhere was provided by the Irish textile workers and their leaders such as John Doherty. Why was it that such important ground had been lost in the field of political consciousness since the days of Thomas Muir, Colonel Despard, and the many others who had embraced their internationalist ideals?

The answer is found in a phenomenon that had arisen on the political scene which has hamstrung revolutionary advance in this country ever since.

In the oppressive and middle-class dominated atmosphere of London politics there began to congregate those political elements who entrenched themselves in the struggles of labour but who severed those struggles from any internationalist orientation. The early 1820s saw the fierce struggle against the Combination Acts, and for the right to organise. The motive force behind this struggle was the Irish national minority of the Midlands and the North, whose rebellious men, women and youth held the threat of uprising constantly over the heads of the bourgeoisie of the industrial towns. Such a factor should have provided a living link between the revolutionary movements of the two countries. And yet the new breed of labour leader, epitomised by Francis Place, situated in London and possessed of a great talent for intrigue and skullduggery, constantly worked to divert proletarian struggle away from insurrectionary paths and into the murky back-corridors of parliamentary machination.

Then as now the true forces for revolutionary advance in this country were based far beyond the fringe of 'respectable' labour politics, among the super-exploited workers, mostly of national minority origin. Place's anti-Irish chauvinism is reliably documented, and it was such as he who effectively sabotaged any prospect of genuine revolutionary organisation that would coordinate on a countrywide scale these militant and largely Irish forces which, while peripheral to the 'agreed limits' of bourgeois democratic politics, were the central forces for revolution against the bourgeois social order. Place was a heated critic of Doherty, to whom he referred as a "hot-headed Irishman".

How reminiscent such a situation is of today's middle class left! Our 'leftists' are forever placing the forces for revolution in Belfast, Brixton and elsewhere beyond the bounds of their political consciousness, and outlawing them from practical consideration when formulating their policies and ordering their priorities. Does such political and ideological genocide of oppressed nations and national minorities by supposed socialists merit any more polite epithet than Hitlerite national socialism?

A constant political feature of 'left' organisations founded on such an approach has always been a chauvinist refusal to contemplate the elementary fact that the prospects for revolutionary advance in Britain are inextricably bound up with the repercussions within Britain of Ireland's struggle for independence. The principal location of such sham 'leftism' is in London, close to the heartland of reformist and parliamentary hocus-pocus. Organisationally, 'left' groupings of such a kind are invariably firmly wedded to their own perpetuation rather than to progressive forces in society at large; mutual allegiance among their component members is set above principled adaptation to unfolding revolutionary opportunity. The characteristic ideological atmosphere of this colonialist middle-class left is one of cold and gloomy superiority and aloofness towards the oppressed, and disdain for the 'hot-headed Irishman', and for that matter for the hot-headed black or Asian or indeed even for the hot-headed Frenchman - anyone, in fact, but the cold-headed Englishman. Such cold superiority is regarded as a mark of honour, being referred to as 'objectivity', 'science', and so on. Such chauvinist 'leftism' provides a final line of defence of imperialist ideology against the formation of genuine revolutionary groupings that stand with the oppressed.

As a result of such a tendency among its 'leadership', the organised labour movement of the early 1830s became diverted into the struggle for parliamentary reform. Revolutionary leaders such as Doherty became disillusioned with 'politics' and left the field to 'free trade' demagogues such as Cobden. Meanwhile at this very time the Tithe War was spreading the sparks of revolutionary agrarian warfare across Ireland. But the credo of the middle-class was, then as ever, to outlaw such considerations from the counsels of proletarian politics in Britain.

Thus was British colonialism spared once again from the nightmare of a British crisis in the context of an Irish crisis. The Irish peasant was by the late 1830s bludgeoned back to the increasingly infertile potato patch, there to eke out another seven or eight years of destitution before the whole precarious ecological system broke down in potato blight and starvation, and on top of it collapsed the social system and half the human beings of which that social system was composed.

It was thus with a free hand that the British authorities faced Chartism during its insurrectionary phase of 1838-42. By the mid-1840s, this force had spent itself, and labour demands had been diverted into the cry for Repeal of the Corn Laws, i.e. 'cheaper bread'. The Repeal of these protective tariffs when at last it came in 1846 constituted, by reducing the price of Irish corn exports, perhaps the final twist which plunged Ireland into

the unrelieved famine of the late 1840s. The cry for 'cheaper bread' thus became, in the mouths of the demagogues of the time, a veritable watchword of chauvinist, colonialist 'leftism', flaunting as it did the utter disregard of these labour 'leaders' for Ireland's agrarian emergency.

In 1848, an Irish rising was attempted. Its leaders were at best half-hearted in their enthusiasm for the Chartist revival which occurred in that year, and who can blame them?

In England, Feargus O'Connor had, through embodying an Ireland-Chartism link, focussed the few rays of hope for a revolutionary uprising. But even he balked at the prospect of a showdown with the authorities in 1848 and reached an agreement with the English authorities for a peaceful dispersal of the great London Chartist demonstration of April. With the focus and sights of Chartism so exclusively within Britain, and so shamefully split from the central, glaring fact of the Irish famine, is it any wonder that O'Connor took this course? He was not a coward. His action was taken because he was a shrewd politician (being something more than that as well, he was within months a broken spirit).

Thus was the conjuncture of an Irish national rising with an insurrectionary crisis in Britain once again successfully warded off by British colonialism. That catastrophe of missed opportunities which was enacted as tragedy in the period 1789 to 1803 was replayed as a tragicomical Dance of Death in the conditions of Irish famine and chauvinist 'left' dominance in the 1840s.

D. Ireland and the birth of scientific socialism

Marx took England as his paradigm and main case study for the demonstration of the laws of capitalist development and the conditions for its overthrow. In the same way his initial work on the question of international relations under capitalism centred on England's domination of Ireland as his most poignant and prophetic case study. Indeed, in the world of today, it is international relations that have become the focus of concern of revolutionary communism rather than the labour-capital contradiction within the dominating capitalist countries. Hence, the work of Marx and Engels in laying bare the role of British colonial dominance in Ireland, and struggling to rid the labour movement of chauvinism, is in important respects more directly relevant to the world of today than the achievements more generally associated with them - Capital and other works of political economy.

Just as Marx took the concept of surplus value round the whole gamut of the economic, political and philosophical thinking of his day, using it to tear the veil of mystification and hypocrisy from the social relations which lay behind that thinking, so also must we, in this imperialist country, take the concept of national oppression round the whole gamut of social, economic and political thinking in our day. Our starting-point is as easily stated as was Marx's: we have to deal with the same fundamental questions as Marx did, but in a context where Marx's basic assumptions no longer serve as adequate starting points. Where Marx could again and again start from the situation within a given country without in any way de-revolutionising his theory, we face a situation where the pressing problems faced by us all begin from a situation where any single transaction normally involves more than one given country, nation or national group, and where the relation between them is exploitative. In such a situation it is counter-productive and indeed thoroughly reactionary to start from Marx's assumptions. As an example, Marx's concept of 'socially necessary labour time' no longer serves, as it did with Marx, as a solution to pressing polemical tasks; for it has become transformed,

with capitalism's development to imperialism, into its opposite, and has become a problem - for the characteristic position under imperialism is that in one transaction are involved two necessary labour times because two societies are involved.

In spite of this enormous difference in the context of their work, the practical and theoretical activities of Marx and Engels in relation to the Irish question showed how far they had gone in spirit towards the proletarian internationalism of the future, which was eventually to become, in our time, so clearly focussed on the struggle for national independence by oppressed nations and peoples. Marx integrated this internationalism into his assessment of the revolutionary forces within Britain itself, referring to the antagonism between English and Irish workers as "the secret of the political impotence of the English working class."

In connection with his work on the London IWMA, Marx constantly ran up against the deadweight of chauvinist opportunism. Time and again he had to struggle hard to get Britain's labour leaders to present at least a modicum of support for the republican Fenian movement of the 1860s, if only in words. Only thus were these 'leaders' enabled to hold their heads up in the international socialist movement, which was perhaps very much more than they deserved. He also used the IWMA as a base from which to mobilise all possible international contacts to campaign worldwide for release of the Fenian prisoners and other central Ireland solidarity tasks.

It is worth noting that Marx's use of the IWMA was strictly tactical, and that matters of principle took precedence. He was well aware of the rotten, chauvinist essence of much of the London IWMA set-up, as his confidential correspondence with Engels reveals. In 1871, the Paris Commune brought into existence more thoroughly reliable and internationalist revolutionary forces for Marx to work with. By the end of 1872, therefore, the London IWMA outfit had served its purpose and Marx sensibly ensured its demise by shipping it off to the US.

Then as now a central point of principle in the Ireland solidarity movement was politically to defend the right of Ireland's nationalist armed forces to conduct military operations on British soil. Marx upheld this right and refused to be drawn into the anti-'terrorist' orchestra of his day. In this, he presents a strong contrast to the 'Marxists' of today's SWP, WRP, and others, who like nothing better than a routine bit of anti-Republican hysteria every time this question comes into prominence. Marx's principled stand on this matter is brought into all the sharper relief by the fact that he was constantly engaged in polemics with anarchist terrorists, and this had disposed him personally to disfavour some Fenian operations in London; however, this did not affect his publicly-expressed standpoint, and he kept his personal views strictly between himself and Engels - least of all did he confide them to the chauvinist labour leaders of his day.

The political core of Marx' teaching on this question was to oppose chauvinist labourism with a clarion call to support Fenianism as a movement of the oppressed in struggle. He assessed Fenianism as being "characterised by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by being a lower orders movement ... The movement took root (and is still really rooted) only in the mass of the people, the lower orders. That is what characterises it."

It is perhaps only today, over a century later, when the revolt of the oppressed of the world is centred on the struggles of oppressed, weak and divided nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and when independence has become the political crux of these struggles, that the greatness of Karl Marx can be fully appreciated in all-round perspective. For Fenianism was a national, not a specifically proletarian, movement, and might there-

fore have appeared to a more dogmatic thinker as a negative phenomenon at a time when the immediate task of scientific socialism was to uphold the exclusively proletarian class forces which were then struggling into political life. Furthermore, Marx had, as we have seen, his own reservations about some of the Fenian movement's tactics. Yet he allowed none of this to stand in the way of his support for Fenianism as a "lower orders movement" in struggle. What "characterised" a movement was for him not its relation to his own theories or preferences, but whether or not it was rooted among the lower orders, and whether or not its blows were aimed against oppression.

What a contrast the real Karl Marx presents to the opposite approach of our chauvinist left today, who do not hesitate to use 'Marxist' terms about 'class struggle' as arguments against the Irish Republican Movement !

The banner of Marx and Engels was taken up by James Connolly in his enduring work in wedding the concept of proletarian struggle to the context of national uprising by the oppressed peoples. Connolly developed a firm grasp of the dialectical link between the fate of British labour and the national liberation struggle of the Irish and other oppressed nations. For example, his work Labour in Irish history pinpoints, with the assured touch of a professional activist, most of the events and individuals that have been mentioned above - Despard, Emmet, Doherty, O'Connor, etc. Though Connolly himself did not have the opportunity to develop such work to its full potential, it is again and again found that his comments lead to further fresh and productive trains of thought.

The fruitfulness of Connolly's historical work stems in large measure from his ability always to see the revolutionary movement of Britain in the context of the situation in Ireland and vice versa, an ability derived from his lifelong involvement in the revolutionary movements in both countries.

The essence of Connolly's teaching on the British labour movement may be summarised as: Either the British labour movement breaks free from the dominance of its chauvinist leadership and aligns with Ireland's independence movement, or it will be sent to hell - not least by the Irish vote in English elections, which will in that case understandably continue to be cast in favour of Liberal candidates in the hopes at least of Home Rule, and thus continue to stifle the development of socialism in Parliament or indeed (and more significantly) outside it.

Connolly's aim was to direct the British labour movement away from the road to hell and into active collaboration with the Irish lower orders. His work with Larkin in 1913 brought the oppressed of the Clydeside and many other areas of Britain into active coordination with one of the biggest labour struggles ever seen in Western Europe - the Dublin Lockout. Connolly actively campaigned to direct solidarity action in Britain away from exclusive preoccupation with fund-raising, the relatively cosy operation favoured by the 'charitable' labour leadership, and towards the launching of sympathetic strikes.

In the Lockout struggle, which held out for five months, the Irish Citizen Army was born. The fighting spirit of the Dublin workers re-awakened from the ashes the spirit of Emmet and indeed of Despard. Once again British colonialism faced a dagger held to its throat by an 'unrespectable' labour movement at home spearheaded by the Irish national minority in Glasgow and elsewhere, and in close and organised coordination with an Irish movement already taking to arms. Soon may British colonialism live to see such a nightmare once more !

Connolly greeted the "moral grandeur" to which British labour had been raised in the early days of the lockout: Dublin suffered and agonised,

but rejoiced that even in its suffering it was the medium for the apostolate of a rejuvenating idea." However, the "sectional officialdom" of the labour leadership "fell to the tempter" and confounded the internationalist unity of the early weeks. "And so we Irish workers must again go down into Hell, bow our backs to the lash of the slave driver, let our hearts be seared by the iron of his hatred, and instead of the sacramental wafer of brotherhood and common sacrifice, eat the dust of defeat and betrayal" ("The isolation of Dublin", February 7th 1914).

The nemesis wreaked upon British labour for thus being misled was to be a terrible one, measured in the deaths of their youth by the million in the ensuing inter-imperialist war.

E. 'Easy politics' and the age of independence

Before returning to a basically chronological framework, some of the political ground covered above will be restated in current terms:

The stated aim of communism is to lead class struggles towards the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state. Its method is to build a revolutionary political party with this aim that can give all-round leadership based on the summation of revolutionary experience and revolutionary thought.

History abounds in cases of the insurrectionary overthrow of the established order. Some of these cases are progressive and result in seizure of power by the oppressed. Others remain under the control of reaction and demagoguery, and result in the establishment of despotic rule or fascism. How are we to differentiate which is which? The difference can be difficult to see for some people, especially for middle class people, who like to see themselves as above or 'detached' from such violent goings on and tend to regard the two phenomena as two aspects of the same thing - as 'totalitarianism', etc.

Blood-and-thunder varieties of naive 'revolutionary' socialism have little to say on this crucial question. Their view of society is summed up in the memorable couplet by Paul Potts which is quoted in Paul Foot's Why you should be a socialist:

We're in the ditch, we're in the ditch -
We've got to get rid of the rich !

This view of the world might seem rather touching in its childlike simplicity (I even fell to the temptation in Why Paul Foot should be a socialist, of suggesting a completion to this poetic epigram as follows:

"We've got little, and they've got lots -- It's a 'two-class' world, say the Trots.") However, such an 'easy politics' approach of 'Up the workers and down the rich' is more handy for the fascist demagogue than it is enlightening for the genuine revolutionary.

Genuine revolutionary leaders have always had to differentiate their policies sharply from those of the 'easy politicians'. First, as we saw in the case of Marx's remarks on the Fenians, they hold to the fundamental principle of revolutionary dialectics - that the 'lower orders', the most oppressed, are to be supported when they rise up.

Secondly, and overlapping with the above point, genuine revolutionaries have since Lenin's day recognised that in the era of modern imperialism (i.e. the era when capitalism has come to take an imperialist form and the principal form of oppression worldwide is national oppression) it is oppressed nations and national minorities which are the most oppressed.

It is clear that 'Marxism' as the term is understood in common parlance

in Britain today tends to omit these crucial facts from consideration, and (when the term is not being applied to New Left-style intellectualistic waffle utterly divorced from practice) is used as a synonym for simplistic proletarianism. To take one example from the many possible, Arthur Scargill is well known for his professions of readiness to defy the capitalist legal system in the pursuit of the interests of his members and indeed of the members of other unions. Such a standpoint can justly be said to give credibility to his reputation for devotion to the interests of his members, and doubtless he is indeed prepared to suffer weal and woe with them. However, he slips easily into talk about an 'energy policy for this nation' in such a way as to reveal a lack of any internationalist perspective, and even a readiness to identify the interests of his members with those of British imperialism and its plunder of third world resources. Such is the ease with which 'easy politics' can coexist with chauvinist disdain for the struggles of the oppressed countries for economic independence.

Those who genuinely uphold the tradition of Marx, by contrast, begin from an entirely different angle. In the words of Kim Il Sung: "The whole process of international developments in the years under review" (1970-1980) "showed clearly that ours is an age of independence when the oppressed and humiliated people have appeared as the masters of the world and are pushing the wheels of history with vigour according to their own will and demand. The people of the world oppose all forms of domination and subordination and call for independence, and many countries are taking the road to national independence and sovereignty. This is the main trend of our times which no force can stop." (Report to the 6th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, October 10th 1980.)

In this "age of independence" when oppression by capitalism has taken a national form, the struggle for independence is the concrete manifestation of the historical mission of the proletariat to end the oppression of man by man. In Marx's time it was the proletariat of the first capitalist countries that led the fulfilment of this mission; in Lenin's day the mantle fell upon the Russian proletariat, a younger social force, and yet, not least by virtue of that fact itself, a more revolutionary social force; in our day, the "age of independence", the mantle of this historical mission has fallen upon the newly emerging proletarian forces in the third world, with peasant and other oppressed class forces rallied close around them. This does not deny Marxist class dialectics - on the contrary, it confirms them, by showing that the proletariat can play a leadership role in every situation where man exploits man, and at every stage of the struggle to overthrow the capitalist system in all its manifestations.

The simplistic proletarianism of 'easy politicians' like Paul Foot, Arthur Scargill and Co., who like their class confrontations to be nice and straightforward, were long ago castigated by Lenin in his comments on the Easter rising: "Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution really is."

From the very beginnings of the history of human civilisation, every ruling class prior to the proletariat has oppressed other peoples and national groups. That is how classes and the state first arose, as Morgan and Engels long ago established. The patriarchal family, having subjugated woman within the family, expanded through the subjugation and enslavement of other local or tribal groupings. Thus class struggles have never from their very inception been 'pure' internal affairs within a single people, the way our 'easy politicians' would have us believe. Class struggles have always had national or local form and content.

For example, in the British Isles the structure of ruling class power has since Norman times derived from the domination by feudal-invasion

rulers over the previous inhabitants:

* in England, the previous inhabitants were largely incorporated within the ruling class political and cultural orbit (although local cultural survivals continue as much more than a memory in many areas, and local identity even takes a national form in Cornwall and the Isle of Man);

* Wales and Scotland were subdued by a mixture of suppression and incorporation, with the successful integration of their ruling classes into the British political system;

* Ireland has run the whole gamut of forms of national oppression, from settlement to attempted genocide, and eventually to neocolonial partition - a history which has made of Ireland a historical encyclopaedia of forms of oppression.

As we have seen, whenever, down the centuries, the foundations of oppressive class rule in this country have rumbled, these bottled-up forces of local and national resistance have threatened to burst forth, particularly in the case of Ireland. All the violent confrontations in which the British ruling class has defended in blood the rule it won in blood (the Civil Wars of the seventeenth century, the survival of the monarchical system in the face of the French revolutionary threat, etc.) have taken place in the context of Irish rebellion. And in every case the Irish rebellion represented the ultimate nightmare for the survival of that rule - the 'dagger at the heart', the force which most immediately threatened delivery of the final coup de grace.

No matter how 'Marxist' our easy politicians may regard themselves, Marx himself deeply grasped this fundamental law of the British revolution: "The decisive blow against the English ruling classes ...", he wrote in 1870, "cannot be delivered in England, but only in Ireland."

The chauvinist 'left' in British politics, which labours to prevent a "decisive blow against the English ruling classes" so as to preserve its cosy position of 'leadership', hence clings desperately to 'easy politics' as a manoeuvre to keep genuinely revolutionary forces such as Irish republicanism (and now black youth rebellion) out of consideration. This explains the fanatical devotion of such leftists to fads such as 'industrial base-building' and other such apotheoses of the holy labour-capital contradiction.

Such an approach is wrong, and misleading in a profoundly reactionary way. For it is not Arthur Scargill and his merry men who hold a dagger to the heart of British capitalism.

That dagger is held by Connollyism, by Bobby Sands's spirit of freedom, by the African, Malayan and all other peoples rebelling against British imperialist rule, and by the Phoenix and bold Robert Emmet.

F. Ireland, the Red Clydeside and the British revolution

The years following the conclusion of the First World War were stormy. The ruling class lived in fear of the prospect of revolutionary class struggle breaking out on the Clydeside, in Liverpool, and elsewhere, and desperately set about deploying the armed forces of the state accordingly. In Ireland, the British armed forces were being chased out of county after county by the rifles of the IRA. The British ruling class was in the midst of its recurring, raging nightmare - a domestic crisis in the context of an Irish rebellion.

We shall return later to the nature and significance of the neo-colonial coup whereby Britain imposed a partition settlement upon Ireland and thus

extricated itself from its quandary. For the moment it is enough to state that, faced with the traumatic event of the success of the partitionist coup, the revolutionary movement in this country was forced to perceive the bankruptcy of 'easy politics'. In such an extremely complex situation of national and communal contradiction and nationalist loyalty and treachery, it was plainly unfeasible for even the most banale demagogue to say, 'We are for the workers and against the rich' and expect this to establish any kind of progressive credentials. On the contrary, a world situation had arisen in which the Soviet Union and Comintern supported the independence struggles of Ireland, India, Egypt and other countries oppressed by British imperialism. 'Easy politicians' who wanted to get back to the 'straightforward' labour-capital contradiction were forced to come out in opposition to the Soviet state and the national liberation struggles it supported.

It is to the credit of the revolutionary forces in Britain at the time (constituted, as we shall see, by the Irish national minority and their supporters) that a militant anti-partitionist minority upheld the banner of internationalism in this complex situation. Many of these comrades rallied round the initial attempts to found a Communist Party in this country.

Outstanding in his support for the struggle of Ireland's revolutionary republicans was John Maclean. Although the Leninist theory of imperialism was not current among British revolutionaries prior to the mid-1900s (see "Imperialism and the British labour movement in the 1900s," Stuart Macintyre, *Our History* pamphlet, 64), and although the significance of British imperialism's turn towards neocolonial tactics could not yet be fully grasped, Maclean nevertheless firmly upheld the struggle of the revolutionary republicans. "The Sinn Feiners," he stated, "who make no profession of socialism or communism, and who are at best non-socialists, are doing more to help Russia and the revolution than all we professed Marxian-Bolsheviks in Britain" (from Maclean's article entitled "Up India!").

This assessment is strikingly reminiscent of Marx's remarks on the Fenians ("a socialistic tendency ... in a negative sense", etc.) and reveals how Maclean creatively sought to apply Marxian support for the "lower orders" in the new situation of the post-1917 world.

This thought expressed by Maclean is really so simple that it might almost be regarded as a commonplace. It is, after all, a truth that even bourgeois propaganda will blare out on occasions when it feels that communism has been given a sufficiently bad name for such a truth to put people off supporting a given nationalist movement.

Yet, unbelievable as it may sound, such rays of clarity as that provided by Maclean are scandalously few and far between in the annals of Ireland solidarity in Britain. A fairly exhaustive search of the published material of the Communist and labour movements has so far failed to bring to light any enduring Marxist tendency guided by this ideological truth between the time of Maclean and the founding by the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) of their journal "Hands off Ireland!" in the early 1970s (a journal subsequently incorporated into "Fight Racism! Fight imperialism!", and since 1979 joined in its advocacy of this line by "New Age", a newspaper edited by me, which in 1980 was incorporated into the current "Class struggle").

Maclean's clarity was demonstrably a function of his active immersion among the Irish national minority of the Clydeside. For when at Easter 1916 the latter community, by now isolated for a year from Ireland, was caught largely unawares by the rising in Dublin and failed to strike immediate blows in solidarity, Maclean was lukewarm or even negative in his support for the rising. However, his continuing involvement with

the most oppressed of Glasgow, the Irish, who were quickest to sense the backslidings and treachery of renegade 'patriots', had set him on the correct course by the time it came to the partitionist coup. It was in this identification with the oppressed in struggle, and his readiness to learn from them, that Maclean's greatness lay.

Much indeed is there to learn from the experience of the Irish national minority in Britain. Doherty's Lancashire- and Scotland-based National Association for the Protection of Labour, though its existence was brief (1830-circa 1832), made enough of a mark to justify the claim that it was the Irish national minority and its leaders who first organised labour on a national scale in Britain, and the puny TUC opportunists of today should be forced to acknowledge that fact and pay due tribute to those who, through heroic class struggle, laid the groundwork for the formation of the organisation they now 'lead'.

Similarly, urban Chartism in England and Scotland was largely manned by the Irish, and it was an Irishman, Feargus O'Connor, who "converted Chartism from a series of local disturbances into a national movement" (Asa Briggs in J.W. Boyle, ed., Leaders and workers). As Connolly was later wryly to observe, O'Connor was "one of the first of that long list of Irish fighters in Great Britain whose unselfish sacrifices have gone to make a record for an 'English' labour movement" (Labour in Irish history, Chapter 12).

At the turn of the present century, and at an accelerating rate during the First World War, there was a rapid expansion in the transport, ship-building, munitions and other industries. In the sprawling and unplanned conurbations which mushroomed round the boom areas, peopled largely by the Irish national minority, there existed a situation echoing the urban social turmoil of the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century, and in turn foreshadowing the later development of national minority urban areas such as Brixton, St. Pauls, etc. The most turbulent area of all was the Clydeside, a vast workcamp which spread out from Glasgow and housed tens of thousands of recent immigrants from Ireland and the Scots Highlands.

As already mentioned, it was precisely in the political interchange between Glasgow and Edinburgh on the one hand and Ireland on the other that much of Connolly's activity took place. At the very beginning of this century, Connolly played a leading role in the establishment of the Socialist Labour Party, a split from the British Socialist Party which was at the time dominated by Hyndmanite chauvinism. The firm internationalist stand sustained by the SLP during the ensuing years has been well documented (see Raymond Challinor's Origins of British Bolshevism), and it was subsequently to bequeath to the Communist Party some of the latter's most actively internationalist cadres (MacGanus, Paul, Murphy). A larger-scale mass organisation was the Glasgow ILP, for whose paper, Forward, Connolly contributed a weekly column from 1913 until prevented by war conditions early in 1915.

An interesting example of how historical materialist fact is 'revised' out of the record is provided by a book entitled Poor men's guardians by Morning Star correspondent Stanley Harrison, which purports to tell the truth about the working class press in Britain. This revisionist book is all adulation for the Daily Herald in its fund-raising for the Dublin Lockout of 1913. Yet at the time Larkin stated that collections raised by Forward had contributed more funds for the Lockout than the rest of the labour movement put together. The facts and figures are all on record, and an investigation would probably reveal how misleading the chauvinist historians of the British 'left' are in their supercilious unconcern for the most oppressed whose struggle has been the true motive force of history. Significantly, Forward's readers, Irish and Scots Highlands immi-

grants for example, had a national contradiction with the British state. Being beyond the periphery of respectable society they constituted a powerful embryo for a new society defined by the noble characteristics of the oppressed. But no, Harrison and his ilk prefer the perspective of standard bourgeois history, and the achievements of these super-exploited workers are struck off the record. Such are the elementary, initial tasks that still remain to be undertaken by revolutionary theory if we are even to begin to rest our policies upon historical materialist bedrock.

Connolly drew attention to the fact that in Britain "Irish working class exiles were present and active in the ranks of militant labour in numbers out of all proportion to the ratio they bore to the population at large. And always they were the advanced, the least compromising, the most irreconcilable element in the movement" (Labour in Irish history, Chapter 15). If 'socialists' like Harrison choose to ignore such historical materialist starting points, then it will be their own 'socialism' and its inevitably unrealistic and misguided policies that they will condemn to irrelevance and oblivion.

The enormously important subject of Glasgow's links with the Irish struggle in the period up to 1923 cries out for detailed consideration as perhaps the most critical feature of British revolutionary history in this century so far.

During the First World War, Connolly's paper was at one time printed on the SLP press in Glasgow and smuggled over to Ireland by Arthur Mac Manus, the future leader of the CPGB (in a box, he later reminisced, marked "Glass - with care"). By 1915, Connolly was able to print his paper in Liberty Hall on a printing press protected against the state by an armed guard on duty day and night. By the end of that year, the Glasgow press began to suffer state onslaughts, Forward being suppressed at Christmas for its stalwart stand against the Government's war policies. Taken by surprise over the Easter uprising, which took place after the government's repressive measures had disrupted Glasgow-Ireland communications for a year, the Glasgow Irish, stung as was the entire progressive labour movement of the world by the British government's vindictive execution of Connolly, Pearse and the other Irish leaders, held the threat of rebellion over Glasgow as the Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army had previously held it over Dublin. As in the case of Dublin prior to Easter, the British government took the option of avoiding confrontation, with the result that in the concluding years of the war Glasgow won a reputation as the last haven of free speech in Britain. This free speech was thus the result not of governmental generosity but of the immediate threat of proletarian violence. Even in this comparatively favourable situation, the Government still practised savage and vindictive persecution of Maclean and other proletarian leaders whenever it felt it could get away with it.

In the War of Independence of 1919-1921, Glasgow provided hundreds of recruits for the IRA (T E Handley's History of the Irish in Scotland estimates 500). Harry MacShane's autobiography, No mean fighter, gives a vivid picture of Glasgow at the time when "politics in Glasgow meant the Irish question". He recalls the fact that Captain Jack White drilled an Irish Citizen Army detachment on Glasgow Green. Maclean and his comrades helped fund the ICA, and Maclean and other prominent labour leaders openly called for the arming of a Citizen Army in Britain. Maclean became a fervent upholder of Celtic nationalism, and advocated a separate revolutionary party for Scotland.

Such were the legendary days of the Red Clydeside, and it was from those promising origins that most of the original leaders of the CPGB derived - leaders like Maclean, MacManus, Bell, Gallacher, Murphy, Paul, MacShane,

Lecky, Stewart - none of whom thought anything of spending their political life in and out of jail and in constant antagonistic contradiction with the state authorities. Almost all of them were, like Connolly, Scots-Irish or at least with strong family ties to Ireland. At no time since then has the Irish revolution come so close to spilling over onto British soil. Whole sections of the working class community had openly defied wartime legislation, and turned for political leadership not to respectable spokesmen of the bourgeois order, but to figures such as Maclean and his fellows who proudly upheld their record of successfully carrying out illegal as well as legal work. Furthermore, many of those trained in the school of Clydeside travelled South of the Scots border, and contact was spread far and wide through Shopstewards Committees, etc. (In Liverpool's situation of mass revolt after the war resulted in a gunboat being sent up the Mersey by the panic-stricken state.) Internationally, Gallacher, Paul and others sustained contact with Moscow, and Lenin began to amuse visitors to international gatherings by speaking English with a Scots accent.

In order to gain an overall perspective on the British revolution - what it is and how to move it forward - it is essential to grasp the fact that these stormy years (known in Comintern literature as the 'first period' of post-war politics) saw the British capitalist state more immediately threatened than at any time since 1848 and up till now. The tremendous importance of stressing this point is that many 'easy politicians' are so adulatory about the General Strike, and indeed subsequent unemployed workers' struggles, that they allow a chauvinist interpretation of history to creep in that ignores the Irish context. If we are to gain a correct perspective that will enable us to formulate policies that will help to push the capitalist state over the edge next time, we must bear in mind the following periodisation of the proletarian revolution in Britain:

- * the revolutionary proletariat was kept on the defensive in the post-Napoleonic years by suppressive actions like the Peterloo massacre of 1819; such proletarian offensives as took place were based among the Lancashire and Scots Irish - this was the first proletarian revolutionary period, and its effects remained localised;
- * the second proletarian revolutionary period was that of 1838-42, which, though reaching insurrectionary proportions particularly in Wales, failed to relate to the Irish national question in a revolutionary manner;
- * the third proletarian revolutionary period was that of the Chartist revival of 1848, which came nearer to coordination with Ireland, but nevertheless proved a passing phenomenon;
- * the fourth proletarian revolutionary period was ushered in with the Dublin Lockout solidarity of 1913, and peaked in the 'first period' after the war, ending by 1923;
- * the fifth proletarian revolutionary period was ushered in by the street fighting in Southall in 1979, the youth uprising in St Pauls in 1980, and reached a peak in the risings of 1981; this revolutionary period coincides with the context of an Irish republican revival of great political profundity - the hunger strike campaigns and the consolidation of the Republican press - and in the high tide of the age of independence internationally.

Only by gaining such an overall perspective can we grasp the fundamental laws of the British revolution and excise all the chauvinist 'easy politics' that can cause so much confusion. Only such a perspective takes due account of the fact that in an imperialist country revolution takes shape around national issues, not around some idealistically-conceived and simplistic

labour-capital contradiction. The British revolution is the Irish revolution when the reverberations of the latter spill over onto British soil, as spill over they always have done and always will do. The revolutionary forces in British society are those who, like black youth, respond most readily to this new situation and provide a basis for rooting it more deeply over here. Black youth and those most oppressed sections of white youth who participated with them in the risings are the current manifestation of that 'unrespectable' substratum of the proletariat which is beyond the periphery of the official annals of labour and which has nevertheless been the true writer of proletarian history in Britain.

Let us greet the birth of a black Clydeside in every British town, and rally around it as the herald of a truly internationalist future.

G. The Irish and the CPGB

It is precisely a characteristic of colonial peoples that one of the skills they develop in everyday life is to keep themselves out of the limelight so far as the information network of the dominant nation is concerned. Thus the political history of the Irish national minority in Britain is an extremely difficult subject for research, as it has of necessity tended to keep its counsels to itself for reasons of basic political and cultural self-defence. Even within the Communist Party, which should have paid respect and attention to the views of its national minority members, there appears to have existed a primeval division into, on the one hand, 'respectable' 'personalities' like Pollitt and Dutt, and a kind of unofficial rank-and-file substratum often dominated by Irish members. One day this hidden story of party history may be told.

In the early 1930s, the struggle of the Belfast working class for "outdoor relief" made a great impact on the British left and provided much of the inspiration for the unemployed workers' struggles in Britain itself. In addition, the communist literature of the time constantly mentions the Birkenhead rioting of that period in the same breath as the Belfast events. When Thatcher remarked last year that the recent youth uprisings could not be explained as due to unemployment because there was also widespread unemployment in the 1930s but no rioting, she was both right and wrong. She was wrong in that there was indeed rioting in Birkenhead by the largely Irish unemployed. She was to an extent unknowingly right in saying that the reason was not unemployment; the reason was not just unemployment, but the existence of a national contradiction which brought national minority areas to the fore in the militancy of their resistance to unemployment and other ills of capitalist society.

So plain was the vanguard role of the Irish in the labour movement in Britain that on one occasion the fact even penetrated the addled pate of Harry Pollitt: "Particularly must we support the great struggle now being waged by the revolutionary forces in Ireland. There is not an important town in the country - Canning Town, Newcastle, Glasgow, Manchester - in all these places a tremendous section of the population is Irish. Their participation in the struggles side by side with the British workers will have a tremendous effect on the struggle in Ireland. Is it an accident that in Birkenhead, West-Ham and Liverpool, the advance guard were Irishmen, not only fighting against the means test but also fighting against the policy of the National Government in Ireland, and we must learn how to use these facts to the full..." (The road to victory, 1932). Unfortunately this promising lurch of Pollitt's cognitive system in the direction of historical materialism and anti-imperialism seems to have been an isolated instance, and no more was ever heard of it.

The CPGB in general held to the ideological perspective expressed in

the title of its programme of the time - "Class against class". This programme included some very stirring and even insurrectionary calls to struggle that place it in another world from the revisionist "British road to socialism", but it nevertheless fails to grasp the nature of the British revolution as being a revolution in an imperialist country where the focal political struggle is the fight to free the revolutionary forces from the stifling influence of colonialist mentality and of the middle class left which gives such a mentality a social base. "Class against class" does not even mention, for example, the basic points alluded to by Pollitt in the quotation given above.

The CPGB tended to shunt Irish affairs off sideways to be dealt with by the 'specialists' of the Connolly Association. The CA seems to have undertaken some creditable civil rights work during the war, and to have achieved a certain mass following in the postwar period. However, its overall ideological approach to the attitude to be adopted towards a national liberation movement was very weak, and sometimes foul (it initially came out against the IRA military operations of 1939, for instance). The anti-imperialist party 'theoreticians' such as Dutt did not deign to give any consideration to such 'peripheral' questions as the Irish revolution's repercussions in Britain, and thereby, besides consigning themselves and their 'learned' tomes to deserved oblivion, left the CA activists to flounder around without any guidance. It is therefore not surprising that after some wobbling forwards and backwards the CA eventually degenerated into a Stickies social club, and an object of contempt and ostracism by genuine revolutionaries.

The CPGB's line of today boils down to telling the Irish what to do, and especially telling the Irish of the six counties what to do. In this, the CPGB is at one in its viewpoint with the British imperialist state. The roots of this revisionist treachery stretch back to the early Comintern period, when Comintern, under the influence of heady talk by Zinoviev and others, regarded the organisation of a World Federation of Socialist Republics as an immediate practical task which would be completed within a period of months, not years. The recovery of imperialism, which Comintern had not expected, brought its deliberations back down to earth in the following years. However, by that time the attitude of being part of an international centre undertaking immediate practical work on behalf of many worldwide forces had evidently gone irreversibly to the head of some British communists. This attitude unfortunately overlapped with British imperialist chauvinism which also of course goes in for organising other nations and telling them what to do.

By the time of the 6th Comintern Congress in 1928, a much more sober and even self-critical standpoint was adopted. It was recognised that Lenin himself had declared his lack of qualifications to speak on the role of communists in colonial countries, due to the communist movement's lack of experience in this field. By 1928, Comintern felt, above all as a result of the Chinese revolution of 1925-7, that some initial experience existed from which to learn. This experience was largely in the field of making mistakes, a field of operations where Comintern was to continue active in the following years; however, its fundamental attitude remained a learning posture. Even this, however, did not rub off on the CPGB, whose London establishment continued not only to make mistakes but also proved incapable of even trying to learn from them, or indeed of anything more creative than waiting for the line from Moscow and then passing it on to India, etc.

It should be placed to the credit of Comintern that among the new generation of CPGB cadres it had trained, their most promising pupil, William Rust, appears to have appreciated not only the significance of Ireland's fight for independence, but also the great importance of Ireland's solidarity

for the task of rooting internationalist sentiment among the working class. He welcomed the great Irish demonstrations in Hyle Park in the early 1930s in support of Devalera, and in an article in Labour Monthly waged an interesting implied polemic against the party old guard which had adopted a 'left' chauvinist line on the Irish elections of the time (the latter position having been put forward in a previous article by Bell).

Meanwhile, the ruling class had been doing its best to learn the lessons of the Red Clyde period. They made sure to improve their industrial relations in the form of the 'Mondism' that followed the General Strike. Even more significantly, they took advantage of the decline in Britain's traditional heavy industries to try to ensure that never again would such a community come into existence. The wave of Irish immigration during the Second World War and the 1950s was absorbed into the new boom industries of car production, aviation, etc. largely in the Midlands of England. The immigration took place into the new world of council housing, town-planning, and eventually of the welfare state. Thus, although there must be about a million people born in Ireland now living in Britain, and though the overwhelming majority come from Cork, Kerry and three or four other counties which have suffered most from British imperialism, there has been care taken that another Red Clyde should not develop.

This relatively new Irish national minority community constitutes something of a question mark over the prospects for anti-imperialist advance in this country. A response to industrial boom, this community has evidently developed a tradition of keeping itself to itself, and after some early Connolly Association activity in the 1950s, a political tradition has failed to take deep root amongst it. This apolitical stance survived the resumption of armed struggle in the 1970s, a fact which must be linked with the dismal failure of the British 'left' to put up any effective opposition to the PTA. For genuine revolutionaries, this circumstance decrees the urgent necessity of getting organised, as have the North and South London Irish Solidarity Committees and others, to defend all those engaged in Ireland solidarity work against harassment by the state. Only on the basis of such organisation can any credible call for political action by the Irish community be made, faced as every member of that community is with the immediate threat of the barbarities of the PTA.

With the rapid political deepening of the republican political tradition in the years since 1970, above all in the hunger strike campaigns, there have begun to emerge new forces of support for republicanism from among Britain's Irish national minority. These forces - some veterans but mostly new from among the youth - must be backed and cherished by the revolutionary movement in this country. They constitute the harbingers of the powerful revolutionary social force that will emerge in British society when a million Irish, rendered destitute in their well-loved homeland by British imperialist exploitation, and driven to emigrate to Britain, along with the families they are bringing up here, begin to speak out, as speak out they eventually most surely will. Such a social force will be a powerful factor for rooting internationalism deep among the working class, and rallying support for Irish republicanism, the youth uprisings led by black youth, and the struggle of the oppressed for independence throughout the world.

H. The dearth of theory

National culture, in an oppressed nation as indeed elsewhere, is more resilient than specifically proletarian class culture. Rooted as it is not only among workers but also among the literati of the middle class, national culture tends to generate and perpetuate a vigorous literary culture that passes on its message, often in an effortless and unforced

manner from generation to generation. Proletarian culture, by contrast, always faces a tough and upward struggle to sustain itself, and continually suffers breaks in continuity. Dictated by the objective conditions of its existence, it is forced to be almost aggressively political. Its only weapon against being cast into oblivion is conscious theorising, the only method of summing up its experience and passing it on. A proletarian movement which fails to create a conscious theory, when it faces, as all revolutionary movements will, a period of suppression or of falling off of support, cannot easily get itself back on its feet again.

The British communist movement is a movement that, in the sixty-odd years since its inception, has failed to develop a proletarian political culture, let alone a profound corpus of revolutionary theory. Hence it has bequeathed us next to no theoretical scaffolding which we can adapt to our new conditions today. Trying to learn from the revolutionary experience of the Communist Party from its theoretical literature is like trying to get blood out of a stone. We know there were workers who struggled hard, and we know they must have gained hard-won experience that would be of inestimable value to our embryonic communist forces today. But it is almost impossible to get at this experience. The literature of the movement is 99% theoretically useless, being either, at one end of the scale, blindly empiricist descriptive notes on various ongoing struggles, and at the other end of the scale empty intellectualist waffle masquerading as 'theory'. Lessons must lurk among this literature, but one has to work very hard for them, and gain them from inferences, from remarks presented as secondary or thrown out as asides, or simply by starting from the beginning and putting all the empirical reporting together and drawing one's own conclusions.

The effectivly spontaneist style of much CPGB work ran directly counter to Lenin's emphasis on the importance of theory. In his day, it was the danger of wholesale arrest that continually led to the destruction of revolutionary activity. For us, it is the corrosive effects of British imperialist chauvinism within the left that has proved to have the greatest destructive capacity. Either way, replacements for the lost revolutionary forces always arise, especially among youth, and they can only be put straight to work if there exists a body of guidelines that can function as a training for them. It is precisely theory in this living sense that has traditionally been neglected by the British communist movement. You can read half a century's worth of Labour Monthly and find not a single indication about what you are to go out and do. The British conception of theory seems to have been closely aligned with the concept of boredom, and as something to be alleviated with allegedly more 'lively' forms of literature, principally empiricist descriptive journalism. Even the great classics of Marxism were represented in a patronising manner as works which have to be 'made relevant' - as though Marx's writings on Ireland needed to be 'made relevant' by the frequently philistine pen-pushers of the Daily Worker!

So busy were the 'theoreticians' of the CPGB arranging India's affairs for it and other such 'internationalist' commitments, that they left the central ground of their own battlefield and ours completely uncharted. It is particularly galling that the Irish-based substratum of the party left so little literature behind it (Greaves only once deigned to take even a 'weekend' to writing a brief history of the CA, namely his Reminiscences of the CA). What exists in the form of Clydesiders' autobiographies and other miscellaneous reminiscences is often of far greater significance than the 'official' material.

This dearth of revolutionary theory from the British side makes it all the more important to learn from the more profound revolutionary experience of Ireland. In James Connolly, Ireland has already in this century created

one of the great Scientific socialists, a precursor of the Asian communist tradition of communists in oppressed countries epitomised by Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung. In the Irish Citizen Army Ireland had already created proletarian armed forces before the Red Army of Lenin. In the Easter uprising Ireland ushered in the period referred to by Mao as the period of 'new democracy' when the national liberation movements of the oppressed countries began to be characterised by proletarian leadership. In the republican struggle of today we have the most profound anti-imperialist armed struggle in Europe, and behind it a whole community in permanent insurrection, with a living revolutionary culture and press.

If ever we are to achieve even a fraction of the clarity on our revolutionary tasks that Lenin and the Bolsheviks achieved on theirs, then we must start from such revolutionary bedrock and seek to place it in an overall historical framework. A search of communist literature in Britain reveals no attempt at an overall treatment of the repercussions of the Irish revolution within British society. Parts of David Reed's recent series of FRFI articles entitled "The communist tradition on Ireland" have at last addressed themselves to this long overdue task. However, in spite of the considerable and well-presented material he makes available, Reed's work is ultimately disappointing in its detachment from practical and programmatic considerations, its failure thoroughly to grasp the laws of the British revolution, and its parochial failure to situate its arguments within the context of the great debates of twentieth century Marxism. What lies behind these failings is evidently a continuing influence of middle-class leftism which ignores historical materialism in favour of empiricism, and which, even more seriously, sees Britain in isolation from, or should one say at the centre of, the world. Thus his 'communist tradition' is evidently a whites-only tradition, for as soon as the CPGB degenerates, communism ceases to exist in his articles. In a situation where the anti-Asian racism of the state and its Nazi-style dupes on the streets presents such a dire threat to precisely those forces in society which we should most cherish, such political genocide of Asia as that practised by Reed and his fellows in the RCG could well deserve a more impolite characterisation. It may well be in the context of the struggle to rout the anti-Asian racism currently propagated within the Ireland solidarity movement by the RCG that the outlines of the genuine internationalist ideology of the nascent revolutionary forces will take shape. The present Pamphlets series will address themselves to this task; in the context of support for a unified Ireland solidarity movement along lines which have been pioneered so admirably by the activists now grouped around the RCG.

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Such, then are some tentative ideas on a new interpretation of British revolutionary history that can adequately comprehend the facts revealed by the struggles of the most oppressed both in Britain and internationally. Such an interpretation shows the imperative need to draw upon the three sources of a new internationalism within Britain - Irish republicanism, the Asian communist tradition, and the world of the youth uprisings. Let us cause those who have been oppressed and humiliated by British imperialism who have brought forth such fine internationalist movements to rejoice even in their suffering that they have been, to borrow Connolly's expression, "the medium for the apostolate of a rejuvenating idea" - an idea that can rejuvenate the struggle against British imperialism on its home territory.

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