

**Republican
lecture
series
No.10**

LOYALISM

(Part Two)

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LOYALISM

IN PART ONE of this education lecture on 'Loyalism' we dealt with loyalism, the British identity and Protestantism, the Plantation of Ulster, the Williamite wars, the Orange Order and the Act of Union. Part two begins with the industrialisation of Belfast and the North-east of Ireland.

During the 19th century the population of Belfast increased enormously during the industrial revolution as the ship-building and linen industries expanded, attracting the poorer social classes from the countryside.

After the defeat of the United Irishmen, Belfast in 1800 was still regarded as a rebel centre, yet as the century progressed the sectarianism which the authorities had used to divide the Catholic and Presbyterian in the countryside was imported into Belfast as impoverished peasants flocked to the city looking for jobs, and sectarianism took on a much more intensified form.

While sectarianism was rampant in the countryside, Belfast remained comparatively free from it until about the 1850s. The employers did a great deal to aggravate the sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics for their own ends.

The widespread discrimination against Catholics in employment, which was later to form one of the main characteristics of the political contract between employers and the loyalists, was not practised at this time (mid-1800s). In fact the employers made a practice of employing equal numbers of both religions.

It was the Orange Order (not the bosses) which took the initiative of intimidat-



● Twelfth of July parade to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne

ing Catholics out of workplaces, ensuring that they became preserves of Protestant unemployment. This had a tragic effect on the trade union movement in Belfast which has persisted up until the present day. Trade unionism generally grows quicker in well-paid skilled trades but, because of the conditions in Belfast, this otherwise sound characteristic became distorted, and the trade unions reflected the privileged interests of the loyalists, since the Catholics largely occupied the unskilled jobs. The labour movement was thus robbed of the progressive nationalism of the Catholics and often reflected the pro-imperialist attitudes of the Protestants. And, up to this day, it is regarded as heresy that the trade union movement should be anything else than pro-British.

This also had an unfortunate effect on the political development of the Catholic people — although to a much lesser extent — that they became divorced from the politics of labour versus employer, and sometimes left themselves open to the anti-socialist ravings of right-wing clergy, and to the anti-Protestant rhetoric of the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

Sectarian riots came in 1857, 1864 and 1872, growing in intensity as the Home Rule movement intensified. In 1864 the loyalists burnt an effigy of Daniel O'Connell.



● The Orange Order has always provided the sectarian backbone to the Northern state

In 1886, the year when the first Home Rule Bill was introduced (and defeated) in the House of Commons, the worst sectarian riots ever took place after a visit to Belfast by Randolph Churchill, a leading member of the Tory party who claimed that "Home Rule means Rome rule." Catholics were chased out of the shipyards, and at least one was killed.

In 1893, when the second Home Rule Bill was introduced, similar disturbances occurred.

Having ignored the Orange faction in Ireland for over 80 years, the British ruling classes again renewed the relationship, and the alliance between the selfish political interests of the Tories and the ignorance of Orangeism was again cemented.

CONNOLLY AND LARKIN IN BELFAST

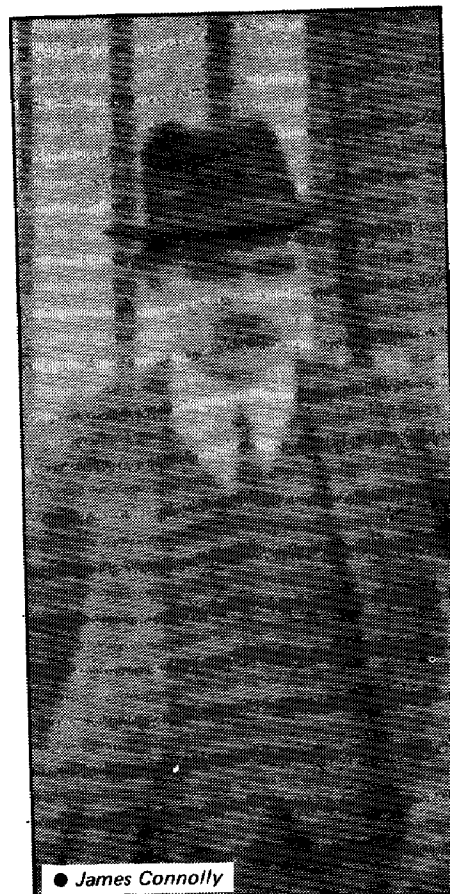
In the years 1907 to 1911, Connolly and Larkin did a power of work in (partially) reversing the sectarianism of the Belfast working class by providing them

with an uncompromising socialist leadership in their struggle against the bosses. The trade union leaders who were infected with sectarianism were ideologically unable to give this lead even on 'bread and butter issues'.

Connolly came to ideological blows with these working-class traitors, since they would not associate themselves with Irish nationalism, finding all sorts of grand 'socialist' reasons not to. Their leadership (or lack of it) was partially responsible for the ease in which the Carsonite/Tory reaction steamrolled over the trade union movement in 1912.

The effect of the whipped up anti-Papist hysteria on the movement can be shown by one example.

In 1913, 300 workers at an aluminium plant in Larne went on strike over conditions. They had been working a 12-hour day, seven days a week, and some of them had been doing this for 17 years! However, in the first week of the strike



● James Connolly



● Jim Larkin

they were told, from the pulpits, that the strike was all a Fenian and Papist plot, and that it was their Christian duty to return to work, which they did.

As a result, Connolly made the comment that the North-east of Ulster was the only priest-ridden part of Ireland since the Catholic clergy (despite their efforts) in the South were never able to break a strike with such ease.

THE HOME RULE 'CRISIS' OF 1912

The Home Rule movement of the latter part of the 19th century, led by Parnell and the Irish Party at Westminster, was aimed at ending the constitutional union with Britain which had been imposed on Ireland in 1800 (under which Ireland sent MPs to Westminster) and to restore the measure of self-government under the crown which Ireland had previously enjoyed. It was not separatist or republican in nature, although many of its supporters were separatists.

Since the main opposition to Home Rule came from the British Tories, and not from 'Ulster' itself as is now popularly imagined, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of British politics and the reasons why the Tories opposed Home Rule.

The Tories in Britain were interested in one thing and one thing only – to preserve their corrupt and unrepresentative political power in the British parliament. They represented the aristocratic landowners who had the 'born to rule' mentality.

The Liberals, on the other hand, were at this time the voice of British democracy and represented the sensible capitalist classes who had grown up during the industrial revolution, and who were more interested in making money than subscribing to the outdated aristocratic mythology of the Tories.

These industrialists had no pedigrees, and had no time for aristocratic superstitions, the Divine Right of Kings, the House of Lords or any other sort of nonsense.

Throughout the 19th century the Liberals waged a parliamentary war against the aristocratic privileges of the Tories by steadily extending voting rights to the ordinary British people, thereby cutting away the totally corrupt power-base of the Tories.

It has been a tragedy, both for British and Irish democracy, that the Tories as a political power were not wiped out altogether at this time. By rights, the Liberals should have taken over as the establishment political party, since they represented capitalism, and the infant Labour Party should have played its role as the working-class opposition to the capitalist policies of the Liberals.

The reason why the Tories were not wiped out was that they were able to plug themselves into the vast sectarian cesspool of Orange bigotry in Belfast, by championing the anti-Home Rule movement which they had in fact started in 1886. There was no way that the Tories could defeat democracy in Britain, so they homed into the anti-democratic spirit of Orangeism in North-east Ulster circumnavigating the onward march of democracy within Britain itself.

THE DEFEAT OF HOME RULE

The Liberal Party had been in favour of Home Rule since 1872. They also wanted to introduce a democratic budget in Britain to tax the landed aristocracy. They were prevented from carrying out these measures since the Tory-dominated House of Lords still had the power of vetoing any Bill carried in the Commons. Because the Liberals had a majority in the Commons they passed the Parliament Act which curtailed the powers of the Lords.

The testing of this Act was the third Home Rule Bill of 1912, passed by the House of Commons and thrown out by the Lords. Under the Parliament Act, the House of Lords could only delay a Bill (or Act) passed by the Commons after which it would become law.

The Tories, having seen the last bastion of privilege destroyed by the Parliament



● Sir Edward Carson inspects an Ulster Volunteer Force unit in 1914, after the Larne gun-running

Act, instigated a counter-revolutionary movement in the North-east of Ireland.

The Ulster Volunteers were trained by officers of the British army and navy. Guns were stored in the Tory clubs of Britain as well as the Orange lodges of Belfast.

The Tories, who should have been extinct at this time, still made up the officer class of the British army and the 'best' aristocratic circles in Britain rallied to the cause to defeat the 'tyranny of the Commons'.

The British ruling class provided the ideology for the counter-revolution in Ulster. They also provided the guns and the training.

The Liberal government did nothing to suppress this Tory conspiracy, even though they were the lawful authority. They hadn't the nerve to crack down upon the Tories because a principled stand against them could have instigated a class war in Britain itself in which they might perish along with the Tories.

The Liberals were also politically afraid of the labour movement whom they considered a much greater danger than the Tories, since socialism was a greater threat to the capitalists of the Liberal Party than the imperialistic antics of the Tories in Ireland.

Although the British people of today don't know it, the Tory conspiracy in 1912 has had a disastrous effect on political development in Britain itself.

The imperialist/aristocratic inspired notion that 'class differences are good for you' and the ideology that some people (preferably white) are born to rule are reactionary notions still predominant amongst British working people, notions which should have been done to death 60 years ago.

In other words, the ideology of the aristocracy still survives, even though the aristocracy are almost an extinct species. Capitalists within Britain today have wired themselves into the aristocratic/imperialist ideology since it is a good ideology for preserving the status quo and confusing British workers.

OPPOSITION IN ULSTER TO HOME RULE

When the Liberals announced that they had a third Home Rule Bill in the offing, in July 1911, there was no spontaneous or widespread reaction to the news amongst either the loyalist working classes or the unionist businessmen. It took the reactionaries several months to organise resistance by inflaming sectarian

passions.

In fact, many Belfast businessmen were interested in Home Rule, including Lord Pirrie, the leading Belfast industrialist. Lord and Lady Pirrie were later pelted with rotten eggs by an Orange mob at Larne, because of his supposed treachery, in January 1912, after the reactionaries had organised resistance.

Home Rule certainly posed no threat to the economic position of the Belfast capitalists, although the measure of democracy that Home Rule would bring in would have certainly undermined their local political power. And since most of the ruling classes in the North-east were imperialist-minded toadies, possessing little foresight whatsoever and who were guaranteed to react hysterically to even the slightest tremor in the set-up, they provided the ideological link in Ireland which the Tories needed.

WORKING-CLASS OPPOSITION

But whatever the reasons for the industrialists resisting Home rule were, fear of Rome was not one of them. This was the fodder for the Protestant working classes since they had certainly nothing to lose from Home Rule, and had to be supplied with a bogus reason to resist it. Although a minority of the Protestant community enjoyed a privileged economic position (e.g. the labour aristocracy in the shipyards) this was not the reason for their resistance since the anti-Home Rule hysteria embraced all loyalists equally, from the farm labourer to the unemployed.

CARSON

In September 1911, representatives of all the Orange lodges in Ulster met in Craigavon and heard Carson announce that 'Ulster' would resist Home Rule, if necessary, to the death. His speech was dismissed by commentators as hot air and when, in the same month, the Ulster Unionist Council announced that they were preparing to set up a provisional government in the event of Home Rule being implemented, comparatively little notice was taken.

The unionists' first job was to silence all dissent amongst the middle-class business community. A violent press campaign was instigated against Liberal businessmen who were also boycotted to a certain extent in business by Orangemen. Physical assaults, or the threat of them, by Orange hooligans were enough to finish off liberalism amongst the middle classes by the end of the year (1911).

THE POGROMS OF 1912

By July 1912, sectarian lunacy was at its height, with wild inflammatory speeches being the order of the day. This was unfortunately met with Catholic sectarianism, and Catholic bigots then attacked a Protestant school outing. This event was used as an excuse for sectarian attacks on Catholic workers in the Workman Clarke shipyard. The trouble spread to Harland and Wolff's where 2,000 Catholics were chased out along with 400 English and Scottish workers who would not assist the Orangemen's activities.

Every socialist, radical or liberal Protestant worker was pronounced to be in league with 'the Fenian conspiracy' and received even worse beatings for their 'treachery'. Meanwhile, the police did nothing while men were being pelted with rivets, except to arrest one of the victims.

The Catholic women working in the rope works were next but left 'voluntarily'

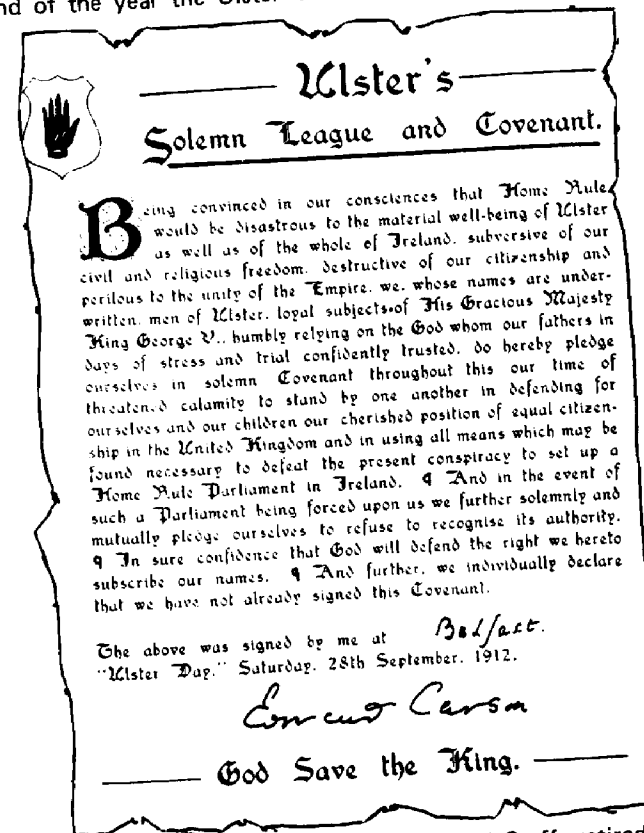
before any trouble started. However, this did not satisfy the insanity of Orangeism and any Protestant woman who had even a relative who was known to be involved in the trade union movement was told to take her leave.

Once the riots had subsided, the management of Workman Clarke clearly stipulated that no Home Rulers or socialists would be re-employed or taken on to replace those who had been chased out. Harland and Wolff's condemned the expulsions, but they and other employers availed of the opportunity to tear up union agreements, to hire non-union labour, and introduce lower wage rates.

THE ULSTER COVENANT

The Ulster Covenant, which pledged violent resistance to Home Rule, was presented in September 1912. Employers collected signatures from their employees, and landlords passed the list to their tenants. Over 200,000 people signed; although the majority most likely did so willingly, there must have been many who signed from fear of being beaten up or from fear of losing their jobs.

By the end of the year the Ulster Volunteers were raised, and with the help



of Sir Henry Wilson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, retired army officers were provided to train and command them. Carson applied to the magistrates for licences to arm his men, which they did, and the Liberal government only forbade the importation of arms into Ireland the next year when the nationalists started bringing in weapons.



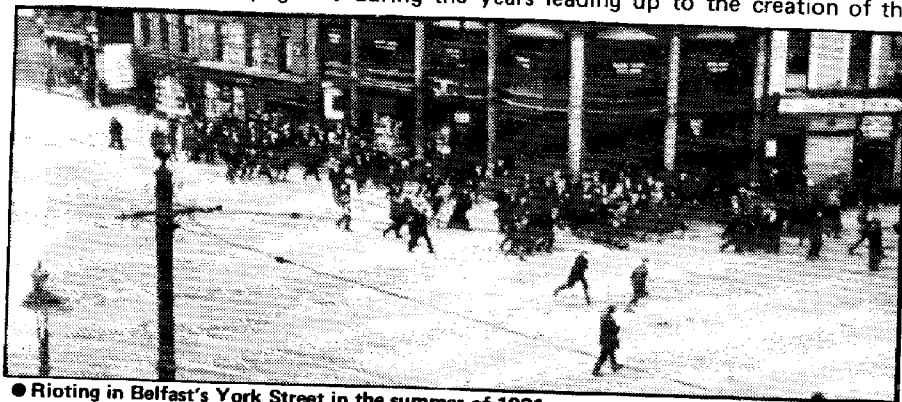
● Carson signs the Ulster Covenant on September 28th 1912

In January 1913, the Home Rule Bill passed its third reading in the British parliament, after which it should have become law. In March 1914, the apex of the Tory counter-revolution occurred when 57 British army officers resigned at the Curragh, after being told to prepare for duty in Ulster to put down the Carsonite revolt, since it was the ruling classes which the officers belonged to that started the revolt in the first place.

However, the Home Rule Bill was suspended with the outbreak of the First World War, the issue to be settled at the end of the war. Nevertheless, by that time the IRA and Sinn Fein had totally eclipsed the Home Rule movement. With the demand now for an independent republic, the forces of reaction which had been organised to resist Home Rule set up the six-county statelet, institutionalising the mindless sectarianism which had been whipped up in the process.

CREATION OF THE ORANGE STATE

There were more pogroms during the years leading up to the creation of the



● Rioting in Belfast's York Street in the summer of 1921

six-county state in 1922. These were not merely to suppress the Catholics into submission but were politically essential to keep the loyalists in a state of sectarian frenzy and were planned and organised by the Tory/unionist clique with these objectives in mind.

In July 1920 the pogroms started in Belfast, coinciding with the introduction of the Black and Tan terror in the South, and were preceded by the usual inflammatory speeches and propaganda meetings.

On July 12th, Carson told the shipyard workers that they were in danger from Sinn Fein, that the British government could no longer be trusted to protect them, and that they must do something to protect themselves. His speech received great press coverage, and as a result hundreds of Catholics were again chased out of the shipyards as well as a handful of 'disloyal' Protestants.

The special constabulary was formed at this time and led many of the pogroms into the nationalist ghettos. The July pogroms lasted for four days, spread to



● Nationalist youths in Leeson Street, Belfast, tear up paving stones to defend the area against sectarian attacks in the '20s

Lisburn, and then resumed again in Belfast in August.

The total tally for the year was scores of people killed, thousands of Catholics made homeless, and thousands chased from work.

In June 1921, they started again, after the elections to the Stormont parliament, in which, as one Ulster Tory MP put it, "too many Sinn Fein votes were cast." This time the pogroms were almost entirely the work of the Special Constabulary. Twenty Catholics were killed and another 150 were rendered homeless.

In 1922, one of the first things that the new unionist regime did was to introduce severe penalties for the possession of unlicensed firearms, to make sure that the nationalist people had no means of defending themselves. Needless to say, any Orangeman could obtain a licence.

The Catholics that year suffered another pogrom but first the Specials searched the already overcrowded Catholic quarters for arms, and after finding that they had no defence, passed on the word to the Orange mobs who then descended.

The press at the time blamed the whole thing on "Sinn Fein gunmen". Sir Henry Wilson, who was now the chief military advisor to the Stormont

government and believed to be the architect of the pogroms, was eventually executed.

LOYALISM TODAY

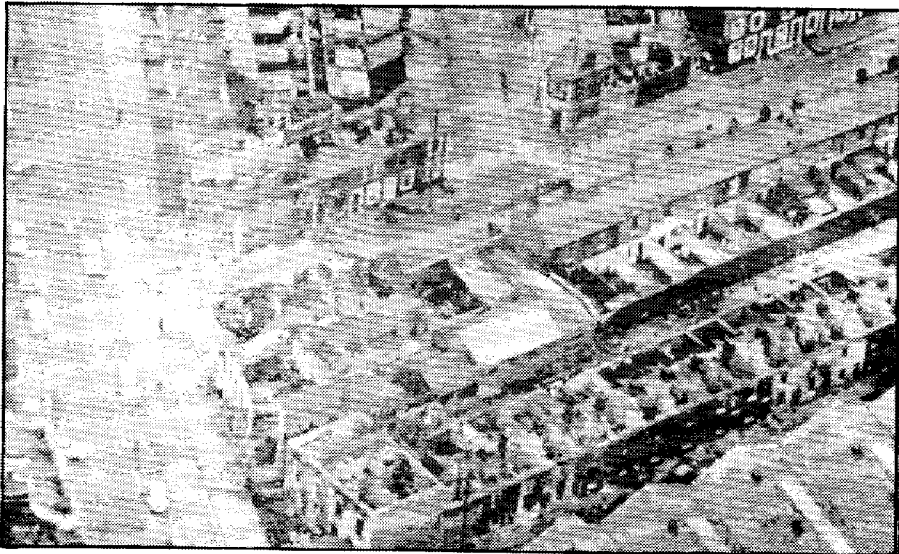
It was, of course, the vicious loyalist response of 1968/69 to the demands of the six-county nationalist population for an end to the discrimination and oppression of 60 years of living under the Orange state that sparked off the present phase of the liberation struggle.

Beginning with the batoning of the civil rights marchers off the streets by the RUC and climaxing in the burning of Bombay Street, loyalism demonstrated its ugly sectarian face before the eyes of the world. It made clear its determination to preserve its 60-year-old ascendancy and domination over the nationalist population which was inaugurated by the pogroms of 1920-22, and which sealed the Government of Ireland Act in Catholic blood.

Despite regular attempts by the British over the past 12 years — prompted by the pressure of international opinion on London — to get the unionists to tone down the worst excesses of their sectarian politics and co-operate within the Orange state with the Catholic middle-class (SDLP), their own creation has refused to budge. Indeed, those like O'Neill and Faulkner who went down that road, died a quick political death, and the progress of Paisley in particular has highlighted the huge right-ward shift in the unionist camp since the early '70s.

It would be quite wrong, however, to conclude from this that modern loyalism has somehow developed an independence from ultimate British control and direction. This notion is at the root of the 'blood-bath' or 'civil war after withdrawal' theories put forward by British apologists and pro-imperialist 'socialists' like the Workers' Party.

Britain's differences with the loyalists, though serious, are tactical ones within the framework of broad political and military co-operation.



● Bombay Street, in nationalist West Belfast, burned out by loyalist mobs in 1969

There is strategic unity on: (1) the need to defeat the nationalist resistance and its IRA spearhead; and (2) on maintaining partition.

It is highly significant (and often overlooked) that loyalist protest — and the level of sectarian killings — is highest when the British are 'soft' on security (repression) and engaging in political co-operation with the Free State (e.g. Sunningdale or the 1980 Haughey/Thatcher summit meetings) and lowest when a hard-line repression policy is being pursued and/or the British have dropped 'power-sharing' and 'reconciliation' rhetoric.

It can be seen then that loyalist strength is still determined today as it was in previous years — by British strength of arms and 'resolve' to maintain the Union.

It can also be seen that, contrary to the belief of the 'bloodbath' theorists, loyalist war-mongering rhetoric invariably expresses their weakness and fear that the enemy is winning the war against its main line of support and defence (i.e. the British). This inevitably raises the spectre of a united Ireland and the loss of loyalist ascendancy.

Thus the correctness of republican strategy, directed through the war of national liberation at forcing a British withdrawal which will undermine its loyalist junior partner and, by opening the door to a united Ireland, allow North-eastern Protestants for the first time to take their place as free and equal citizens of an all-Ireland republic, can be seen.

In the interim, however, Britain can be relied on to utilise its loyalist arm including ways perhaps not yet imagined by the nationalist population.

Loyalism is an ideology and politics that can in no way be compromised with short of the achievement of a united Ireland.

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