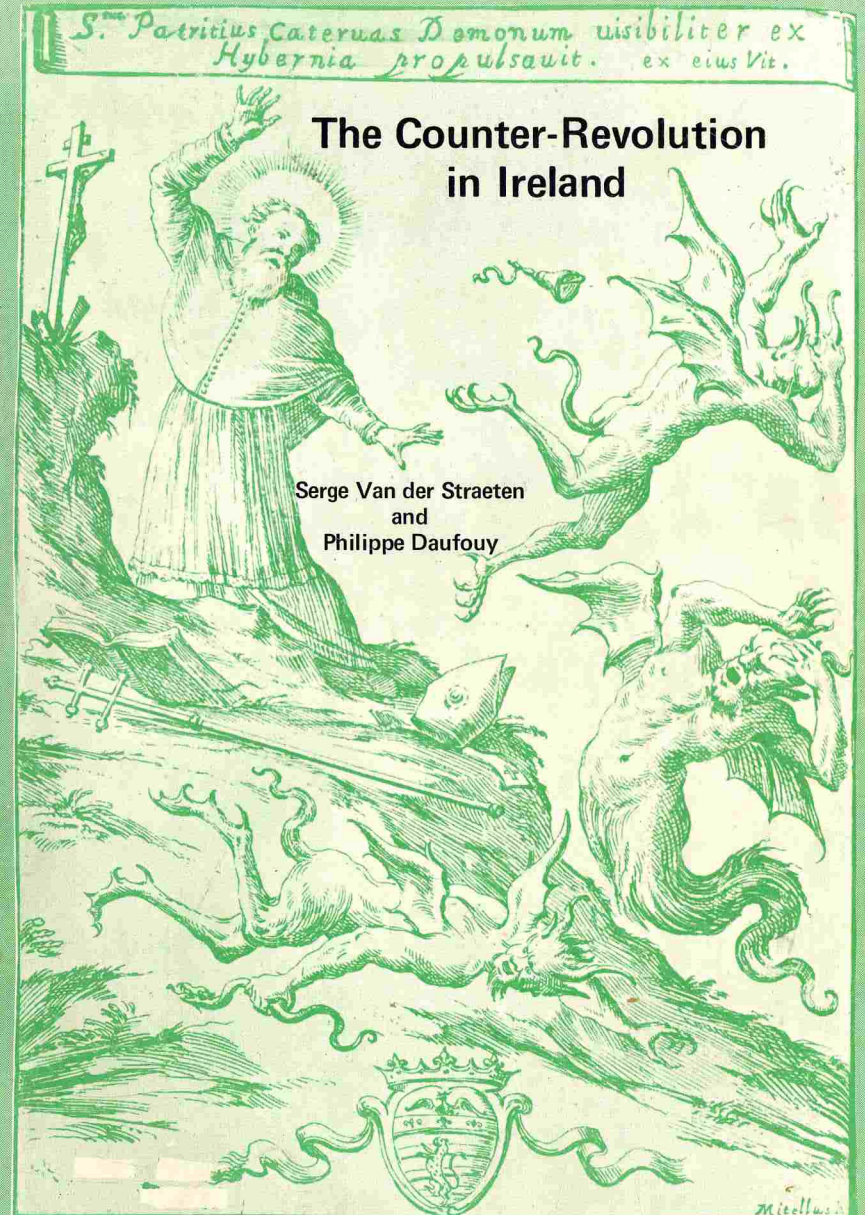




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The Counter-Revolution in Ireland

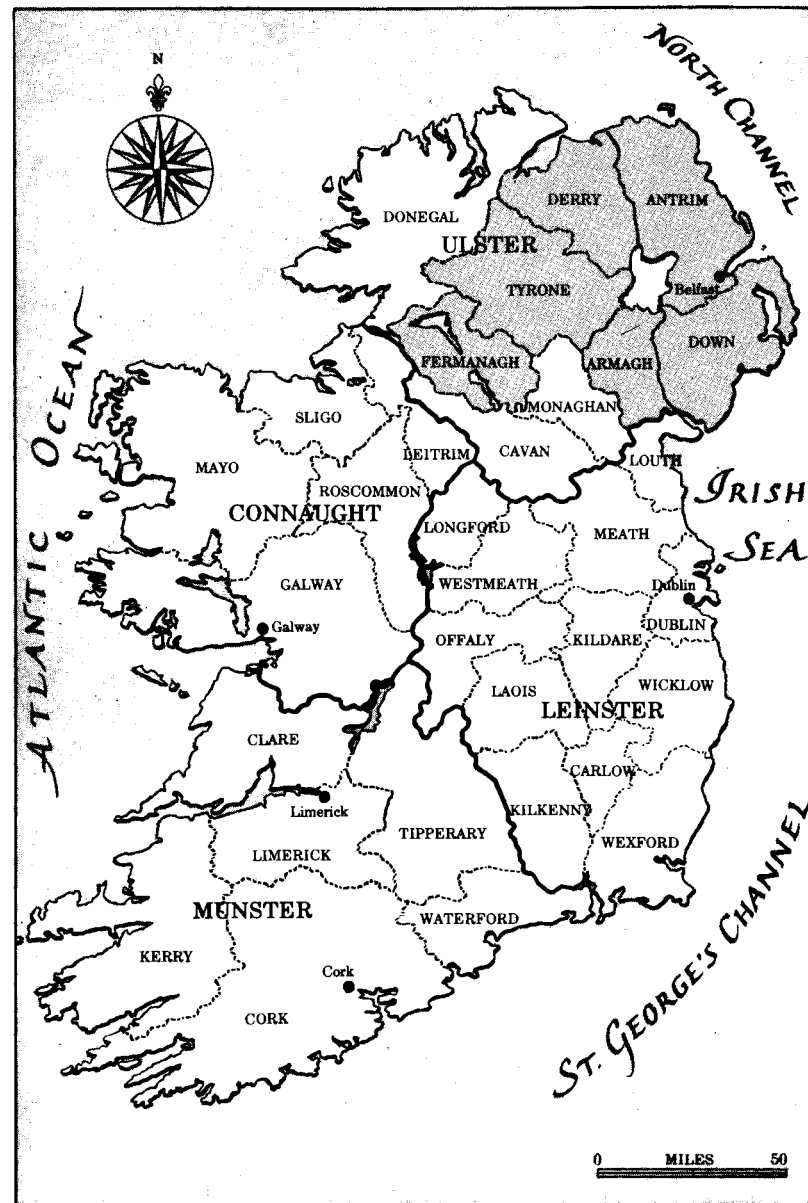
by

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Black & Red
Detroit
1974

"La Contre-revolution Irlandaise" first appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, No. 311, June, 1972. It was translated into English by Ruth Nybakken and Lorraine Perlman.

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The Counter-Revolution in Ireland

The rich always betray the poor.

—Henry Joy McCracken

By weakening the English colonial empire, the American Revolution (1776-1783) aided the young national liberation movement in Ireland. As in the United States, the settlers rebelled against the mother country, and all classes of Irish society began their revolt against the English landlords, whose allegiance to the British government was necessary for the preservation of the colonial structures from which they profited. Defeated at Yorktown,¹ England had to make concessions to prevent Ireland from following the American example. In 1783, Dublin was granted parliamentary autonomy within the framework of the British Empire. This autonomy² made possible the beginnings of capitalist development, all the more dangerous for England since, at the dawn of the industrial revolution, the English population was scarcely twice that of Ireland (8 million as against 4.5 million). At this time the old order was being threatened: in Paris, people were storming the Bastille. England's commercial monopoly throughout the world was in danger of being shattered by the continental bourgeoisie which had just acquired the means for economic and social development, notably by incorporating Belgium into the French nation. From Anvers, the French army directly threatened the

¹Here the British surrendered to the American rebels in 1783.

²Catholics obtained the same rights as Protestants. This civic equality allowed the Irish nation to take shape.

mouth of the Thames, and therefore London. Saved by the Polish uprising of 1794, the young French republic, in order to resist the reactionary coalition between England and the continental monarchies, sought the support of the Irish Republican movement which was advocating total independence. In order to thwart the chances for success of an armed Republican rebellion, England organized the *planters*, the local Old Regime, into the Orange Order, founded in 1795. Composed primarily of Anglicans, this army subdued Presbyterian Ulster, center of the revolutionary movement, in 1797. In 1798 it put a quick end to the insurrection in the South, which also failed for tactical reasons: the French army commanded by Hoche had been unable to land. Ireland at this time was at the apex of its international importance; never again would it achieve these heights. Its national-progressive period was definitively ending. Ireland's defeat marked the prelude to the brief triumph of the monarchic reaction, the European Holy Alliance: the reign of modern capitalism could now begin in England.

Ireland, vis-à-vis England, lost the political autonomy which had allowed it to erect protectionist barriers,³ the necessary prerequisite to industrial development. The Act of Union of 1801 halted this nascent development, just as the English victory over the Napoleonic empire guaranteed a world monopoly for English industry and commerce and delayed for several decades the industrial development of the continent (then under the Holy Alliance), primarily by the separation of France and Belgium. Ireland was reduced to supplying England with grain;⁴ the few budding industries were wiped out by free trade.⁵ England's enormous demands assured Ireland, in normal times, of a monopoly over the grain market. After the blockade, the Corn Laws (1815)

³The Foster Law prohibited the import of foreign wheat, thus transforming the country into wheat fields. Customs duties were imposed on various products. With the Act of Union, the industries disappeared.

⁴The average annual exports of grain to England were: 1801-1804: 300,000 quarters; 1820: more than a million quarters; 1834: 2.5 million quarters.

⁵Among others, the cotton industry in Dublin which employed more than 14,000 workers was wiped out.

artificially prolonged the relative scarcity of these foodstuffs, benefiting the landowners who held political power. This privileged situation encouraged the English aristocracy, who owned the Irish lands, to speculate in crops, thus starving the population and ruining the soil for the care of which no rent⁶ was re-invested. "With the abolition of the Corn Laws in 1846, this monopoly was suddenly removed."⁷ The potato famine threw everything out of joint, causing a million Irish deaths and forcing a million and a half inhabitants of Ireland to emigrate during the next eight years. The population of the island fell from eight to less than six million. Most of the emigrants, small tenant farmers and day laborers, went to the United States or to the large industrial centers in England. "Emigration formed one of the most lucrative branches of its export trade."⁸ Scarcity and famine brought about the depopulation and the agricultural revolution. By converting arable lands into pastures, introducing machines, economizing on labor costs, this agricultural revolution made overpopulation an endemic problem and transformed the country into the purveyor of meat and wool to England, since the price of these products rose while the price of wheat fell. "As the Irish population diminishes, the Irish rent-rolls swell."⁹

The landlords and those managing their properties were thus led to a "clearing of the estate," expelling the

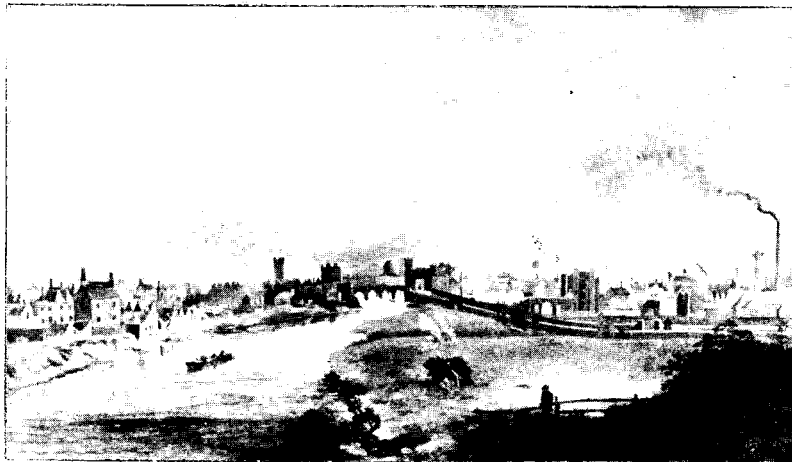
⁶It should be pointed out that "In Ireland. . . rent does not yet exist, although the letting of land has reached an extreme development there. Rent being the excess not only over wages, but also over industrial profit, it cannot exist where the landowner's revenue is nothing but a mere levy on wages." (Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, New York: International Publishers, 1963, p. 158.) What the landlords called ground rent was merely a fraction taken from wages. Thus an official English report stated that "the Irish peasant is the most poorly fed, the most poorly housed, and the most poorly clothed in Europe; he has neither reserves nor capital; he lives from day to day." Understanding the pre-capitalist nature of Irish rent, we can continue to use this term unequivocally.

Most quotes for which no references are given are taken from the writings of Karl Marx on Ireland published in J.-P. Carasso, *La Rumeur Irlandaise* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1970).

⁷Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, New York: The Modern Library, n.d., p. 783.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 774.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 781.



former tenant farmers, usually by armed force.¹⁰ The systematic application of these practices provoked agrarian crimes and also led to the formation of a revolutionary organization: the Fenians. At the height of their power, around 1865-67, they extended their activities to England, provoking a wave of repression, and gaining the support of the International. Marx did all he could for this cause, since he felt that this "Fenianism is characterized by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by being a lower orders movement"¹¹ ought to receive support from "the intelligent sector of the English working class."¹² Such support would make possible the delivery of "the decisive blow against the English ruling classes (and it will be decisive for the workers' movement all over the world)"; it could not be delivered "in England, but only in Ireland," since "Ireland is the bulwark of the English landed aristocracy. . . . Ireland is therefore the great means by which the English aristocracy maintains its domination in England itself. . . . As for the English bourgeoisie, it has in the first place a common interest with the English aristocracy, in turning Ireland into mere pasture land which provides the English market with meat and wool at the cheapest possible prices." But above all, "owing to the constantly increasing concentration of tenant farming, Ireland steadily supplies her own surplus to the English labor market, and thus forces down wages. . . . This antagonism [between the English and Irish workers] is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power."¹³

¹⁰A law made possible the auction of land belonging to landlords who were in debt. These sales caused the disappearance of 120,000 small farms and the concentration of land in the hands of English capitalists and former medium-sized farmers.

¹¹Marx in letter to Engels, November 30, 1867 in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 196.

¹²Marx in letter to Engels, November 7, 1867 in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, New York: International Publishers, 1972, p. 144.

¹³Karl Marx in letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, April 9, 1870, in *Selected Correspondence*, p. 235-236.

"The overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland" would have "as a necessary consequence its overthrow in England. And this would fulfill the preliminary condition for a proletarian revolution. . . The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent" as part of "a free and equal federation with Great Britain."¹⁴ The terms and conditions would be:

"1. Self-government and independence from England.

"2. Agrarian revolution. With the best intentions in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them,¹⁵ but they can give them the legal means of accomplishing it for themselves.

"3. Protective tariffs against England."¹⁶

This would allow the disbanding of "a large permanent army which, in case of need, can be dispatched against the English workers, as we have seen."¹⁷ For Marx, these conditions were indispensable since, if he had "long believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy. . . deeper study has convinced [him] of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it had got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general."¹⁸

Since Marx's time, the Irish question has always been approached (if at all) in terms of his final conclusions, that is, as it relates to the social movement in general. The long depression that began in 1873 brought about, two years later,

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵In 1853 Marx wrote: "Too weak yet for revolutionizing those 'social conditions,' the people appeal to Parliament, demanding at least their mitigation and regulation." (Marx in *Ireland and the Irish Question*, p. 61.)

¹⁶Karl Marx in letter to Engels, November 30, 1867, in *Selected Correspondence*, p. 196-197.

¹⁷Karl Marx in letter to Dr. Kugelmann, March 28, 1870, in Karl Marx, *Letters to Kugelmann*, New York: International Publishers, 1934, p. 108.

¹⁸Karl Marx in letter to Engels, December 10, 1869, in *Selected Correspondence*, p. 232.

a widespread agricultural crisis which lasted until the First World War (with an interruption between 1884 and 1893). Ireland lost much of the importance Marx had attributed to it for the workers' movement. Imports of wheat from Russia, North America and Argentina sharply reduced the cultivation of wheat in Great Britain and Ireland. The high yields from these virgin soils led to the abandonment of poorer land, and the price of wheat continued to fall. The reconversion of Ireland into pastures for the raising of stock provided only a brief respite for the landed aristocracy. Improvements in transportation and refrigeration allowed meat to be imported from Argentina, North America, Australia and elsewhere. Herds of sheep from Australia and New Zealand furnished wool for English industry. Thus, the extension of the English colonial empire and imports from new countries made cattle and sheep raising in Ireland less profitable. The ruin of Ireland brought about the ruin of the English aristocracy. Between 1875 and 1901, the number of farm leases in Great Britain diminished by half and by even more in Ireland, due to the steep decline in prices. The price of wheat fell by 61% between 1873 and 1894, and since the rent from stock farming was based on that of wheat, the price of meat fell proportionally. This general decline in agricultural prices explains the refusal of the English bourgeoisie to give up free trade, which the other great industrial countries abandoned one by one after 1880. This contraction of agriculture helped oust the English aristocracy from political power. Marx had foreseen and *hoped for* this outcome, about 1875, at a time when he was collecting material for Volume Three of *Capital*:

"In Europe, part of the land was definitively removed from the competition of wheat raising; everywhere rents dropped. . . . This is the cause of the farmers' complaints. . . . *Fortunately* [our emphasis] all the fields are far from being cultivated; but there are still enough to ruin the great European landed proprietors as well as the small ones."¹⁹

¹⁹The prospect of a socialism built by workers and small farmers seems to have held little attraction for Marx. His hatred for the manure pile, the henhouse, the yokel, would have put him in a good position to analyze the history of the Irish Republic and to accurately evaluate the Irish Left.

After its ruin, the English aristocracy of Ireland yielded its political power to the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie through several electoral reforms. The reform of 1884-1885, which gave the vote to the petite bourgeoisie and a small fraction of the proletariat, inaugurated the period which ended with limitations placed on the power of the House of Lords (1911). England was entering the phase of real domination by capital.²⁰ As Marx had hoped/thought in 1870, the aristocracy foundered along with the ruin of Irish agriculture; nevertheless, the proletariat did not intervene in the transfer of power to the bourgeoisie. The nature of the period 1871-1914 explains this in part: the economic depression, the decline in the price of agricultural goods, and the conquest of large colonial empires, from 1873-75, benefited the proletariat, whose outlook can be summarized in one word: reformism. Against the aristocracy and the peasantry, the bourgeoisie had no better ally than the proletariat.

The two positions held successively by Marx—either the proletarian revolution in England would settle the Irish question *or* the resolution of the Irish question would make possible the revolution—gradually lost their relevance, as the epicenter of an eventual proletarian revolution shifted from England to Germany.

There is an analogy between the strategic position of Ireland in relation to England and the later relation of Russia to Germany, when Germany replaced England as the major stronghold of capitalism. In 1916, a year before the Russian Revolution, when the Irish rose up in rebellion, their revolutionary attempt in no way affected the Allied bloc.

²⁰The phase of *real* domination contrasts with the earlier phase of *formal* domination; the latter is characterized by the existence of a gap between the bourgeoisie, taken as a class with its own immediate and specific interests, and the State, representing the general interest. This limited, hence *formal*, domination allowed the bourgeoisie to extract only an *absolute* surplus-value (lengthening of the work day, reduction of the minimum wage, etc.), because the earlier mode of production was not significantly altered. The pressure of the market, the State and the working class forces the bourgeoisie to revolutionize the mode of production. Because of the rise in productivity the labor force is no longer the sole means for increasing the total surplus value. The bourgeoisie then takes power over the State and the general interest. This is the phase of *real* domination.

For Marx and the First International, the question of Irish independence was raised only in the context of world-wide working class strategy for the period from 1865 to 1871. After the defeat of the Paris Commune, socialists nevertheless persisted in confusing socialism and Irish nationalism, even though England had lost its leading strategic position. Although Russia, with its resources in manpower and raw materials as well as its traditionally servile peasant population, was able to compete in the race for "socialist national" development just after the final defeat of the proletariat in Germany in 1923, Ireland, on the other hand, in the absence of a British revolution, was condemned to remain forever in the English orbit. A country which oppresses another (like Russia before 1917, policing the German revolution) can itself forge its own chains (as in the "struggle" to construct heavy industry in Russia); but a country which, like Ireland, is oppressed by another, having nothing to sell but unruly men, agricultural goods and a few raw materials, retains its chains which only rust and creak with time.

For Marx, Irish independence was never anything more than a "secession of the plebs" in the Roman manner. For a brief period he believed that Irish independence could have toppled the ruling classes in England. This is why he did not, in any of his writings, treat the question of the possibility of Ireland's economic survival, a question which was later answered in the affirmative by the "third-worldists," for whom a people with a resolute will can accomplish miracles.

* * *

Between 1880 and 1922 (the year of its independence), Ireland acquired its present-day characteristics; the social classes became fixed and their antagonism was expressed in terms which we still recognize today. But if Ireland has not changed, the world has. It is not our intention here to view the Irish question—since its re-emergence in 1969—as a simple accumulation of old history, even if ancestral conflicts and anachronistic debates reappear on the surface of the present. Rather, our goal is to show how it happens that in Ireland history *seems* to be moving in circles.

The partition of Ireland into two States corresponds to the existence of two centers of capital with divergent interests. The first consequence of this division brought about the ruin of landed capital and the passage of the Wyndham Act of 1903. The second consequence was the concentration of industrial capital in Ulster along with its entry into the British market. The third—certainly the most important—was the appearance of the Irish proletariat as an autonomous class and, after 1913, its defeat.

“The farmers’ complaints” were spread throughout Ireland by Parnell, who headed the Home Rule League after 1877 and the Land League after 1878. His party, which soon furnished indispensable support to the Liberal Party, obtained backing for Home Rule from Gladstone in 1886; this was tied to a proposed law stipulating that the State would itself buy back the lands of English landowners and reassign them to Irish peasants. The inseparability of the two parts of the program resulted in its defeat. To the bourgeoisie of Ulster, also represented by Liberals, Home Rule meant eventual separation from the English market of which they were an integral part and thus meant their ruin. All hopes for creating a unified Ireland through a bourgeois national revolution vanished. The peasantry, which until then could have been considered a class allied with the national bourgeoisie, simultaneously lost its revolutionary importance. Instead of being a class capable of expropriating the landlords, the small farmers, in the absence of any real ground rent, represented no more than a destitute under-class, henceforth unable to help transfer the ownership of the land to a national bourgeoisie.

The agrarian revolution carried out by the government began in 1882 and spread as ground rent decreased, thus ruining the aristocracy and diminishing their political power. It was at the price of an enormous fraud that the English State “gave” the land to the Irish peasants: they had to pay for it in 68 land annuities.²¹ (It would have been 1971 before the peasants really owned the land!)

²¹The land annuities were less expensive than the farm leases, but the government was only speculating on the falling land prices, which, since 1875, had reduced the number of leases by half.

The peasants were expected to transform into capital a land which was hardly sufficient for their own subsistence. This capital, plus the interest accumulated until 1938, thus constituted not only a fraud, but an act of usury carried out on a national scale. The Wyndham Act of 1903 put an end to the agrarian problem. No longer having capitalist valorization, the land was quickly resettled and parceled out: between 1903 and 1906, there were more than 300,000 farm purchases, and the Irish were able to recover their lands, or at least what remained of them. The agrarian revolution which Irish nationalists and internationalists had hoped would be the lever for independence thirty years earlier, was thus accomplished, negatively, by capital, in this case the British State. Its delayed appearance made it totally ineffective; capitalism had been introduced from without, and since rents had gone to England, there had never been any primitive accumulation. The partitioning of the land was excessive. In addition, the usury prolonged the flow of land rents to England. This explains the Irish peasant’s hatred for everything English and everything capitalist; this also explains the development of a nationalism which is typically “southern,” based on race (glorification of the Gaelic race, Gaelic renaissance) and whose voluntarism (in 1905 Sinn Fein, “We Ourselves,” was founded) grew proportionately to its powerlessness. The Land Annuities triggered Irish nationalism in the same way as the additional 45 centime tax of February 1848 made the French peasant the principal moving force of the counter-revolution. All the social classes in the South participated in the movement, whose autonomist tendency was expressed by the systematic boycott of English institutions. Sinn Fein, and nationalists in general, stressed independence. They proposed an alliance of classes similar to the one in the North. The Catholic Church also advocated such an alliance.

The primarily industrial and urban region of Ulster, on the other hand, remained relatively unaffected by the agrarian question. After 1830, the shipbuilding and linen industries developed and the number of engineering firms increased, particularly in Belfast. This rapid capitalist growth was the result of large investments by major Scottish and English merchants. Capital established itself in Ulster, attracted by the plentiful supply of cheap labor. This took place side by side with colonial relations: in Derry, linen was

made on hand looms supplied to women of the surrounding countryside. Belfast, on the other hand, had a modern proletariat by the middle of the nineteenth century. The republican radicalism of the bourgeoisie of Ulster had been blunted; tendencies favoring Union were reinforced as local industries prospered within the British market. The Orange Order, no longer useful, was banned in 1837. It was revived only in 1880 to solidify the alliance among all classes in their loyalty to Great Britain and in fierce opposition to Home Rule. But this Order was no longer the feudal and anti-Presbyterian brotherhood uniting the yeoman or the artisan with the landed aristocracy. It now preached a holy alliance between owners and workers, in other words, corporatism, even fascism. Claiming that the Orange Order active at the turn of this century harks back to the previous century and embodies some unique ancestral quality of the Ulster inhabitant, is like saying, all due allowance being made, that Nazism existed only because the primitive Germanic tribes were of the Aryan race. In fact, the Order now did nothing to oppose the agrarian "revolution."

Only the Left of that time could believe that these alliances were not directed against the interests of the proletariat. The nationalism of the South, which was reinforced by constant attention to the Gaelic past, was countered by the loyalism of Ulster, a nationalism which had only to prove its national existence. Confronted by this waltz of nationalisms, the concepts of the Irish Marxist leader, James Connolly, turned sour. He forgot that the concept of nationality had been elaborated with reference to the interests of the proletariat. At the turn of the century, the situation in Ireland could not justify the participation of the proletariat in the nationalist struggle. Participation meant a denial of the aims and possibilities of the proletarian revolution. By 1871, the period of national revolutions had ended. Ireland confirmed this fact:

1. The national revolution would not establish new social and productive relations, since capitalism was implanted in the North. Rather, the independence of the South would reinforce its agrarian backwardness.

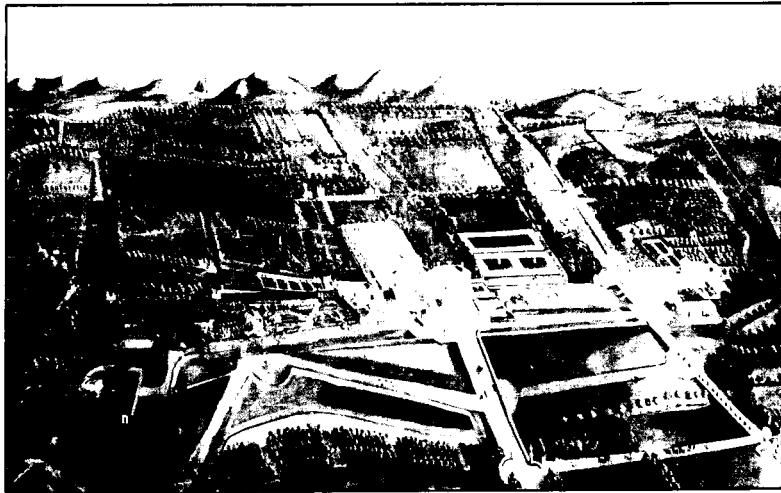
2. An independent State (even if united) would have retarded the development of the proletariat and the break-up of the agrarian society by abolishing free trade.

3. An independent State (even if united) would not have halted the emigration to England and the United States, which was a source of conflict between regional proletarian groups.

The separation between North and South cannot be explained by the difference in activity, even though one finds a city-country division, nor by factors of race, religion or nationality. Still today Irish socialists get bogged down in interminable anachronistic disputes as to whether Ireland is one or two nations. They manage to trace the question back to the origins of colonization in the 17th century, or, at least, to the reaction of the Orange Order against the republican movement of Wolfe Tone.

* * *

The determining factor which explains the Partition, Ireland's nationalist orgy, is the defeat of the proletarian movement. This defeat was apparent in 1913, confirmed in 1916, consummated in 1919. Faced with the petit-bourgeois and peasant nationalism of the South and with the upper-middle-class unionism of the North (which advocated Union with Great Britain as much as union between social classes), the workers' movement appeared, at the end of the last century, as the sole unifying force in Ireland. Unfortunately, from the beginning, it was cut off from the English working class. England was the first country to give rise to the contemporary phenomenon known as a labor aristocracy, which is totally integrated with the general aims of the State and organized in unions such as the T.U.C. or in political parties such as the Labour Party (founded in 1892). The Irish proletariat thus had to organize alone, independently of the English workers, who, in their unions, often supported the more imperialist sector of the English bourgeoisie. Opposing the attempts to divide the working class on the English model, in which unskilled workers are excluded, the Irish revolutionaries proposed the unified organization of the proletariat in unions. In Belfast, Larkin broke with the British T.U.C. and in 1907 organized the National Union of Dock Labourers, which launched a strike against the Shipping



Federation (international association of ship owners). The I.T.G.W.U. (Irish Transport and General Workers Union), whose program included the abolition of wage labor, was founded in 1909. From Belfast it spread throughout Ireland under the influence of James Connolly, another revolutionary and militant union organizer. The I.T.G.W.U. launched a second proletarian attack in 1913, a strike of more than six months against intransigent local capitalists, the "Dubliner's Sweaters" (bosses of the sweat-shops of Dublin).

Faced with the unification of the proletariat on a national scale, a prelude to asserting itself as a party,²² the bourgeoisie of the North responded with the centrifugal force of the *frontier*—frontier between workers of North and South, frontier between Catholic and Protestant workers. In 1913, Carson and Craig organized the Ulster Volunteer Force to fight against Home Rule and against the nationalists, who had been joined by the Socialists. In Dublin, the same year, appeared the Citizen Army, a workers' militia formed to fight the employers' police which was tracking down union militants. But this army quickly fell back to a nationalist position, preparing themselves for a civil war against Ulster. During the Dublin strikes, the Socialists opposed both the Union and Sinn Fein, but, following the double defeat in the North and in Dublin itself, they were led to formulate a national socialism and to move closer to Sinn Fein and even to racist groups like the Gaelic League. Joining the nationalist combat, the proletariat split in two, in order to become the ideological appendages and the fighting vanguards in the alternative furnished by the national bourgeoisie; it negated itself as a distinct class and party. This socialism, which deserves the name only because of its past, was well expounded by James Connolly, who, refusing to accept the

²² "Party" is taken in the generic sense as the organization of the proletarian class with a view to seizing the power of the State and establishing the conditions leading to socialism: "[the] party, which springs spontaneously from the ground of modern society" (Marx to Freiligrath, February 29, 1860). "Party" is conceived in the sense of a higher stage of self-assertion than that of a class simply conscious of itself and of its economic and social existence. It is not to be confused with Party, the narrowly political organization of the Leninist vanguards.

defeat of the proletarian movement and of the bourgeois revolution in Ireland, proclaimed himself heir to all the past failures of the Irish struggle and advocated an alliance between all the fragments of classes in the South, in a movement which was Socialist, Democratic and Nationalist.²³ In 1914, when the Ulster Unionist Council declared itself the provisional government and succeeded in cutting off the workers in the South from their avant-garde in the North, the Dublin workers were forced to capitulate before Murphy, a powerful reactionary magnate who controlled City Hall, the major newspaper (*Irish Independent*) and several firms. The situation of the workers was even worse than in Moscow at the same time (a mortality rate of 27.6 per thousand). Once the proletariat resumed work, one could speak of its physical deterioration.

The Dublin insurrection during Easter week 1916 must be understood as a lower class rising to a role, here a spectacular one. The fragments of classes in the South entrusted to the military vanguard of the proletariat, which no longer existed as a party in 1913, the task of carrying out the necessary violent action which would open the path to the constitutional independence of 1921. This historic process also made possible the political elimination of the proletariat by the physical liquidation of its military vanguard, after it negated itself (speaking from a revolutionary perspective) by taking part in this nationalist putsch. It is a universal phenomenon that no bourgeois revolution has ever been able to succeed without significant participation by a sector of the

²³In October 1916, Robert Lynd, in his funeral oration for J. Connolly, described very well the shift—for which Connolly himself was responsible—from socialism to social nationalism:

“But most of us were indifferent, I think, to what we regarded as a sentimental Nationalism. We rejected almost unanimously the proposal to adopt red and green as our colors. . . . We were doctrinaire internationalists and we barely understood that imperialism, just as much as capitalism, means the exploitation of the weak by the strong. For us, Socialism seemed to be a credo for the world, whereas we considered the Nationalism of flags and banners as simply vulgar weakness, hardly different in nature from that of London’s money changers. Connolly taught Ireland the essential unity of the Nationalist and Socialist ideals. Socialism, for him, was not the means for realizing a broad cosmopolitan community. It was the instrument for a richer individual life, both for human beings and nations.”

proletariat, the lower class upsurge which is necessary for victory, since the bourgeoisie is too weak to carry it through by itself. The bourgeoisie must subsequently eliminate its working class allies by force, in order to assure its own domination. It was in this way that the French Revolution, the most complete model of bourgeois revolution, aroused, channelled, and then suppressed such movements as those of the Hébertists, the Enragés and the Babouvists, all having their roots in the Parisian working-class district of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Bloody Easter belongs much more to the counter-revolutionary period which preceded the First World War than to the period of revolutions which terminated it. In this sense, when Lenin writes, “The Irish had the misfortune of rising up too soon, at a time when the revolt of the European proletariat was not yet ripe,” he failed to consider the whole process of disintegration of the social classes, particularly of the proletariat, that led to this desperate attempt which, far from being premature, came too late. In any case, this revolt cannot be included among the great struggles of the European proletariat between 1918 and 1923.

The nationalism/loyalism of the North asserted itself only after the workers’ movement was liquidated. The general strike of January-February 1919 in Belfast, which ended in defeat, was then channelled toward the Unionist movement through a pogrom of “republicans,” an attack which began in the shipyards, bastion of the workers’ avant-garde (June 1920). Ulster Unionism consolidated itself over the dead body of the 1919 workers’ movement, just as the nationalism in the South, that of Sinn Fein, had taken advantage of the defeat (1913) and then of the liquidation (1916) of the proletarian party. Only this local defeat made possible the partition of 1922, which was reinforced by the defeat—definitive, for the period—of the international revolution.

Ulster’s secession (effective since 1914), the period between 1921-1932 which witnessed the war against the English, the civil war, and the attempt to construct an Irish State in the South, raise questions about the nature of the new product of the anti-imperialist struggle. Was it a national revolution which brought a comprador bourgeoisie to power?

As a class, the bourgeoisie throughout history was able to be a dynamic element in society only as the promoter of capital, capable of abolishing the earlier privileges which impeded the accumulation, reproduction and circulation of capital. In colonial countries, or in countries dominated by a great power, this bourgeoisie may play an important role in breaking down the privileges which prevent the development of these countries. Nationalizing rents, distributing land in the case of uncultivated latifundia, or promoting productive sectors which had been monopolized by the former colonizer (the case of sugar cane in Cuba) can lead to the birth of an urban proletariat and rescue the most backward social strata from their immediate misery. The vulgarization of Lenin's theory of imperialism, which gave rise to "third-worldism," maintains that every oppressed people can and must go through a phase of national bourgeois revolution out of which can arise a proletarian revolution which, according to anti-imperialist logic, will inevitably follow. This theory restricts us to a progressive vision of history according to which capital can allow a relatively harmonious development of the planet, so long as the social forces situated at the periphery of capital's large centers take the trouble to compete with them.

If the North chose "loyalty" toward England, it was not because it had been subjected, ideologically or militarily, to British imperialism, but rather because it was a part of Great Britain and because it was in the interest of all the social classes, including the proletariat, to remain English. At that time, Ulster was equal in importance to Lancashire in the English geo-economic system: the triangle Ulster-Clyde-side-Lancashire formed the backbone of the crown. Cutting themselves off from the English market (goods and trade outlets) would have meant suicide, for all classes. Furthermore, they would have had to assume the enormous land debt of the South. The fact that "loyalism" and Unionism had always been used as weapons of the bourgeoisie against radical elements of the proletariat, particularly in putting down the general strike of 1919 (by which Ulster, unlike the South, revealed itself as an important region, from both a capitalist and a revolutionary point of view), does not negate the fact that the proletariat had an interest in refusing separation from England. Imbued with trade unionism, not to

mention Orangist ideology, it simply echoed the views of the English working class throughout the 19th century.

But let us return to the "bourgeois revolution" in the South. There was no longer an agrarian revolution to carry out. This revolution (land to the peasants) which Marx hoped would be the lever of independence, had been carried out by imperialism itself. Was it then a matter of bringing about an industrial revolution? The few industries located in Dublin were truly insignificant. Those industries spared by the strike of 1913 were reduced to nothing by sabotage against the English from 1919 to 1922, and, above all, by the civil war of 1922-23. In 1925, the South contained more than 100,000 unemployed and thousands of acres of uncultivated land; most of the railway track was destroyed, and the only industries which remained were the poplin industry in Dublin and the breweries. The situation would not have been so bad if the bourgeoisie, or what remained of it—the Collins, the Cosgraves and, later, de Valera—had been able to organize a government powerful enough to nationalize the agrarian debt. This did not happen. Every government punctually remitted the Land Annuities (which accounted for one-quarter of all tax revenues) until 1938, when de Valera paid, "to close the account," a sum of ten million pounds taken from a blocked account in Dublin, after an interruption between 1932 and 1938, a period referred to as the "economic war." (It was an Irishman, Swift, who conceived the battle between Gulliver and the Lilliputians.)

The history of the Republic shows the impossibility of building an autonomous center of capitalist development in Ireland. Even more, it shows that imperialism is not some outsider which one need only boot out by armed force in order to be master at home. Imperialism is only a system of *private* international exchange in which finished products of different organic composition are exchanged at their market value, a system which results in the domination of one country over another, or of one region over another. For example, if a commodity containing a great deal of labor value and relatively little surplus labor, or surplus value, and sold at its market price, is exchanged, also at the current market price, with another containing little *necessary labor* value and a lot of relative surplus value, we can say that there is an inevitable transfer of value from the underdeveloped



country to the developed country and exploitation of the first productive center by the second. This iron law of capitalism (and not of imperialism—because resistance to devaluation of capital is possible) condemns countries with a low organic composition of capital (due to lower productivity) to permanent backwardness in relation to more powerful ones.²⁴ Without sufficient resources and the means to impose increases in working hours and decreases in wages, in other words, without extracting a maximum of absolute surplus value with a minimum of capital outlay—which would lead to a primitive accumulation of capital (case of the mines in South Africa)—it is not possible for an underdeveloped country, even through the use of military force, to achieve autonomous development. Ireland was certainly in no position to effect such a recovery: it lacked both the resources and a sufficiently docile labor force. The productive sector which the Irish State developed was precisely that of light industry requiring a low organic composition of capital along with a large amount of human living labor in order to make up for the absence of a real productive apparatus and for the lack of raw materials: breweries, distilleries, biscuit factories, sugar refineries, flour mills, canneries, and small-scale textile industries.²⁵

This situation barely provided a market for small-scale production of sugar beets, grain and stock. Power and heavy industry, the cornerstones of national development ever since it was learned that “socialism means soviets plus electrification,” were so lacking that the State had to nationalize them. Due to the shortage of private capital, credit was also nationalized. It can be seen that nationalization is not necessarily the ultimate socialist weapon, but rather an effective instru-

²⁴This generic definition of the law of exchange between nations does not claim to exhaust the question, or even to consider the dynamics of the process. To do so would require an examination of the internal laws and tendencies of capital, which is not our concern here. On this subject, see Jean Barrot, *Le Mouvement communiste* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1972), and J. Barrot, F. Martin, *Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1974).

²⁵As an irony of history, we can mention that the knitting industry was set up in Donegal with capital invested by a Derry industrialist, while the cotton was supplied by English industrialists.

ment of administration in a situation of poverty. Nationalization played the same role in 1919 in Russia. The difference between Ireland and Russia is that in Russia, it was in fact possible to develop heavy industry. In Ireland, on the contrary, in the Republican euphoria after 1932, meager original solutions were tried, such as the utilization of peat for the production of electricity. Unfortunately for the national company which was founded in 1934, and for the Irish people, British imperialism offered electricity from coal 40% cheaper per kilowatt. And this was not the only populist utopian dream to appear during this period of attempting to build capitalism in one country. Since the construction of large industrial concentrations based on heavy industry was impossible, the State, with the active support of the clergy, undertook to develop small co-operative enterprises and small industrial units of less than fifty workers. Once created, this industrial infrastructure understandably fell into disuse.

The ideological picture of this period is as dismal as the economic one; it is characterized by the absence of an ideology capable of galvanizing the masses toward work and thrift. The clergy and the Catholic ethic provided only a pale substitute for an authentic capitalist ideology. Catholicism has always been most comfortable when capital takes flight; it thrives among the social groups which capital abandons, as during the period of agricultural regression of the Western economy, from the eighth to the twelfth century, when Catholicism flourished. In Ireland, the Catholic clergy has always supported agricultural cooperation whenever capital left the Irish land; therefore the State accorded it a “special place” in the constitution of June 1937, which was drawn up “in the name of the Most Holy Trinity from whom all authority derives.” In the absence of the modern Holy Trinity—Land, Labor, Capital—from which all States derive, religion had to play the role of Marxism-Leninism for the poor. In any case, it is not to the credit of this “bourgeois revolution” that it did not even have the strength to nationalize the property of the Church nor to remove education from the hands of the clergy, thus allowing a perpetuation of the spirit of public charity, which is incompatible with the slightest notion of social progress.

When we look at the statistics, the tariff war between Eire and Great Britain, which lasted throughout this whole

period, reveals the extent of the nationalist weakness. It appears that Republican isolationism grows in direct proportion to the economic regression of the country. Between 1923 and 1932, the governments which accepted the statutes of the Free State and the oath of allegiance to the Crown and the Commonwealth, managed, through the 1928 loan from England, if not to develop the country, at least to stop emigration, stabilize the rural population, and encourage the production of electricity by the creation of a government office. After 1929, the world economic crisis, limiting international trade and dealing a blow to the Irish sugar beet and grain agriculture, which was functioning again only after much effort, created conditions for the rise to power of the Republicans of de Valera's Fianna Fail. In this situation, de Valera had a free hand to play the card of isolationism, repudiating the oath of allegiance and refusing to pay the Land Annuities. In spite of the tariff barriers erected on both sides of the Irish Sea (conveniently masking the fact that Ireland no longer had anything to export), unemployed workers, the only non-taxed commodity, were again forced to leave the mother country in great numbers. 1938 saw the end of this Republican impetuosity: agricultural products were again exported, and in exchange for free trade with Great Britain (Anglo-Irish Agreement Act), de Valera spent ten million pounds to pay off the land debt.

There then began a period of progressive liberalization of trade relations with Great Britain, culminating in 1959 with the treaty of free trade. This marked the end of the isolationist stagnation and of the petit-bourgeois republican State through the new economic policies which the treaty imposed. All the efforts of the rulers since independence had succeeded only in establishing a stable petite bourgeoisie in Ireland: on the land, a class of small peasant proprietors; in the cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick), small shopowners and artisans. Such rigid structures could not allow for the absorption of the natural growth in population; and the Church, as usual, opposed any type of birth control. In addition, the State was unable to deal with the high level of unemployment and emigration (departure of those in productive age groups), unlike some third-world petit-bourgeois states, where a good army is sufficient to contain the uprooted poverty-stricken masses in the suburbs of the large

cities. The Irish State, lacking a solid class base, was too weak in the face of the workers' and peasants' combativeness. When national production began to regress, when the deficit in the balance of payments became too great and unemployment too high, it had to take refuge, after 1955, in the lap of imperialism.

This "new course" inaugurated by the 1959 treaty of free trade was not to the liking of the Sinn Fein-I.R.A., which even today (although now "Marxist") does not hesitate to label it a national betrayal. It is true that, while the I.R.A. was busy in Ulster after 1956 driving out the imperialists with bombs and bullets, the leaders in Dublin were turning over the Republic to the financiers of The City. A state within a state, an army within an army, Sinn Fein since independence has never represented anything more than the extremist fringe of nationalist impotence. They have never been able to understand History, still less the concept of Nation, and have never recognized that nationalism as a social force died definitively one Easter day in 1916 in Dublin, drowned in the blood of the last battalions of a disintegrating proletariat. Although this organization pays homage to James Connolly, its origins do not stem from the struggles and political thought of this revolutionary militant, but rather from the petite bourgeoisie, eternally frustrated by "its" nation. It is anti-imperialist to the same extent that any shopkeeper opposes large department stores—not because he finds them antagonistic, but because they are stronger. In addition, Sinn Fein has always denied the existence of social relations, preferring to view the world as a vast collection of objects, juxtaposed as in a shop window, and claiming that the Irish are created to live with each other on their island and enjoy their resources which are indeed sufficient for their needs.²⁶ In the political "thought" of Sinn Fein one finds all the characteristics of the mentality of the small-scale producer. The tragedy is that the failure of the "revisionist" Republicans, in particular of de Valera in the attempts to build an independent Ireland in the South, with the agree-

²⁶"A nation's sovereignty over the natural resources of the nation is absolute." This statement of Padraig Pearse, the Pancho Villa of the woodlands, today serves as the economic program of the Provisionals.

ment and tacit support of Sinn Fein, did not open their eyes to the nature of capitalist relations. Each time that Eire was forced to open its borders, Sinn Fein began a diversionary campaign in Ulster (1939, 1956-62). Reinforcing the myth of British imperialism, their struggle consolidated the nationalist position of the Republic, just as the perpetuity of the Republic (i.e., of the partition) justified their own existence. In the same way, the Republic and Sinn Fein reinforced Unionism in Ulster, which in turn reinforced the institutions and organizations in the South. If Sinn Fein grew in importance during the sixties, years which mark a veritable historic turning point in the South as well as in Ulster, it is only because its traditional base, the petite bourgeoisie, was directly threatened by the new economic policies, and because a relatively important working class appeared in the South. Sinn Fein was a reactionary organization; in theorizing about the importance of the working class as a reservoir of unskilled nationalist labor, it was becoming fascist.

In the South, the objective social program of capital which began with the "new course" in 1959²⁷ can be summarized as follows:

—Try to attract foreign capitals with a view to equipping the country, since it had not been able to do this alone.

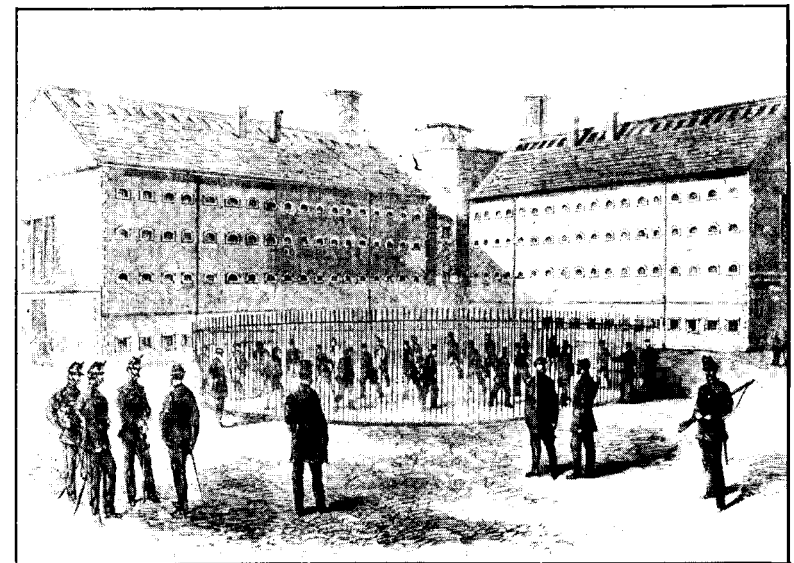
—To do this, extract surplus value, in the form of taxes on all social classes except the peasantry, so as to finance the mobilization of these capitals, in other words, to pay for their failure to earn.

—For the same reason, improve the image of the country's work force through greater specialization and through pressure on the salary levels so as to lower production costs by acting on the variable capital (price of the labor force) which make up these costs.

—Eliminate costly small-plot farming so as to leave only a large export agriculture in certain favored areas.

In any case, Ireland offers few advantages to capital. The only exporting sectors are agriculture (beef, milk: 44%) and the processing industries (51%). The Irish workers pay

²⁷This was simply a recognition of the fact that the point of no-return had been reached in 1956: for the first time, national revenues from industry exceeded those from agriculture.



the price in the exchange of manufactured products for producer goods. But the new development plan placed the working class at the center of the government's concerns and gave it the role which it had lost after 1914. The success of the various plans for development set up by the government depends on the workers' spirit of self-sacrifice. "First of all, the Irish workers take full advantage of the opportunity which they are offered to find employment in the United Kingdom, and their movement from one country to another is in effect a protest in favor of higher wages, revised patterns of income distribution and consumption, and more social services in Ireland," reads a report of the O.E.C.D. from March 1971. It is not the smallest achievement of British "imperialism" that it has aroused this "protest" in the Irish working class, while the unions, erected on the English model, have for several years been inclined to collaborate with management within the National Industrial Economic Council, the highest economic association which includes representatives from the public sector as well as from unions and management. But in general, since 1968, wage increases have exceeded increases in productivity as well as the world average, in spite of collective agreements. This has led to continuous inflation. Pressure from the base sometimes causes bitter strikes, the most recent being those at the silver mines in Nenagh (six weeks) and in the cement factories (six months, from February to June 1970).

Today, the dream of making the Republic into an independent and prosperous State has ended. Export prices are consistently higher than import prices, and all the industries laboriously set up during the autarchic period are folding, one after the other. Between 1969 and 1971, 1200 jobs were lost in the textile industry; the shoe industry, pride of the Republic, and the food industries are on the verge of collapse. The State is forced to attract foreign capital, at great cost: "fifteen years of total tax exemption on your export profits. . . . monetary subsidies (non-refundable) for your land, buildings and means of production. An unlimited supply of skilled and adaptable labor. . . Industrial buildings available immediately. . . Customs-free access to the British market. . . and no administrative interference!" proclaims a circular distributed in France. The whole "Irish miracle" of the past fifteen years is due to these voluntary transfers of

value on the part of the State. The Anglo-Irish agreement of 1965, which established a zone of free trade between the two countries, put an end to the Irish use of peat (also used in industry after 1946) and made cheaper consumer goods available to workers, even though national pride suffered as a result. This agreement, nevertheless, allows Irish agricultural products (England purchases 80% of them) to benefit from the higher English prices. Ireland has once again entered the orbit of British "imperialism," but the concept of imperialism no longer contains the reality of a military-economic force blocking the development of dominated regions, a characteristic long attributed to it: it consists simply of the capitalist law of valorization, which one finds between individuals as well as between nations. Today, this law puts forward another force, *the proletariat*—a fact which has long been obscured by the anti-imperialist theory of necessary class alliances. Whether in the guise of a militant class or, as in Ireland today, in the more peaceful form of variable capital, the proletariat is what determines the shortage or abundance of capital. To a large extent it contributes to increased labor costs and higher prices in Ireland, but at the present time it would be too dangerous, socially, to let unemployment (which already exceeded 8% at the beginning of 1972) reach too high a level. Once its traditional allies, the peasantry and the bourgeoisie, have disappeared, the proletariat is destined quickly to become the single large social force in the South. Farming cannot survive for long; two-thirds of the farms are under 50 acres, and they support a population 30% of which is over 60 years old and which was resettled at great expense after the purchase of the land by the State. The development of three regional centers is being encouraged: Shannon, near the international airport, Waterford, in the Southwest, and Galway, in the West. It is likely that in a few years all the activity in Southern Ireland will be concentrated in these three zones and in the region of Dublin.

It was the growing importance of the working class and the ruin of the traditional petite bourgeoisie which led the Sinn Fein-I.R.A., around 1960-62, to introduce some elements of Marxism into its nationalism, to mix some red with its green. It was simply following the worldwide tendency of all nationalist and capitalist movements which cannot present

themselves exactly as they are because social disintegration has advanced so far since the Second World War. For the time being, while advocating a policy of active class collaboration in the unions which it controls, the Sinn Fein-I.R.A. encourages the workers to struggle vigorously against *foreign* enterprises and it denounces the fiscal policy of Fianna Fail, the party in power. If it criticizes capitalism, it is only to show the superiority of economic isolationism over free trade.²⁸ At the basis of their "socialism," one finds the gross idea that capital is only profit, independent of fixed capital and variable capital (labor), both of which would seem to be products of nature. From this it follows that, if this profit were nationalized, the State would regain the power which, because of its capitalist soul, it has always lacked, and today more than ever. The I.R.A. men have not understood that this State has achieved the maximum of what the world market, in the course of History, has allowed it to, and that conditions are ripe, not for its renaissance, but for its *disappearance*. Their program to nationalize the mines through a "union of democratic and radical forces" is nothing more than the program which Fianna Fail, after its split from Sinn Fein in 1927, tried vainly to bring about after 1932. If it was impossible to develop a significant fixed capital already at that time, today this goal has become a reactionary utopia.²⁹ In practice this would set Ireland back thirty years, and would mean a terrible regression for the working class, who would not only suffer a decline in wages, but would also have to support the peasantry (by paying very high taxes), restrict their consumption, and accept a general rise in prices, which English competition currently maintains at a lower level. We will come back to the real content of this so-called "union of

²⁸"Just as sex is the basis for the survival of the species, taxation is an instrument for the survival of societies." (from the *United Irishman*, official journal of the I.R.A., August 1971).

²⁹The Provisionals, who are only the most naive segment of Sinn Fein, even go so far as to describe (in *An Phoblacht* of September 1971) the existence of fabulous riches: according to them, Ireland contains Europe's largest reserves of zinc, lead, silver, as well as the most valuable barium deposits in the world. "It is our duty as Republicans," they conclude, "to be well informed about the situation of the mines."

democratic forces" (workers' unions, peasants, and all the friends of the people) when we analyze the situation in Ulster. For Sinn Fein, nationalization and tariff barriers are the miraculous means for winning peace, while military struggle in the North is the means for winning the war against perfidious Albion.

* * *

The failure of the I.R.A.'s campaign in Ulster, from 1956 to 1962, showed that the Stormont regime (which, since partition, favored the two-thirds Protestant majority in employment, housing, politics, and in the courts) offered resistance in spite of the stagnation of the local economy. Like its counterparts, Clyde and Liverpool, the industrial region of Belfast was declining. The shipyards and linen industry were increasingly unable to compete with the underdeveloped countries, or with countries which, like Japan, are able to incorporate in their products the *indispensable* part of variable capital, living labor, at lower costs. Competition called for the development of modern industries, those requiring only a small percentage of variable capital and therefore a larger percentage of constant capital; this assumes an accumulation of fixed capital (machines, tools, buildings), and the presence of the circulating part of constant capital (raw materials, semi-finished goods, etc.). The accumulation of constant capital is made possible by an expanded reproduction of capital and provides the basis for reducing the necessary labor time and thus for increasing the surplus labor time. The growing rate of surplus value allows an expanded reproduction of capital, in other words, a higher accumulation of constant capital. The absence or the shortage of constant capital provoked an endemic organic crisis in the industries of Ulster: the rates of surplus value were lower than the social average, hence a smaller expanded reproduction of capital, resulting in a smaller accumulation of constant capital, and so on.

The region has shared the fate of English capitalism, its grandeur as well as, since 1960, its decline. The last war and the period of reconstruction which followed enabled Great

Britain to avoid the great crisis which threatened it. But since 1960, it has been constrained to abandon the obsolescent "Celtic fringe" (Scotland and Ireland) in order to concentrate on the London basin, around the stock exchange, the symbol of its financial power. The organic crisis affected an economy which, until after the war, was largely sustained by the influx of capital from the Commonwealth, was protected against all competition within this pool, and therefore hardly sought valorization through an increase in productivity. Today the old branches of production have been abandoned and the closing of the shipyards of Clyde is accompanied by the threat to close down Harland and Wolff, "the pride of Ulster," as the union leaders call it. Ulster must therefore attract private capital (frightened by the perspective of a lack of circulating constant capital and the costs of its importation, and by the low level of accumulation of fixed capital) through advantages and subsidies comparable to those offered by the Republic. This artificial transfer of capital is inadequate, however, and the State itself is forced to invest in order to support a rate of expansion which only maintains the current level of employment, since the unemployment rate is three times higher than that of Great Britain.³⁰ Unemployment affects mainly Catholic adult males from the western and outlying regions (Derry, Armagh, Newry, Tyrone). Since 1945, public industrial investments, "industrial estates," have created new jobs which compensated for reductions in production and employment in the shipyards and the linen industry. This program could not support the population growth. The population has remained constant, around a million and a half. The natural increase furnishes a constant flow of emigrants to Great Britain and the United States. This situation, unchanged since the partition, was made possible only by the sharp division between the two communities [Catholic and Protestant], particularly at the heart of the proletariat. Housing policy separates the two communities geographically; education, still clerical, perpetuates Catholic tutelage on one hand, Presbyterian or

³⁰Between 5-10% from 1960-1970; in March 1972, 9.2% (figures for Ulster). To these figures must be added those for emigration (.5% of the total population, both in the North and the South, during the sixties).

Anglican on the other. Gerrymandering reinforces the power of the Protestants, whose representatives have had the preservation of the Union as their sole program. The electoral system, based on private ownership of real estate, excludes many Catholics and makes the housing problem a directly political issue. The police reserves, the B-specials, recruited from the Protestant community, have been nothing more than forces of anti-Catholic repression. In addition, local laws, such as indefinite administrative detention, ensure continued domination over the Catholic minority.

All these superstructures of force were set up for the eventuality of uprisings. Today they are no longer adequate to contain the Catholic fringe, one part of which serves as reserves of unemployed to the local economy. For geo-economic reasons, this economy with limited natural resources produces only commodities containing a large percentage of variable capital. The creation of new jobs should not mislead us: in common with those of the shipyards and the linen industry, these new jobs require a large amount of living labor. They are in processing industries which require a reduction of variable capital in order to remain competitive: wages must be low, hence the usefulness of a reserve force of unemployed. Hiring unskilled women also makes possible a reduction of costs. Faced with such a high rate of unemployment, a "typical" government would have enormous difficulties. But in Northern Ireland the problem is evaded because the unemployed are primarily Catholic. The relatively full employment of Protestants binds the majority of the working class to the State and perpetuates the Orangist ideology, as can be seen in the socio-economic reality which exhibits this religious inter-class solidarity. It reaches such a point that Harland & Wolff, Ulster's major enterprise, employs only 4% Catholics out of 10,000 employees, even though Belfast's population is one-third Catholic.

This latently critical situation put a great strain on the Catholic population and therefore on the very existence of Ulster. As early as 1963, Prime Minister O'Neill set himself the goal of transforming the socio-political structures of the province in order to facilitate economic modernization. The urgent need for this modernization was evident in the growing financial hemorrhage which was being held in check only by the British State. The local government had to exercise

authority over the Catholic and Protestant communities in order to institute reforms. But the first attempts only exposed the government's powerlessness and its segregationist nature. These initial efforts encouraged the Catholics to demand and bring about the necessary changes. Far from strengthening a "typical" government, these attempts weakened a sectarian government. These thwarted half-measures only revealed the power of the Protestant class alliance over a State set up to assure its domination. It was the Protestant working class which showed the most virulence. For it, the problem was simple: the alliance would continue only if this class kept its privileged position. Its intransigence provoked a split in the Unionist party: one side, moderate, represented the politicians, the government employees, and the middle classes; the other side, more militant, expressed the wishes of the working class. By an irony of history, it was the so-called revolutionary class which became the most ardent defender of a State whose specious structure had been developed only to subjugate this very class. But the question of the suppression of this regime by the tutelary authority of London was soon to be raised.

In 1969, the radicalization of the civil rights movement (N.I.C.R.A.) gave rise in the Catholic proletariat to new tendencies totally unrelated to nationalism or Catholicism. The "hooliganism" of the unemployed youth of Bogside or the injection of ideology into the conflict by the Peoples' Democracy (originally a student movement imbued with ideas of the "new left" which appeared throughout the world during the 1960's) show quite clearly the class origins of the conflict. Later, in 1970, the movement met the same misfortune as the black proletarian movement in the United States: in its isolation, it had recourse to nationalism just as the black movement embraced secessionist ideologies like those of Black Power or the return to the African homeland.

The geographic location of the Catholic ghettos, particularly in Belfast, favored the military intervention of the Provisionals, who implanted themselves in view of the permanent threat which hung over these districts. The I.R.A. claimed to be a useful weapon of self-defense against the constant terror in which the Catholic population lived. But along with the Protestant para-military organizations supported by the Orange Order, the I.R.A.'s attacks are the

cause of the veiled civil war³¹ and, consequently, of the terror. The forms of popular organization which arose during this nationalist phase of the conflict (popular tribunals, health clinics, "national" and public meetings, workers' productive co-operatives, etc.), which some people want to see as proletarian forms of organization, are only direct consequences of the civil war. They are no more proletarian than the French "popular tribunals" set up after the Liberation, which set out energetically to liquidate the revolutionary elements and to shave women's heads in the public square. Due to its military weakness, the I.R.A. is incapable of winning the war against the Protestants and the British army, and is reduced to proposing constitutional solutions of compromise. Whether they favor a federalist solution which includes four provincial parliaments,³² or a centralized solution (a "republic of workers and small farmers"), both wings of the I.R.A. offer the worst solution for the Irish proletariat: namely, an alliance with the least progressive classes around a populist economic program. In practice, this solution can only mean *fascism*, conceived as a military dictatorship with the mobilization of workers into unions.³³ But there is no single unifying factor, neither the Catholic Church, nor the glorification of the Gaelic race, nor even the most immediate interests of the workers of the North and South, on which to found this "Republican revolution." Some countries (Brazil and Greece, to cite the most recent examples) are able to carry out a certain development under military dictatorships; but this is due to their strategic posi-

³¹It is public knowledge that the "provisional I.R.A." is openly supported by several dissidents of Lynch's Fianna Fail: Blaney (former minister of agriculture), Boland and Haughey. Just as Stormont is no more than the Ulster Vanguard Movement, the Dail could just as well have taken its policies for the future from the I.R.A., if the referendum of May 10, 1972 had not revealed that the I.R.A. is nothing more than an empty facade.

³²This federation would mean abandoning the present boundary, and returning to the "historic Ulster" with the addition of three counties to the six which it now contains; this would result in balancing the representation of the two religious communities.

³³"The first task is to demand the right to join your unions, then Gaelicize them and socialize them," recommend the *provos* to the Catholic workers of Ulster.



tion, which attracts financial aid from the great powers. Ireland, on the other hand, lacks any strategic importance, and the young republic's refusal to join N.A.T.O. in 1949 went completely unnoticed.

The Irish working class no longer has anything to gain from an alliance with the nationalist petite bourgeoisie, because this petite bourgeoisie no longer has a role to play in the capitalist arena. Working class interests lie in an alliance with England, whether it be with capitalism and the English State, which alone are able to provide unemployment assistance and to furnish jobs in times of social peace, or with the English proletariat which in recent years has begun to show through actions in Clyde and the coal mines, that intense struggles are beginning on the class front.

All those who see imperialism at work in contemporary Ireland and call for its opposite, anti-imperialism, directly serve the English State as well as its pseudo-enemy, Irish nationalism. The English State certainly has no desire to oppose the nationalist position—in 1967 this State spent ten million pounds on social security for Ulster and two more million to support agriculture; it has already spent 18 million pounds on Harland & Wolff and must partially support the price of beef imported from the Republic! It is clear why Wilson can meet openly with the leaders of the I.R.A., and also why the Protestants, both owners and workers, react violently to every threat of "betrayal" by London. Between 1969 and 1971, many socialists, especially those of People's Democracy, moved toward nationalist positions as a result of their anti-imperialist predisposition and the sectarian regression of the movement. They were led, along with others, to support the Republicans in their fierce campaign against entry into the Common Market, thus defending peasants against capital and actively pressing for the "republic of workers and small farmers." Their Leninist conceptions were responsible for their mechanistic, evolutionary view of Irish history. Michael Farrell (of People's Democracy) and the Irish Communist Organization (a Marxist-Leninist grouping) came to think that since Ireland, formerly a colony, had undergone a "national revolution" between 1921 and 1923 but had failed to free itself from the former colonizer, then Eire must be nothing more than a neo-colony. From this distorted conception, Farrell deduced that the working class

must itself carry out the anti-imperialist revolution. This is why he did not delay in allying his movement with the I.R.A.³⁴

Objectively, capital (in this case British and international capital) is leaving a region where the manufacturing industries offer only reduced rates of surplus value (due to relatively high wages) and give lower rates of profit than those in Great Britain and the European continent. Only legal and fiscal stratagems attract small amounts of capital. Although this capital remains in the country, the crisis of unemployment grows more serious, stirring up the Catholic community and threatening the security of the Protestant community. These stratagems can no longer attract capital to manufacturing industries: they have their limits, while the rise in the cost of labor power has its limit only on the British labor market. Capital leaves Ulster just as excess capital has always left England and the United States (c.f. the floating capital, in dollars, in Europe). But in Northern Ireland, the departure of this capital endangers the country's very existence. The British State spends millions of pounds in unemployment payments to Catholics and in loans and subsidies to enterprises which employ Protestants. Less and less social, capital becomes increasingly autonomous, ejecting man from the process of production; therefore, in order to counter these effects of its objective being and to avoid the inevitability of a revolution, it is the State which must become more and more social: it must provide for the army of unemployed, finance the deficits of enterprises, and even nationalize them (the State has held 47.6% of the capital of

³⁴Nevertheless, one should not conclude that all militants of the Irish socialist movement have retreated to these reactionary positions. E. O'Kane, for example, wrote in the *Northern Star* of February-March 1971: ". . .the bourgeoisie has accomplished its progressive historic task; it has achieved nationalism and stands now as a reactionary force across the path of the Irish working class which continues to grow. From now on, there can no longer be any question of an alliance with elements of the bourgeoisie in an anti-imperialist struggle. They have made their pact with imperialism and will defend it against an Irish proletariat. If any sector of the bourgeoisie is 'progressive,' it is in Ulster, where the moderate Unionists are engaged in liberalizing and democratizing a police state, but they would be far less enthusiastic in their struggle if they could foresee the possible consequences of their eventual success."

Harland & Wolff since July 1971) in order to absorb their growing losses—all this with the sole purpose of ensuring employment. If Harland & Wolff had not embarked on such a program of modernization (concentration and accumulation of fixed capital in order to compete with the Japanese) and, above all, if the shipyards had not been located in Belfast, they would have been liquidated like those of Clyde. This problem is directly political: abandoning Harland & Wolff means abandoning Ulster.³⁵ One could even say that the dictatorship of the proletariat (in the negative sense of the term, that is, as the appropriation of the means of production *within* the already existing capitalist production relations) is imminent. If the British government sold out Harland & Wolff, why wouldn't workers do what those in Clyde did? Why wouldn't they take over the management of the enterprise? Why wouldn't they take a cut in their wages to reduce the debt (quasi-public) and make their company competitive? If they did, this would be the last phase of capital, assuring its unending existence. The working class would practice self-management; it would move toward its own enslavement. The undisciplined labor force would discipline itself, in short, limit itself. In this hypothetical situation which is both comic and tragic, the entire drama of the proletariat is revealed. The proletariat—and this is true in Ulster even more than elsewhere—does not have as its revolutionary objective its own suppression along with that of capital. It is true that we are not yet on the verge of revolution; we are only observing the decline of the counter-revolution. The partition of 1922 was the culmination of the counter-revolution: the separated futures of the two "nations" confirmed this for the proletariat, which had on this occasion mistaken the priorities of the revolutionary struggle. It is known that capital constantly revolutionizes its own conditions; in Ulster it undertook to liquidate its own counter-revolution by following its objective world-wide interests. The current crisis is an outgrowth of this counter-revolution which has been battered by

³⁵This firm is the fief of the Association of Loyalist Workers; William Hull, its head, was chosen by the workers of this enterprise. He is even more of an extremist than William Craig, leader of the Ulster Vanguard Movement, and his organization serves as a base and stimulus to this Movement.

capitalism. All the classes taking part can be distinguished in terms of their relation to this strategy—the reinforced barrier between the two communities proves this. No social group attacks the counter-revolution because none are aware of it. In this respect, the situation has deteriorated since 1969. Consciously seeking work, that is, aspiring to capitalist citizenship, the Catholic proletariat, partially thwarted this strategy which is unconscious of itself and forced capital to undertake its “modernization”—by leaving. This could have had revolutionary effects in this region, but the historical development of the crisis caused this Catholic proletariat to return to nationalist positions. The English intervention only made the situation worse, preserving the status quo and increasing the chances of open civil war, which could provide a solution—the worst, but not for capital—to the problem of Northern Ireland.

The absence of a class with a revolutionary program, even a limited one, is certainly the decisive factor. This absence is not surprising, given the strength of the counter-revolution, which skillfully managed to perpetuate the division of the proletariat—a division that alone made possible the preservation of both Ulster and the Republic. It is in such situations that one can assess the power of ideology: Orangist, Nationalist, Unionist, Republican, etc.; its diversity in one locality greatly increases its effectiveness. Capital has remarkable coordination; it always does when the proletariat does not intervene. The counter-revolution of 1913-14 to 1916 (institutionalized in 1922) is still going on, fifty years later: whenever there was a “risk” of the proletariat’s being drawn into a revolutionary struggle, the counter-revolution played its role and continued to play it. It kept, keeps and will keep the *negative* revolution which capital is now carrying out from going beyond the capitalist framework and from becoming the prelude to a revolution or even to the re-formation of a revolutionary proletariat.

Such a possibility being unlikely in the near future, it is obvious that a settlement will be reached through constitutional and “peaceful” means. For the Catholic proletariat, the current conflict does not have a revolutionary character. Nevertheless, it is increasingly active in the conflict, due to the strength of the counter-revolution, which involves it in a national struggle, even though the progressive

phase of nationalism ended a century ago. Drawn into this battle, the Catholic proletariat complies with capital’s wishes, and demands the reunification of a country to which independence, and then unification, were always denied so as to keep it underdeveloped for the benefit of British interests. As in 1916, the radical segment of the proletariat defends nationalist positions favorable to the Republic. Once again its violent struggle works to the benefit of the State in the South. In 1916, it sacrificed itself so that the remnants of the archaic classes could set up this State. Its position at the time was destructive and aided the counter-revolution; the same is no less true today. The Catholic proletariat is only claiming its place in a capitalism which sees the chance for new life through the “release” of all of Ireland. This proletariat once again denies its very existence as a class even though the possibilities for building a communist society have multiplied enormously since the First World War. Compared with this splendid prospect, the future offered by variable capital inspires little enthusiasm.

* * *

It has been repeated over and over, in all the newspapers, that the solution to the Irish “problem” lies in the hands of the Catholic and Protestant liberals and the English. The solution will be a constitutional one and will have to deal with the whole political structure of Ulster. It would put an end to the Unionist system, this racist and fascist regime from another era. The main achievement that such reforms could bring about would be to abolish the proletariat’s division into ethnic groups and to create the conditions, not for social progress, but for proletarian equality in poverty and its unification throughout all of Ireland. Whatever they are, these reforms will strike the death blow to the products of the counter-revolution: the Republic, Stormont, and the frontier. In short, a nation which has never attained existence from a capitalist point of view is now preparing, not to establish itself (history cannot be relived), but to disappear. In its place appears a class which speaks neither the language of Ireland nor that of Scotland, but which will turn toward



England and the Common Market, where its actual enemy, international capital, circulates and is reproduced. For the proletariat, the best constitutional solution would be to simultaneously eliminate Stormont, the Republic, the frontier, and to replace them by a federation with England. This was the solution advocated by Marx, who wanted an "Irish Party" in the Workers' International of 1870. After a long detour through pre-history, we again find this solution, no longer as the one necessary outgrowth of the "lower orders movement" which was then agitating Ireland, but as the one truly adequate framework for the present economic and social reality of the country. The State in the South and what remains of the one in the North now form no more than superstructures ill-adapted to the social forces which they are supposed to keep in check.

The plastering together of the two States that is being prepared will only perpetuate their repressive power and their extraordinary ability to divide the working class, while relieving them of the responsibility for managing the economy and for unemployment—problems which they will henceforth be unable to deal with alone. It is this pitiful, statist framework that they are trying to preserve, even though History has negated it again and again. In this sense, the solution proposed by the militant wing of the I.R.A.—to revitalize this small nation by giving it a federative form and by redrawing the boundaries—proves to be the conservative solution *par excellence*. Could it be true that "the Irish have invented a machine to turn back time," as Aer Lingus, the Irish airline company, advertises?

But beyond the legal quarrels, the irresistible force which threatens to transform the Irish question is called the Common Market. The simultaneous entry of the United Kingdom and the Republic will put Ulster and the South on an equal footing in 1978. After a transitional period, during which the two States will try to resolve the insurmountable problems of the labor force and of capital, the Common Market will call for reunification according to terms outlined in the Wilson Plan. The Common Market will then furnish the country with continuous assistance through funds designed to aid regions requiring special development. In no way will it free Ireland from the capitalist evil which plagues it.

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Title: The Counter-Revolution in Ireland

Organisation: Black and Red Press

Author: Philippe Daufouy, Serge Van der Straeten

Date: 1974

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