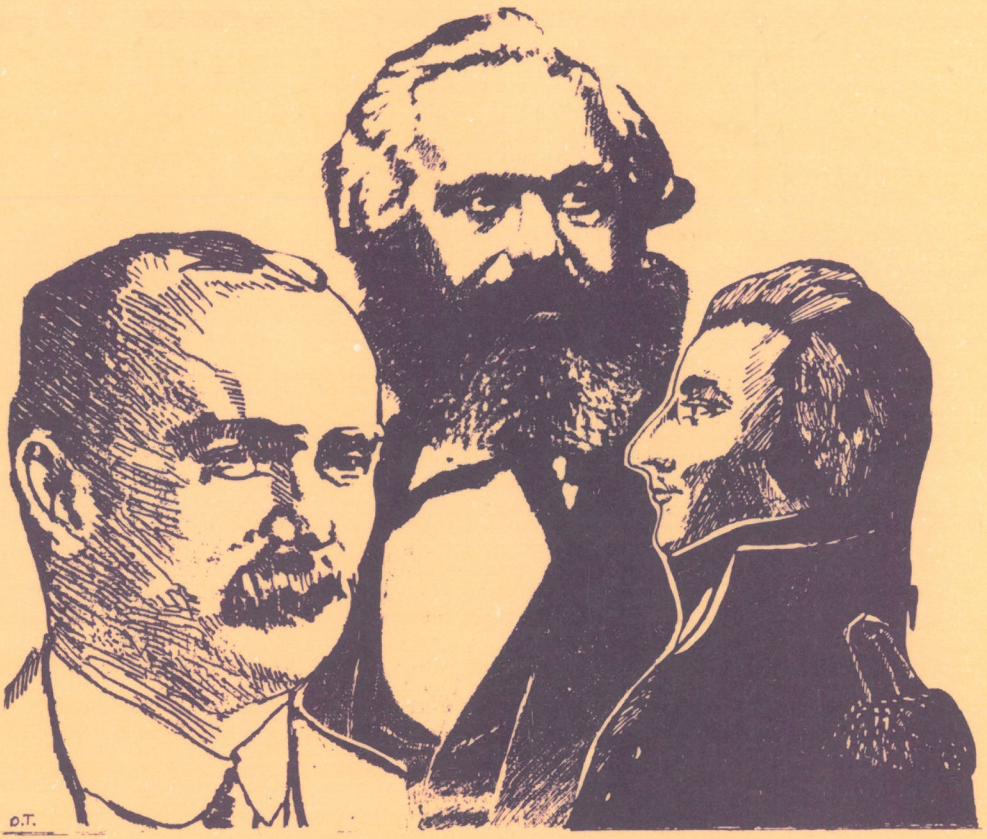
CONNOLLY

A Marxist Analysis



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Published by the Irish Workers Group, 1990.

Irish Workers Group, 12 Langrishe Place, Dublin 1, Ireland.

Connolly: A Marxist Analysis

ISBN 0 9508133 4 6

The Irish are not philosophers as a rule,
they proceed too rapidly from thought to action

–James Connolly

(Labour in Irish History, p. 69)

INTRODUCTION

THE LEGACY OF JAMES CONNOLLY

To this day James Connolly remains the central figure in the history of working class struggle in Ireland. He lives on in the consciousness of the working class movement as a revolutionary opponent of capitalism, martyr in the insurrection against British colonial rule, organiser of the Citizen Army workers' militia, advocate of economic emancipation for the working class woman, and as internationalist. He remains the embodiment of the aspiration of generations for the Workers' Republic. Most enigmatically, he remains also the only Marxist in the pantheon of modern Ireland.

During his own lifetime, Connolly was the most important Irish representative of the Social Democracy of the Second International. Indeed, his political career spans the history of that international almost exactly. He was a contemporary of Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxembourg and a generation of Marxists who addressed in various ways the crisis of theory which unfolded with the transition of capitalism into the epoch of imperialism.

His attempt to apply his understanding of the canons of Marxism to Irish conditions in this changing international context that marks him out as an innovative thinker and that elevates him above any other Irish Marxist then or since. Yet this innovation within the socialist movement led him to become a leader and martyr of the nationalist rebellion of 1916. And this is only one paradox, albeit the central one, in the written corpus and practical legacy he has left us. For here, too, is a revolutionary who was committed to a syndicalist objective of the transfer of power to the workers through the general strike which would paralyse the capitalist class, he believed, and effect a peaceful transfer of power to the working class party. Yet, his involvement in the 1916 insurrection appears to refute this perspective completely.2

Here, too, is a man who is understandably hailed as an exponent of the emancipation of women, and who stands out even today as such. And yet, one cannot but be struck by his negative attitude towards the right to divorce and his denial of the elementary duty of socialists to defend this right.

Paradoxes arise also in his attitude to the Catholic Church, and to religion generally. Although a part of Social Democracy, Connolly took the view that socialists should accept a self imposed ban on discussions of religion and the defence of freedom of conscience.

And finally, here was someone whose lifetime objective was to bring the working class to the head of the national struggle, overcoming sectarian divisions and uniting workers of all creeds, yet patently failed to grasp the nature and importance of the obstacles that stood in the path to this goal, namely the respective holds of northern Protestant Unionism and Catholic bourgeois nationalism on vital sections of the rural masses and the working class itself.

Given these paradoxes, it is strange that to date, nobody has presented a consistent and rounded critique of Connolly's legacy. The central work of scholarship for many years was Greaves' biography, a work limited by the crude dictates of Stalinist ideology. Connolly is cast in the mould of an Irish Lenin, or worse, in a Stalinised version of "Leninism". From this perspective, his final act is seen as the embodiment of the more 'mature' Marxist approach, where a place is reserved for the native capitalist class in the Irish revolution and the political independence of the workers is subordinated in a 'popular front'. The real weaknesses in Connolly's theory are either presented as strengths or, as in Greaves' discussion of religion, women, etc., cosmetically hidden from view.

The later treatment of the subject by Bernard Ransom was the first to acknowledge the innovative manner in which Connolly sought to come to terms with the Irish question. Yet Ransom is content to view Connolly's theoretical concessions to populist nationalism as a successful "hibernicisation" of Marxism. He seeks to justify this by arguing that "orthodox" Marxism was not a complete method but required a speculative and imaginative addition and that Connolly was simply supplying this dimension as did many others such as the Austro-Marxists in particular. Ransom does, indeed, hit upon a central issue in the whole understanding of Connolly's thought here, namely Connolly's historiography. It is a theme that we deal with in the context of his understanding of nation and class in Irish history. However, in contrast to him, we show that Connolly's theory is quite easily refuted from the standpoint of an "orthodox" Marxist historiography.

Some of these themes are touched upon by Austen Morgan in his recent biography of Connolly. Morgan rejects Connolly as a serious thinker and, in an apparent attempt to satisfy the revisionist book market, presents him as

eclectic in thought and pragmatic in deed, breaking suddenly from syndicalism, becoming a nationalist almost overnight with the outbreak of war. While only too ready to deny any consistency in Connolly, he is unable to render the components of his politics coherent for want of a method himself. Morgan's liberal revisionist critique adds nothing to our understanding of Connolly. (See review of Morgan by Joe Larragy, 'Connolly, Myth and Reality' in *Saothar*, Journal of the Irish Labour History Society, No. 13, 1988, pp. 49-53).

Those claiming the mantle of Trotsky in Ireland (Militant, Socialist Workers Movement, Peoples Democracy) who might have been expected to critically investigate his legacy, have instead sought to interpret him in defence of their respective and rival positions.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to examine the roots, influences and developed ideas of Connolly's thought from an unashamedly Marxist standpoint. Not the "Marxism" of Greaves or of Stalinists generally, but that of the classical tradition upheld and developed by Trotsky from the mid 1920's, when Stalin's grip began to tighten on the neck of the October revolution and all its historic aspirations. Now that Stalinism is being ground between the upper wheel of imperialism and the nether wheel of working class revolution, as predicted by Trotsky, it is all the more relevant for Marxists to re-examine Connolly's legacy in a clearer light.

Every serious attempt since 1916 to develop a socialist programme which addresses also the National Question has looked to Connolly's legacy. His 'socialist republicanism', because it is ambiguous on key questions of class and nation, remains an obstacle to developing independent working class politics.

From Apprenticeship to Martyr

The presentation of our arguments centres on the view that Connolly's early apprenticeship to Marxism in Edinburgh was conditioned and constrained by the rigid economic determinism and ethical relativism that made do for a more worked out materialist method. In Chapter 1 we show the range and limits of the Marxism of the British, and more specifically the Scottish, left and the way this shaped Connolly's views on the economics of capitalism, as well as on nationalism, religion and party organisation.

The relevant 'orthodoxy' of the Scottish and British left, together with the dynamic tensions between the Celtic fringe and the metropolitan British centre set the scene for Connolly's break with the underlying Marxist orthodoxy on the Irish national question. In Chapter 2 we show how Connolly effected this break and laid the groundwork for his theory on the Irish question. Here lies the root of his fusion of nation and labour and hence his confusion of Irish revolutionary

republicanism and international socialism. We show the centrality of the influence of the revolutionary populism of James Fintan Lalor in this innovation, and draw out the striking parallels between Lalor's ideas and those of the Russian Narodniks of the mid to late 19th century. It was against narodnism that Russian Social Democracy had to ferment itself clear in the 1880s and 1890s.

Connolly went to considerable lengths to justify his view that the 'real' Irish nation and 'real' national struggle were essentially the struggle for the historic interests of collective labour. He developed this principally through his central works, Labour in Irish History and The Re-Conquest of Ireland. The first component of Connolly's historiography as outlined in these works relies on the view that Ireland was a communist clan society until English conquest, which imported a foreign system of private property. In Chapter 3, we present the first complete refutation of this characterisation by drawing on the Ethnological Notebooks of Marx which deal with the same topic but characterise pre-Norman Ireland as feudal society.

The second component of Connolly's historiography is his characterisation of the bourgeois democratic reform and revolutionary movements spanning the last decades of the 18th century. In Chapter 4, we argue that Connolly rewrote the history of this period to suit his theory of an essentially communal labour democracy of Ireland pitted against a foreign capitalist—aristocratic interest, and that Tone did, literally, speak for the men of 'no property'. Once again, drawing on the detailed notes of Marx on Ireland 1780-1800, we show that this view is quite inaccurate. Tone, as is now widely acknowledged, was a bourgeois democratic revolutionary, albeit with Jacobin tendencies.

The core values in Connolly's synthesis as applied to religious and social life, women and the family are treated in two chapters. In Chapter 5, we show that his position on religion was at odds with Marx, Engels and Lenin. Furthermore, the method he adopted from his Scottish apprenticeship, served to justify his making the case for a special type of Catholicism in Ireland, which served the masses rather than hindered them. This too conformed to his historical schema of a communal nation seeking to throw off a foreign system of private property.

Chapter 6 examines Connolly's position on women's emancipation. This too is shot through with romantic views about the rights and duties of Irish women, and how these might be established. His opposition to divorce and his rigid defence of monogamy reveal a cast of mind all too vulnerable to the claims of the Catholic bourgeoisie and middle class of rural Ireland, which constructed itself around the family and Church after the famine of the 1840s.

Chapter 7 deals with the issue of Ulster Unionism and the working class. Connolly's attempt to accommodate the Protestant working class in his historical schema is shown to be invalid. He reduced Ulster Unionism to the

status of an outmoded vestige of the landed aristocracy. He took little or no account of the changes which transformed Presbyterian capitalism into a bulwark of the Union, and with that the mechanisms which aligned the Protestant working class with them against nationalism. Where this work, however, parts company with revisionist scholarship on the question is in our concern with the political economic context of imperialism and the development of a decisive labour aristocratic minority among the Protestant workers.

In chapter 8 traces the evolution of Connolly's views on the role of the political party in relation to the working class. In the 1890s he learned to apply the method of "political action", or parliamentary campaigning around the "minimum" programme while taking up the socialist "maximum" in passive propaganda—often through organisationally separate parties. Throughout Connolly's different phases—notwithstanding his populist break with Marxist orthodoxy on the national question—he never bridged the "minimum-maximum" divide, a fact which challenges those contend that Connolly came close to developing a version of Trotsky's Permanent Revolution.

The final chapter rejects the thesis put forward by Morgan that this 1916 flowed from a subjective abandonment of socialism for nationalism upon the outbreak of war. There is considerable evidence that Connolly had a distinctive view on the purpose of and necessity of a rising, a view that flowed from his original analysis of imperialism and the relationship between the national and class struggle. Nor did Connolly abandon his hopes for syndicalism and labourism, believing that they would re-emerge as a force in peacetime. However, we categorically reject Greaves' attempt to bracket Connolly with Lenin on the basis of their attitude to the war and indeed to the insurrection itself.

After the rising, Trotsky perceptively observed that the young Irish working class, emerging against a backdrop of a burgeoning nationalism and "the egoistic, narrow-minded imperial arrogance of British trade unionism", tended to swing between syndicalism and nationalism in search of a programme. Connolly's central ideological struggle consisted of the attempt to render such impulses into a coherent political consciousness. The wonder is that he achieved as much as he did, given the sources and influences that shaped his ideas. We see his demise in the 1916 insurrection not as the product of a simple abandonment of his socialist career, but rather as its inescapable conclusion. Not some sudden conversion to Pearse's nationalism but his own theoretical paradigm since as early as 1897, provides the key to the rights and wrongs of Connolly's ultimate political sacrifice, and indeed to so much of the political legacy we have inherited from him.

CHAPTER ONE

APPRENTICESHIP TO MARXISM

In 1889 when James Connolly was recruited to socialism in Edinburgh, both Marxist and non-Marxist trends were represented in the newly formed Scottish Socialist Federation (SSF) to which he adhered.

In its attempt to overcome the organisational fragmentation of Scottish socialism the SSF had drawn together members and sympathisers from two competing Marxist strands—the Socialist League of William Morris and the Social Democratic Federation (SDF).

The SDF was founded by Harry H. Hyndman, J. L. Joynes and others. Its Marxism was modelled on the example of the German Social-Democratic Party. The Socialist League started as a split from the Federation in 1884 but its tendency towards abstract propagandism—and ultra-left abstention from parliamentary elections—led to general disillusion among its members of whom many drifted back into the SDF in the 1890s.

Other ideological tendencies at this time in Scottish socialism (and particularly in Edinburgh) were the Christian Socialists and the non-Marxist Keir Hardie group, embryo of the Independent Labour Party established in 1893-4.

Still other trends derived from the various land agitation groups in Scotland during the previous decade—the Irish 'land war' of 1879-82 was fresh in the memory of many Irish immigrants in the working class wards in Edinburgh including Cowgate where Connolly himself had been born in 1868. Another influence was the short but militant wave of New Unionism of 1888-9 which swept through Leith and Edinburgh just when Connolly became an activist. And last but not least was the influence of the Home Rule movement in the Irish immigrant community, intense in the 1880s, against which the Scottish Socialists were obliged to define a socialist attitude to Irish independence.

The development of the Edinburgh Marxist movement was hampered by the limited availability of English translations at that time. The first volume of Das Kapital, translated in 1886, was the main source of orthodoxy for the SDF. The Communist Manifesto was also widely available from the mid 1880s, as was Wage-Labour and Capital (translated by J.L. Joynes), a dramatic indictment of capitalism written by Marx but a very early work dating also from 1848.

Given this narrow literary base, it is not surprising that British 'Marxism' tended to be confined to Marx's political-economic theories and his theory of history as popularised in the Manifesto.

The economic dominance of Britain as "workshop of the world" in the second half of the 19th century improved the working conditions of a large section of the proletariat in tandem with British imperialist expansion. The ideology of reformism thus emerged strongly—the notion that capitalism could be gradually reformed towards socialism without resort to revolution. This accommodation to bourgeois society greatly strengthened the hold of the Liberals on the mainly craft-dominated trade unions and of Fabianism in sections of the intelligentsia.

In order to maintain their independence from Liberalism, therefore, the founders of the SDF were compelled to formally adopt Marx's ideas about the roots of exploitation being inherent in the capitalist mode of production itself, that capitalism can never be reformed to eliminate exploitation: it must be overthrown.

It was a ready-made and powerful weapon against Liberal and Fabian rivals, but the SDF was unable to apply Marx's ideas in a living way. In 1894 Engels, sorely disappointed with what they had done to Marxist theory, commented: "The SDF … has managed to transform our theory into the rigid dogma of an orthodox sect. (Letter to Sorge in Marx & Engels: Selected Correspondence, Progress, Moscow, 1982, p.449).

For most of the SDF Marxism provided a general theoretical justification for socialism and for the belief in its inevitability. The rudimentary knowledge of Marx's work was, however, not underpined by his materialist method, his deeply critical approach to all aspects of social life. The SDF, no less than the Socialist League, though as a result of short term opportunism rather than ultra-leftism, had little understanding of how to develop and apply Marx's principles tactically in the context of partial or day-to-day struggles. Engels demonstrated this practically in two significant periods of working class upheaval, the unemployment agitation of 1886-87 and the rise of the first wave of unskilled "New Unionism" in 1889-90. With a tiny band of comrades acting independently of both the SL and SDF factions Engels successfully related to the militants and leaders of both movements, particularly the new union leaders.

Stephen Spender, in his recollections published in 1927, sheds some light on the version of Marxism which was prevalent among the SDF membership:

> [I] learned as a result of my study of the Marxian system that man is entirely a creature of external circumstances; that social and economic evolution takes its own course regardless of man's will or desire, and that he cannot broadly affect it in any way, at least consciously; and that the contradictions in the system would continue to deepen until the great mass of disinherited workers would discover the power of numbers, rise up in

> their myriads, violently expropriate the handful of expropriators and establish the Socialist Commonwealth. (Henry Collins, The Marxism of the SDF, in Essays in Labour History, Vol. 2, 1972, (ed.), A. Briggs, p.68).

This is the kind of schematic determinism that gave rise to sharp protests from Marx and Engels at different times, that socialism is inevitable and will evolve in its own good time. It completely overlooks the role of conscious revolutionary action, strategy and tactics: after all if everything is predetermined "regardless of men's will or desire" then political tasks hardly take on much importance.

Socialism and Materialism

In the 1890s, while Connolly was embarked on his intellectual apprenticeship, some of the limits of the old truisms of Marxism as then understood were coming under scrutiny in SDF circles. The attempts by various individuals in the SDF and its SSF periphery in Scotland to rethink their socialist philosophy, however, were fraught with difficulty, not least because they were peripheral to the debates within the Second International (established in 1889), especially in its German-speaking sections.

Belfort Bax, exceptional in this regard for a member of the SDF, contributed to the critique of historical materialism in the 1890s in the German language journal of the International. Bax was one of the most cultured among the SDF leaders, closer to William Morris than to Harry Hyndman, and had been to Germany in the 1870s and studied some of the German philosophers preceding Marx. His was a limited criticism, however, aimed at highlighting the mechanical materialist view of social history in which conscious human agency and action were denied in favour of unconscious economic forces. Bax went back to Kant and argued (as did some Austro-Marxists in this period) that there were many spheres of social life and culture which simply were not amenable to materialist study. He put forward a social theory based on independent subjective and objective factors. He rejected the idea that the objective material basis was primary over subjective conditions, over political and ideological institutions.

The dangers of reducing the Marxist method to economic determinism had been well understood by Engels. It was a problem he returned to frequently. In 1890, for example, he wrote:

> We make our history ourselves but in the first place under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not a decisive one. (Marx & Engels Selected Correspondence, p.394)).

Engels here recognises that while the economic basis is decisive, political and ideological forces and institutions interact with it, posing a range of

concrete problems to be tackled in developing the class consciousness and political armoury of the workers' party. Logically it demands the application of historical materialism to key national, religious, agrarian and other historically specific questions likely to arise in the course of party building and struggle in any particular country.

The net result of Bax's theorising was, on the contrary, to give equal and independent importance to both the economic side and the cultural, social and political 'factors'. This invited socialists to agree on economic analysis but not on important social and ideological questions. In the latter spheres, analysis was very arbitrarily based on gathered impressions and criticisms inconsistent with Marxism. For example, developments in science, mathematics and aesthetics were, in Bax's view, decidedly unconnected with and in no way dependent on economic development. While undoubtedly a reaction to the cramping effects of economic reductionism in his own environment, Bax's position easily toppled over into arbitrary eclectic views, and ultimately sundered all connection between base and superstructure.

This unscientific approach led Bax himself into some very odd views. As a libertarian closely aligned with the Morris wing, he railed against religion with little real comprehension of its social roots in class society and its functions in keeping the proletariat anaesthetised. He even held the reactionary view that women were innately more conservative than men and consequently feared the extension of the franchise to them!

Connolly was certainly no libertarian. His upbringing in a working class Catholic family left its mark long after he himself ceased to be a believer. Ironically, however, he did share with Bax the view that many spheres of social life are not knowable by way of a materialist analysis, particularly religion. So, where Bax might have offered a psychological explanation of such beliefs, Connolly concluded that the socialist party must "fight shy" of such questions on the grounds that they are not germane to the struggle for socialism. (See chapter 5.)

He continually sought to limit the scope of Marx's dialectical method and to partially reject the materialist view of history as applied to culture and ideology. This is evident in the controversy with Daniel DeLeon in 1904-5. Subsequently, as Ransom points out, when dealing with Father Kane's Lenten Pastorals in 1910, Connolly resorted pragmatically to the standpoint of the Catholic religion and highlighted what he regarded as Kane's departure from the truest Church doctrines. It was a method fundamentally flawed and riddled with contradictions. (B. Ransom, Connolly's Marxism, Pluto, London, 1980, p.27).

Connolly's position on religion is an important measure of his overall grasp of materialism. When Connolly attacked "vulgar materialism" he differed radically from what Marx and Engels attacked with the same term. He was in

effect attacking atheism, which Marx, Engels and the majority of the leaders of Social Democracy internationally professed. In his view the problem with vulgar materialism was that it purported to explain godly things without resort to theology. With Marx and Engels, on the contrary, vulgar materialism offered unsatisfactory accounts of religion for the want of a consistent historical and sociological analysis.

Was Connolly, then, a Christian Socialist in these politically formative years?

A more immediate influence on Connolly in the early 1890s was his tutor in Marxian economics, the Rev. John Glasse, a minister in the Church of Scotland. A close ally of William Morris, in the 1880s he was independently editor of the Christian Socialist.

Glasse, like Bax, contested the all embracing rigid determinism—"that socialism is inevitable"—which passed for Marxism, and preferred to view Marx as an economic theorist whose ideas could be integrated into his own left wing theology. Glasse thus set out to persuade the Church of Scotland to take up socialist ideas in order to fulfil its religious mission. He explained:

> The object of my paper was to persuade the ministers and members of the Church of Scotland that they were not worthy of their privileges or position unless they resolved in the spirit of the prophets and of Jesus, and work along with Socialists in breaking every yoke and letting the oppressed go free. (Cited in Ransom's PhD thesis, *James Connolly and the Scottish Left*, *1975*).

Glasse was thus clearly identifiable as a Christian Socialist since he actively mixed the two ideas. Connolly sought only to promote socialism while avoiding the struggle against religion. Thus, while he conceded much ground to the Church, it would be wrong to call him a Christian Socialist.

At its foundation in 1889, the Scottish Socialist Federation avoided programmatic statements but demanded of its members a commitment to fight for "Truth, Justice and Morality" (Ransom, 1975). This high moral tone was aimed at retrieving the unity of socialism after years of tactical and doctrinal division in the SDF/SL of the '80s. As such, it may not have been without some positive value, but the commitment to such apparently absolute ethical values may also reflect the influence in the movement of people who still borrowed from religious rhetoric for their propaganda. Not untypical was Gilray, a co-founder of the SDF, who suggested that capitalism simply bred "immorality" as a "competitive Nazareth". The dubious appeal of this language betrays a tardy sense of history and a reluctance to acknowledge the progress and ideals that the bourgeois revolution had brought with it, such as individual freedoms, national self-determination, separation of moral and religious matters from the state. As we illustrate in later chapters, Connolly was all too prone to understand morality in a similarly absolute way, a fact which was to hamper his

political activity.

The adherence to abstract notions of truth, justice and morality reflected the SSF's lack of a revolutionary or dialectical understanding of the flux and relativity of the social world in general. The effect of this extended towards the treatment of the national question which was brought into focus around the issue of Irish Home Rule. Connolly, following key influences in the SSF, was to separate nationalism from its bourgeois roots in a bid to appeal to the Irish masses.

Existing in the "Celtic fringe", among masses of immigrant Irish unskilled workers, the Scottish left in Edinburgh had become very sensitive to the need to win the support of the Irish in local ward elections. Although the SDF centre in London maintained an acceptably 'orthodox' approach to the Irish national question, supporting political and legislative independence, this generally amounted to uncritical accommodation to bourgeois Home Rule nationalists in the 'constitutional' tradition. While Connolly sympathized deeply with the nationalist movement, he did not trust the Irish bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, he did not share the Marxist understanding that the struggle for national independence was inherently a product of, and a striving for, capitalist development. Certainly, he was correct to observe the untrustworthiness of the Irish bourgeoisie in solving even its own tasks of national independence and democracy. But without a class analysis of nationalism itself, how was he to critically analyse the petit-bourgeois Fenian tradition whose revolutionary methods would appear to pit it against the bourgeoisie? This failure to subject the national question as such to the rigour of Marxist historical materialism was to have far-reaching consequences for the future political fate of Connolly.

Limits to Economic Development

While the Marxism of the SDF lacked philosophical consistency and was largely limited to the political economy of capitalism, the theory of capitalism expounded by the SDF was not rigorously Marxist. It involved important misunderstandings derived from other trends in economics against which, ironically, Marx had developed his own ideas. A key influence in the SDF came via exiles from Germany who subscribed to the ideas of Ferdinand Lassalle. It was not unusual for socialists in the English speaking world at the time to heartily expound Lassallean doctrines in the mistaken belief that they were repeating the ideas of Marx.

Lassalle's teachings were very influential among German workers in the 1870s through the General Workers' Union. But Marx had dealt them a sharp blow in 1875 in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, unfortunately not then translated into English. Among these ideas was the so-called "iron law of wages". This rested on Malthus's theory of population and argued that it was impossible to improve wages under capitalism or to raise them above

subsistence level, in real purchasing power.

This “iron law” had been attacked by Marx in two lectures to the International Working Men’s Association, the First International, in 1865. These talks were first published in English as *Value, Price and Profit* in 1898. Connolly evidently read this pamphlet and defended its key idea in a debate with DeLeon in the USA in 1904. However, in its Lassallean form, the “iron law” brought other flawed theoretical baggage with it, specifically “underconsumptionism”, which shaped Connolly’s theories of economic crisis and of the development of capitalism in Ireland, with negative results.

The underconsumptionist theory of crisis was first stated clearly by Sismondi in 1819-20. He argued that “defective demand” in the market place was the root cause of the capitalist crisis. The idea was taken up by Rodbertus in Germany some thirty years later; who in turn was influential with Lassalle and Dühring. In this context, the theory was closely connected with the “iron law of wages”. The argument was that the “iron law” meant the absolute immiseration of the working class which led to a lack of demand for commodities and hence a crisis pushing prices below the value of commodities, finally squeezing profits.

Marx, while he acknowledges the presence of bouts of collapsing demand and other bottlenecks, never accepted this as a basis for his own theory of the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism. His theory was rooted in his “most important law of political economy”, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall even while commodities are sold at their value. This happens because of the rising “organic composition” of capital, the increasing proportion of capital in machines and materials as against living labour in production. Since this capital simply transfers its original exchange value to commodities, only living labour actually adds new value to a product. The creation by the labourer of exchange value over and above his or her own wages is thus the key to profits. As the proportion of living labour declines, the rate of surplus value extracted from labourers (profit) falls behind the rate of accumulation of capital. It was this conclusion which enabled Marx to offer a consistent account of both the historic role of capitalism in accumulating the means of production and also the periodic crises it brought. However large profits might remain, a fall in the *rate* of profit, if not offset, inevitably brings about the collapse of further investment and hence of accumulation and production.

In underconsumptionist theories of crisis the breakdown is located in the process of realising the value of commodities in the market. In Marx’s theory it is assumed that realisation, whatever its many problems, nevertheless takes place. The source of the crisis is in the sphere of production itself. In fact, Marx, in Volume II of *Capital* (again, not widely read or understood outside German speaking countries) was adamant about the gulf between his and underconsumptionist theories of crisis:

> It is sheer tautology to say that crises are caused by the scarcity of effective consumption, or of effective consumers. The capitalist system does not know any other modes of consumption than effective ones, except that of 'sub forma pauperis' or of the swindler. That commodities are unsaleable means only that no effective purchasers have been found for them, i.e. consumers (since commodities are bought in the final analysis for productive or individual consumption). But if one were to attempt to give this tautology the semblance of a profounder justification by saying that the working-class receives too small a portion of its own product and the evil would be remedied as soon as it receives a larger share of it and its wages increase in consequence, one could remark that crises are always prepared by precisely a period in which wages rise generally and the working-class actually gets a larger share of that part of the annual product which is intended for consumption. From the point of view of these advocates of sound and "simple" common sense, such a period should rather remove the crisis. It appears, then, that capitalist production comprises conditions independent of good or bad will, conditions which permit the working-class to enjoy that relative prosperity only momentarily, and that always only as a harbinger of a coming crisis. (*Capital*, Vol. II, pp 414-5).

Engels added his view in the preface to the same volume of Capital and specifically attacked the theory of crisis advocated by Rodbertus:

> Rodbertus's explanation of commercial crises as outgrowths of underconsumption of the working class may be found in Sismondi … However, Sismondi always had a world market in mind while Rodbertus's horizon does not extend beyond the Prussian border. (*Capital*,Vol. II, p.18).

Unfortunately while Marx and Engels were carefully criticising these mistakes of the German Party since the 1870s, these very ideas were gaining ground in the embryonic British Marxist movement. Harry Hyndman, the founder of the SDF, mentions in his biography that Myer, an exiled German socialist, taught him a good deal about Rodbertus's and Lassalle's ideas during the 1880s and that Hyndman was an ardent admirer of Lassalle thereafter! (See Tsuzuki's introduction to *England for All* by H. Hyndman, 1971 and his biography, H.M.Hyndman and British Socialism, Oxford, 1961). J.L. Joynes, author of the influential and aptly titled pamphlet *A Catechism of Socialism* in the mid 1880s also extolled the "iron law of wages". (H. Collins *The Marxism of the SDF*). Collins also refers to the prevalence of the underconsumptionist fallacy:

> Another SDF member, John E. Ellman, who later turned to syndicalism, expressed a common enough view at the time when he wrote of the lack of effective demand under capitalism, aggravated by technological unemployment giving rise to a situation in which socialists might confidently wait for the capitalist system to break down under its own weight. (Social Democrat, April 1889, cited in H. Collins).

In general those socialists who have mistakenly reduced Marx's theory of crisis to "underconsumptionism", lack of "effective demand" etc., fail to understand the historic mission of the capitalist epoch, the extension of the forces of production. Their focus on the market and the purchasing power of workers for necessities, and of capitalists, landlords etc. for luxuries, displaces

the problem from the sphere of production to that of realisation. Their accounts ignore the extent and centrality of production of goods for consumption within the sphere of production itself, the "effective" demand for new means of production due to the frenetic accumulation of capital itself. Capitalist development does not exhaust a fixed market because its own needs continually create and expand new markets.

The political conclusions which flow from underconsumptionist theories are many and varied. The bourgeois economist Maynard Keynes rested his whole argument for state intervention to manage the boom/slump cycle on the notion of boosting effective demand. Hyndman, too, oscillated between the possibilities of crisis management and belief in the impossibility of curing crisis under capitalism.

Another variant of the theory, when applied within national boundaries, as Engels noted above of Rodbertus, was that the home market is inherently too small to absorb the output of native capitalism. From this it was suggested that export markets were compulsory if a native capitalism were to develop. This superficial view of the "home market" tended to perceive the growth of capital only in its extensive and geographical aspect, and not in its intensive, truly historic dimension in expanding the means of production.

This form of underconsumption argument was most classically put forward by the Russian Narodniks, or Populists, as they set out to show in the 1880s and 1890s that the development of capitalism in Russia was impossible due to the "limits of the home market". One of these, Nikolaion, thought himself a Marxist but actually followed Sismondi in suggesting that the beginnings of capitalism would, after immiserating the vast peasantry as potential consumers, make it impossible to find a market at home. Hence, Nikolaion argued for a special Russian road by-passing capitalism through a "peasant socialism" centred on reviving the collective mode of peasant administration (the *mir*).

First Plekhanov and later Lenin developed a critique of these theories as argued in Russia. Lenin, in his foundation work, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, showed in 1899 that capitalism creates its own home market, particularly by creating a demand for the means of production. He rebutted the mistake of the Narodniks, specifically in their claim that it was not possible for Russian capitalism to realise surplus value, to sell its commodities at their value, without resorting to foreign markets:

> Marx fully explained the process of realisation of the product in general and of surplus value in particular in capitalist production, and revealed that it is utterly wrong to drag the foreign market into the problem of realisation. (Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, p.69).

It is clear from the excerpt below and other writings on the market question

that Connolly held views which were not only within the SDF tradition of underconsumptionism but very similar to the variant put forward by the Russian Narodniks:

> Socialists point out that the capitalist system depends upon the maintenance of the equilibrium between the producing and the consuming power of the world; that business cannot go on unless the goods produced can find customers; that owing to the rapid development of machinery this equilibrium cannot be maintained; that the productive powers of the world are continually increasing whilst the virgin markets of the world are continually diminishing; that every new scientific process applied to industry, every new perfecting of machinery increases the productivity of labour, but as the area of the world remains unaltered the hope of finding new markets for the products of labour grows less and less; that time may come when all the world will be exhausted for the wares of commerce and yet invention and industrial perfectionism remain as active as ever; that then capitalism—able to produce more in a few months than would supply to customers for years—will have no work for its workers, who, constituting the vast majority as they do, will have to choose between certain starvation or revolt for Socialism. (*Father Finlay, S.J. and Socialism*, 1899, in *Workers Republic* collection, Dublin 1951, pp 41-2).

Like other Edinburgh Marxists of Irish extraction he felt the pressure to relate to the immigrant Irish and break them away from their constitutional bourgeois nationalist leaders. This pre-disposed him to the theory that Irish capitalists could not develop Ireland economically on the grounds that no available market existed since other capitalist powers had glutted the world with "unsaleable" goods. Connolly tended towards the view that colonies had been reduced merely to foreign markets of dominant capitalist states. The wars between Britain and Russia over Chinese colonies were characterised as resolving the issue of which industrial nation shall "have the right to force on John Chinaman the goods which his European brother produces but may not enjoy". (*The Roots of Modern War*, 1898, in *Labour and Easter Week* collection, pp 25-26).

The logic of this argument was that national independence struggles were intrinsically directed against the needs of the colonial powers for foreign markets. It led him to the populist conclusion that revolutionary nationalists and the Irish peasantry would be impelled, having won national freedom, towards by-passing capitalism.

In fact Connolly argued that given the "glutted" state of the world market it would be impossible for an independent Ireland to industrialise. In his widely read pamphlet, *Erin's Hope* (1887), he dismisses completely the aspirations of the Home Rule bourgeoisie for a native manufacturing base—incidentally paying no heed to the actually existing industrial base in North-East Ulster—and goes on to argue, in a manner almost identical to the Populists attacked by Lenin:

> To establish industry successfully today in any country requires at least two things, neither of which Ireland possesses and one of which she never can possess. The first is the possession of the wherewithal to purchase machinery and raw materials for the

> equipment of her factories, and the second is customers to purchase the goods when they are manufactured. (*James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, O.D Edwards & B. Ransom (eds.), p.178).

In *Imperialism and Socialism* he repeated the need for foreign markets for the development of indigenous capitalism in Russia. Conquering the Chinese market, he argued schematically, would give Russian capitalism the impetus it needed to break down the monarchist tyranny of the semi-feudal Tsar and establish the conditions under which the working class could come into being.

Whatever about Russian capitalism successfully developing on the basis of finding an external market to take its "overflow", this, said Connolly, could not be so in Ireland, there being no foreign markets to exploit:

> Go to the factory towns, to the shipbuilding centres, to the coal mines, to the trade unions, on to the Stock Exchange of England, the Continent of Europe and America, and everywhere you will hear the same cry: 'The supply of cotton and linen goods, of ironwork, of coal and of ships, of goods of every description is exceeding the demand; we must work short time, we must reduce the workers' wages, we must close our factories—there is not enough customers to keep our machinery going'. In face of such facts the thoughtful Irish Patriot will throw rant aside and freely recognise that it is impossible for Ireland to do what those other countries cannot do, with their greater advantages, viz, to attain prosperity by establishing a manufacturing system in a world-market already glutted with every conceivable kind of commodity. (Edwards & Ransom, pp 179-80).

This general line of argument was aimed at persuading the "thoughtful Irish Patriot" that there was no possibility of establishing a free and independent capitalist Ireland.

While he was clearly at odds with Lenin's method of analysis in the *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, the claim has been made that his approach foreshadowed the method of that other great Marxist classic on the prospects for development in Russia, Trotsky's *Results and Prospects*. There is no substance to the claim.

During the 1905 Revolution Trotsky formulated his view that the bourgeoisie would be incapable of carrying out its historic tasks in Russia; that only the proletariat could complete the tasks of the bourgeois revolution, but in doing so the workers would consciously establish their own class power, supported by the peasantry, and open the road to international socialism as the condition for genuine economic development—the *Permanent Revolution.*

The contrasts with Connolly's method are profound. Like Lenin, Trotsky proceeded from a rigorous analysis of the Russian economy and social formation, a task for which Connolly was never equipped in relation to Ireland. The myth of underconsumptionism played no part in Trotsky's view of the impotence of the national bourgeoisie. They could not be trusted to create carry

out the democratic revolution against the Tsar because they correctly feared the threat to their property and privileges from their own masses. For Trotsky the international organisation of production by capitalism across national boundaries had made it possible for the expected proletarian revolution in backward Russia to usher in an epoch of international socialist construction, for there was every prospect that the German and other working classes should soon join in overthrowing their own capitalists. The key conclusion was that the working class should play the leading role in the national democratic revolution, preserving the strictest political independence of the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie, and rallying the poor peasantry to a workers' dictatorship.

On the contrary, Connolly's wishful thinking about a separate national economic development in Ireland led towards coalescence, both theoretical and practical, with revolutionary nationalists and their utopia of an economically autarchic Ireland. By arguing that there was an insurmountable obstacle to realising a bourgeois democratic revolution he nurtured the illusion that "real" patriotism in Ireland would by its very logic lead to a socialist outcome because capitalist development would be impossible.

This outlook originally served to differentiate him and his close mentors in Edinburgh from the Home Rulers as rival champions of national independence for Ireland. In future years it would continue to inform his orientation to the Irish working class and rural masses. But its populist roots were to blind him to the intrinsic capitalist limits of even the most militant nationalist tradition. In both his economic theory of the market problem and in his exceptionalist road to the Irish Workers Republic, Connolly adopted the very populism that Lenin and the Russian Marxists made it their first task to combat.

Organiser

The Scottish Socialist Federation had come into being in 1888-89 in order to overcome the organisational fragmentation of Edinburgh socialism, which resulted mainly from the split between the Social Democratic Federation and the smaller Socialist League. The SSF included former SL and SDF sympathisers and members, as well as Glasse and other Christian Socialists. As a result it borrowed different features of these two but remained independent of the SDF even after the demise of the SL in 1895. In the interim it became closely involved with the ideologically non-Marxist Independent Labour Party of Keir Hardie which had become a national organisation in 1883. Hardie's Independent Labour Party aimed to put forward working class candidates in elections on a platform of labour and local government reforms.

Along with John Leslie, also of Irish descent, Connolly was active as a founding figure in the Edinburgh branch of the ILP in 1892-3. He had become a key organiser in the SSF in the same period and not only worked quite happily alongside Hardie in the ILP but himself ran for election in the St. Giles ward in

Edinburgh on two occasions. Although he ran as a "socialist" rather than Independent Labour Party, his platform was the same—municipal reforms.

The relationship between the SSF and the ILP was generally amicable. The SSF had found a periphery for its propaganda activity and its lectures on socialism. The ILP, for its part, benefited from the hard work and dedication of Connolly and comrades in its day-to-day activities. Joint membership was common for SSF members.

At one level, this appeared to be a shining example of what was absent in the relationship between William Morris's propagandists in the Socialist League and the parliament-oriented SDF from 1885 to 1890. In that period, Morris had in his own words wished "to keep alive a body of Socialists of Principle who will refuse responsibility for the action of the parliamentary portion of the party" (Thompson E.P., *William Morris – From Romantic to Revolutionary*, New York, 1955, p.532). In refusing "responsibility" Morris merely ended up not holding the SDF accountable for what it said and did. The subsequent disillusionment of Morris and the SL's own failure to grow led him to conclude that the League did not have anything "to do" when the propaganda about socialism was duly preached. (Y.Kapp, *Eleanor Marx*, Vol. II, Virago, London, 1979, pp 366-7). His return to the SDF involved no marked transcending of the combination of SL sectarianism and SDF opportunism.

Similar political confusions were to be found at the root of both the SL-SDF split and the SSF-ILP collaboration. The differences between the SL and the SDF were never really clarified or resolved publicly or politically. There was a left-right division, to be sure, but in the end the SL returned, chastened, to the main organisation.

Between the SSF and the ILP in Scotland, a cleavage began to emerge over the issues of party discipline and a united political line in the ILP. Leslie resigned in 1893 from the ILP, unable to get the kind of discipline he believed was needed. After this Connolly continued to act as bridge builder between the two bodies for a time. By 1894 the ILP was drifting further to the right. Consequently, in 1895, the SSF re-affiliated as the Edinburgh branch of the Social Democratic Federation.

Two main influences—the SDF itself and the successful SPD in Germany—provided the models for a political programme for the Edinburgh socialists. The SDF based itself on Hyndman's Socialism Made Plain, published in 1883. This manifesto anticipated the more general model drafted jointly by Kautsky and Bernstein and adopted by the German SPD. It dealt with the ultimate goals separately from immediate reforms i.e. 'maximum' and 'minimum' programmes. Both Hyndman's and the SPD's programmes avoided references to Marx's *dictatorship of the proletariat*. Moreover, Kautsky's commentary on the Erfurt Programme, *The Class Struggle*, stated that the working class would merely

"make use of its mastery over the machinery of government to introduce the socialist system of production". He further widened the gap between immediate tasks and final goals when he added "The Social-Democratic Party can make positive propositions only for the existing social order", i.e. reforms within capitalism.

In the SSF these orthodox positions were admixed with the tradition of the defunct Socialist League which emphasised abstract propaganda for the socialist maximum. Only the last remnants of the anarchists still opposed all parliamentary tactics. They got little sympathy in the 1890s and a delegation from Edinburgh to the 1893 Congress of the Second International was instructed to oppose the admittance of anarchists to the International.

SSF politics were thus based on a division between minimum demands and maximum goals. This allowed the organisation to canvass around the minimum demands which formed the election platforms of ILP candidates. That the ILP did not, at the time, stand for the final goals of nationalising all means of production and exchange was not a problem. It enabled the SSF to justify its separate existence as the upholder of final goals, as the preachers of socialism. In time, this naïve alliance was bound to fall apart.

By the time Connolly set out for Dublin in 1896, his initial political formation was complete. He had undoubtedly gained a wide range of experience as propagandist, party organiser and trade unionist. His political ideas, however, bore the hallmark of the SDF/SSF, fundamentally weak in philosophical terms, and flawed in its grasp of the political economy of capitalism. Such an intellectual legacy provided a weak basis for grappling with a colony whose long history of oppression and uneven development had consolidated the grip of anti-working class ideologies—religion, loyalism and nationalism—among the masses.

CHAPTER 2:

THE IRISH POPULIST DIMENSION

> But the palm of honour for the clearest exposition of the doctrine of revolution, social and political, must be given to James Fintan Lalor, of Tenakill, Queen's County.
>
> The working-class democracy of Ireland … would be uselessly acquiescing in the smirching of its own record, were it to permit emasculation of the message of this Irish apostle of Revolutionary Socialism. (*Labour in Irish History*, Introduction to ch. XIV).

Parallel with his political activity on the Scottish left, he had explored Irish radical traditions for arguments to counter the political influence of the constitutional bourgeois nationalism of the Home Rule variety. It is necessary to deal in some depth with this aspect of his political evolution in the 1890s to demonstrate how his ideas assumed a 'populist' direction and how underconsumptionist errors in economic theory played a significant part in his thought as a whole.

The writings of James Fintan Lalor (1807-1849) came to have a seminal influence on Connolly's thought through his comradeship in Scotland with the socialist and former Fenian John Leslie (1859-1921). Leslie helped lay down the lines of Connolly's break with orthodox Marxism on the national question. Drawing from the works of Leslie and Lalor, Connolly proceeded to evolve his own doctrine of 'socialist republicanism' from the mid 1890s. While this innovative break from the SDF's orthodoxy has been justifiably hailed for its challenge to the hegemony of the Irish bourgeoisie in the national independence struggle, its debt to the petit bourgeois populism of Lalor has rarely been assessed critically.

The immediate political pressure to develop a new analysis of the Irish question came from the Irish immigrant population in Edinburgh in the early 1890s. Ever since Keir Hardie's ILP had begun to engage in "political action" with the support of the Edinburgh Marxists in the SSF, they came up against the Liberals, Tories and Irish middle-class nationalists. The nationalists, where they had no candidate of their own, opposed the Scottish socialists with particular vehemence in view of the fact that their position on Ireland remained no different to that of the Liberals and merely followed the passive London SDF line of "legislative independence" for Ireland. The fall of Parnell followed by the defeat of the second Home Rule Bill and collapse of Gladstone's government created a new situation by March 1894. The Home Rule movement was wracked with divisions.

Home Rule appeared at the time, in Leslie's words, to be a "dissolving

view". He therefore made a bold effort to address the new political context with an analysis that would, he hoped, be the basis for splitting the Irish immigrant workers away from their erstwhile "gintlemen" nationalist leaders, as well as being the basis for future organisation among the Irish urban workers and rural proletariat. Leslie's analysis was published as a series of articles from May 1894 in Justice, the newspaper of the SDF. Later the articles were compiled into a pamphlet, *The Irish Question*.

At the heart of Leslie's suggestive analysis, soon to be developed schematically by Connolly, was an attempt to give to the national question a social plebeian character by hitching it to the revolutionary dynamic of the "most oppressed class". Leslie's attempt to give Irish nationalism and the national question a social revolutionary content took its inspiration from the agrarian revolutionary ideas of Lalor. In the years 1847-48 Lalor developed the argument that in order for the Irish to achieve "the conquest of our liberties" it was necessary to first achieve "the re-conquest of our lands". In other words national independence would come when the peasantry threw off the yoke of English landlordism and restored the soil to the "people".

Leslie, in the context of the 1890s, attempted to develop this idea by substituting the rural and urban proletariat for the peasantry as the class whose interest genuinely lay at the root of the national struggle. Leslie argued:

> Students of *Capital* will know from the excellent series of tables there given by Marx on section F, Chapter XXIV, that although manufacturing industry is in a relatively backward condition in Ireland, yet the law of capitalist accumulation and concentration is in full force and operation in agriculture and such manufactures as there may be. (*The Irish Question*, p.11).

He suggests that the laws of capitalism had by then taken possession of Irish agriculture (he makes little reference to industry despite the advanced development of the north-east) and had polarised the countryside fully between proletariat and capitalists. The reconquest of the soil by the Irish urban and rural workers would simultaneously free the nation and circumvent any further capitalist development, thereby inaugurating Irish socialism. In this manner he telescoped the national question, the land question and the struggle for socialism into a 'combined' overall goal.

Before examining this theme more fully we must point out why Leslie's innovation was a departure from Marxism. It is understandable that he wished to escape the sterile orthodoxy of the SDF. Under Hyndman its concept of legislative independence for Ireland fell far short of recognising the right of the Irish to full secession from the British state, merely amounting to limited autonomy. Moreover, such was the degree of adaptation by various social democratic (formally Marxist) parties to their existing national capitalist states in the period of nascent European imperialist rivalry that some socialists believed that imperialism was a progressive force for development in the backward

world. This adaptation, attempting to render imperialism more benevolent and peaceable, took root in the main-stream outlook of the SDF. There was little place in it for the view that national struggles of oppressed countries had a progressive content as against imperialism.

Having said this, however, the distorted SDF position still rested on the orthodox and valid Marxist understanding of the national question. In the economic sphere this meant the rise of a territorially specific manufacturing bourgeoisie which creates a home market on the basis of a unified and independent nation state. Politically it meant that the bourgeoisie overthrew the old order and established its rule over all other classes within the confines of its own creation, the nation state.

Once ensconced, the bourgeoisie rested its formally democratic parliament on a state apparatus which could be relied upon to defend the social relations of capitalist exploitation, in the last analysis through its monopoly of armed force. Thus the question of capital lies at the heart of the struggle to establish the independent unified nation state. This remains valid even though in the epoch of twentieth century imperialism the native colonial or semi-colonial bourgeoisie is not capable of leading genuine economic development because it is subordinated through finance capital to the interests of the metropolitan imperialist powers.

Marx, writing in 1867, championed the fight among the English working class for the right of Ireland to full secession from the oppressive colonial Act of Union of 1800. This would, he argued, enable the workers of Britain to free themselves of the imperial chauvinism which tied them to their ruling class. It would enable the Irish to establish “self-government” and open the struggle for “an agrarian revolution” as well as establishing “protective tariffs against England” (Marx & Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question*, p.158). These would be the best conditions for the development of Irish capitalism and the uprise of the working class in Ireland which could link its class struggle for socialism with that of their immediate brothers and sisters—the working class of Britain. In this dialectical sense the British working class had a keen interest in ending national oppression.

The struggle for an Irish nation-state originated not in the misty past or in the land question as such but in the emergence of Irish capitalism, particularly in the 18th century. It reached its peak in the last decades of that century by uniting many sections—peasants, merchants, artisans etc. under the lead of the rising manufacturing bourgeoisie. It rose above religious divisions and, in the person of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, it genuinely sought a modern, national, democratic and clearly bourgeois republic. Moreover, although prepared to rally the “men of no property” if necessary in breaking British aristocratic control, Tone’s goal was not to free the oppressed masses from poverty but centrally to advance the interests of the progressive Irish

bourgeoisie of the time. The thwarting of that revolution by semi-feudal landlordism, Orangeism and the English ruling class in 1798 was a profound defeat. Nevertheless, in the new century a bourgeois, nationalist movement re-emerged to challenge the Union of Britain and Ireland, under the pragmatic leadership of O'Connell, with the ability at certain junctures to mobilise the majority of the Catholic masses behind it.

The new nationalist movement was no longer led by the vigorous industrial bourgeoisie which had dissented from the religions of both the colonial state (Anglicanism) and the popular masses (Catholicism). Instead it was rooted in the Catholic sections of the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie in commerce, small-scale manufacturing, and the farming class which through famine, brutal clearances and land-purchase schemes gradually emerged to replace landlordism over a period of 60 years. In terms strictly of class interest there is, therefore, a continuity between heroic figures of the 1798 Jacobin tradition of Wolfe Tone before the Act of Union, and the cautious and conservative leaders of the nineteenth century. To overlook the central importance of the *bourgeoisie* in defining the national question and to attempt to redefine it around the class interest of the most oppressed class, whether the peasantry or later the working class, was wrong.

Engels, writing in 1882, was aware of the different trends as well as their limitations:

> In Ireland there are two trends in the movement. The first stems from the organised brigandage practised with the support of the peasants and the clan chiefs dispossessed by the English, and also by the big Catholic landowners (in the 17th century these brigands were called Tories…) … all of this is as old as the present English land ownership in Ireland, that is, dates back to the end of the 17th century at the latest… But as regards its nature, it is local, isolated and can never become a general form of political struggle.

In Engels' analysis it was the bourgeoisie which developed national slogans to rally the support of the peasantry, while movements arising out of the agrarian question never accomplished the task of generalising to the level of a national political struggle. He continues, referring to the second trend:

> Soon after the establishment of the union in 1800 began the liberal-national opposition of the urban bourgeoisie which, as in every peasant country with dwindling townlets … finds its natural leaders in lawyers. These also need the peasants. They, therefore, had to find slogans to attract the peasants. Thus O'Connell discovered such a slogan first in the *Catholic Emancipation* and then in the *Repeal of the Union* …
>
> After the American civil war, Fenianism took its place beside these two trends. (*Ireland and the Irish Question*, p.451 ff.).

Marxism views the rural petit bourgeoisie as a vacillating social mass which is pulled and pushed by the external power of the urban-centred classes.

Historically this is intensified by the development of capitalism and the differentiation within the peasantry into bourgeois (labour-hiring) peasants, petit-bourgeois middle peasants and semi-proletarian poor peasants and unemployed. The peasantry as a whole, therefore, opposes semi-feudal landlordism, but it becomes divided increasingly as capitalism penetrates into agriculture. It cannot rise to the level of a ruling class, the condition for solving major political tasks, but the peasantry remains a key factor in the struggles for power by the capitalist class or the modern working class.

Classical Populism

The strategic centralised power of the bourgeoisie was, however, challenged in the name of peasant ideologues in various parts of the world in the 19th century, particularly where the yoke of feudal oppression gave the peasantry a clear sense of unity in opposition to feudal or semi-feudal oppression. The classic example of such parties was the Narodnik, or People's Party which arose in Russia. The Narodniks argued that not only could the peasantry overthrow feudal oppression but that they could actually bypass capitalism and set up a native form of peasant "socialism". In 19th century Ireland, although the rural tenantry never expressed themselves through a party of their own, the idea that they could use their collective power to combat English landlordism was articulated most eloquently by Lalor.

Though long dead and widely forgotten, his ideas were to be resurrected and drawn upon by John Leslie who described Lalor as "the man who first pointed out the class nature of the Irish movement" (The Irish Question, p.5.) Not a bourgeois revolutionary in the classic mould, Lalor identified himself with the interests of the peasantry and sought to place the land in their possession in such a form that "capitalism" could be avoided. Fintan Lalor's originality consisted in the attempt to transform in a social revolutionary direction the conspiratorial, putschist republicanism of the Young Irelanders of 1848. These, such as William Smith O'Brien (1803-64), Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903), Thomas Francis Meagher (1823-67), were the militant descendants of the United Irishmen in arms. Lalor had little faith in conspiratorial rebellion. Rather, he aimed to tap the explosive hatred of the Irish tenants for the English "garrison" of landlords and make the peasantry the locomotive of a social revolution that could take in tow the struggle for a national independent republic. The inspirational power and novelty of this redefinition of republican methods is in no way vitiated by the fact that Lalor had no success in making it a practical aim of a mobilised mass tenantry.

However, while the Young Ireland movement had broken from O'Connell's movement for Repeal of the Union, as did Lalor himself, Young Ireland was in the fullest sense the descendant of Tone—national, secular and urban-bourgeois. Lalor, by contrast, had always been closely involved with the plight

of the peasantry. In the throes of the great famine he stood out in opposition to Whig policies of *laissez faire* which maintained the export of cash crops from the country while the mass of poor peasants and rural labourers died of starvation. This led him to attack capitalism. His 'anti-capitalism', however, was based not on the class interests of the proletariat, even the rural proletariat, but on 'the people', meaning the native peasantry. The prime immediate target of his revolutionary strategy was the English landlords, a semi-feudal class. He redefined the essence of the national question thus:

> "It is a mere question between a people and a class—between a people of 8 million and a class of 8,000". (Marlowe, Collected Writings of James Fintan Lalor, Dublin, 1918, p.59).

As for the leading role he ascribed to the peasantry the goal was:

> … not to resume or restore an old constitution but to found a new nation and raise up a free people, and strong as well as free, and secure as well as strong, based on a peasantry rooted like rocks in the soil of the land—this is my object. (*Readings from J.F. Lalor,* p.68).

Lalor's programme looks to a utopia, a society that can never exist in real history. It idealises petty-commodity production by peasants and artisans supposedly free from the crushing competition of capitalism and the tyrannical oppression of landlordism and usury. As such they bear no resemblance to the propertyless urban proletariat created by capitalism. Lalor reflected and expressed these illusions well when writing nostalgically of the fate of the petit bourgeoisie in previous times:

> The masters in those days were only small capitalists, as each man endeavoured to be one, but they were sure of independence, for they did not believe that their goods depended on unlimited production, and hence ruinous competition, but on the income of the country—on the fact of the people, the masses, possessing wealth. It is not the few rich in a country which consumes the products of labour—they only consume luxuries and these luxuries must always give but a precarious employment—it is the diffusion of wealth among the population generally which regulates the demand and ensures the labourers from sudden and ruinous fluctuations; and this system of numerous small manufacturers produced the result. (Marlowe, p.109).

In real life, however, capitalism relentlessly subordinates the mass of small producers to its system of generalized commodity production where labour power becomes just another commodity while the land of the small peasantry is consolidated into ever bigger capitalist farms.

Lalor equated the new system of capitalism in England with that of the "landlord thugs". His criticisms of capitalism reflect the crushing oppression of the Irish peasantry at the hands of both landlordism and the laissez faire industrial capitalism in England. He explicitly follows the line of argument of the romantic economist Sismondi (1773-1842), the critic of untrammeled industrial capitalism. Sismondi sought to introduce strict regulation of competition and looked back towards feudalism rather than forward to the working class

struggle for socialism. Lalor attacks Ricardo, the theoretician and defender of the industrial bourgeoisie, vituperating against England's industrial revolution for having "blasted" the population with "true pauperism … in all its unmitigated horrors". Along with this horror of industrial capitalism, however, goes his horror of the working class:

> This class, resembling the Proletarii of the Roman Empire, is increasing with fearful rapidity, and will one day revenge all the wrongs on their oppressors, but will also, it is feared, destroy society itself. This class may be called the *destitute*, to distinguish them from the general poor. (Marlowe, p.100).

In this shape Lalor wishes to avoid capitalism, and while this goal is in itself utopian, his programme for a "moral insurrection" against landlordism by means of a rent strike, resistance to evictions and seizures of corn stores by the mobilised tenantry, in spite of contradictions, might have opened a struggle to smash English landlordism. As such it contained components of a revolutionary democratic programme and would, if implemented, have helped to radically free Irish capitalism from the obstacles of the semi-feudal aristocracy. As a revolutionary alternative to gradual land reform from above it would nevertheless have accelerated the emergence of capitalism from within the peasantry.

Lalor's fear of the proletariat is worked into his plan for insurrection. In his plans for the Felon Club he wrote in the spring of 1847:

> As a matter of fact no man will offer himself, or be accepted as a member, unless he holds out principles and unless he is prepared to arm and fight in support of them when called upon. But this will not be enough, else a common labourer unable to read or write would be eligible … It is not the common labourer but the skilled labourer we desire to engage and organise in this club. (*The First Step*, L. Fogarty, (ed.), in *James Fintan Lalor, Collected Writings,* p.86-7).

Lalor's programme was land-centred and directed towards a utopian, peasant-based republic which took little or no account of the key significance of capital in the Irish economy. He explicitly sought to avoid the social relations of capitalism, believing in a solution to the land question that excluded the rise of an industrial bourgeoisie. Further, he believed the land struggle would, like an engine pulling a carriage, bring in its train the solution of the national question. He was doubly wrong. It was historically impossible to write the bourgeoisie out of the national question. The land struggle of the peasantry could never take the form of a general political movement without a leading role for one of the modern urban classes created by capitalism.

Given the wholesale decimation of the rural proletariat and cottier class by famine and emigration, given the immaturity of the modern proletariat scattered throughout the south (only in the north-east was it developing in a concentrated way) it was inevitable that the peasantry, after the failure to rise in 1848, would

again tend to fall under the hegemony of lawyers (such as Isaac Butt) who were, as Engels observed, the usual representatives of the urban bourgeoisie in backward conditions.

Lalor's prognosis of a peasant proprietary as the basis for avoiding capitalist social relations was shown to be wholly fallacious by later events. For the mass Land War of 1879-82, in which the peasantry took up some of his programme, set in train the consolidation of conservative, Catholic, nationalist, capitalist and middle-peasant farming classes.

The Marxist tradition, therefore, characterises Lalor as an agrarian populist, a revolutionary against landlordism yes, but a utopian who was blind to the internal dynamic of capitalism within the Irish peasantry. He stands outside the classic bourgeois revolutionary tradition of the late eighteenth century because he places at the heart of his programme the ownership of the land and not the national and independent rule of a rising industrial bourgeoisie.

He stands outside the scientific socialist tradition, too. He looked to the past and feared the rising proletariat. Objectively his programme defended private property in the means of production. Even if he was for "land nationalisation", as some have argued, this was only in the sense of expropriating landlords, and was at most a radical bourgeois demand.

Leslie Re-elaborates Lalor

It was John Leslie who, sensing the opportunity to challenge the political claims of Irish bourgeois nationalists in the 1890s, first pressed the ideas of Lalor into service in an attempt to create a new political synthesis. Essentially he did so to postulate a different and supposedly more valid strand in Irish nationalism, as against urban bourgeois nationalism whether of liberal or radical-conspiratorial stripe.

In Lalor's critique of O'Connell's Repeal movement and in his 'social revolutionary' approach to national independence, Leslie found what he thought was the perfect analogy for his own criticisms of the Home Rule movement and the model for a social-revolutionary redefinition of the Irish question in the 1890s. But he ignored or did not understand the bourgeois limits of Lalor's programme. Indeed, he characterised Lalor as not just an opponent of capitalism but also a proponent of the "working class's point of view".

In *The Irish Question* he presents selective and modified excerpts from two of Lalor's articles, avoiding all reference to the creation of a free tenantry, or to the "fearful proletarii". He does, however, attack the rest of the Young Irelanders and John Mitchell for their anti-Jacquerie and anti-socialist beliefs:

This is evidence enough that the men of '48, despite their patriotism, were

from the working class point of view, not much better if any than those they rebelled against, and that it was as hopeless to expect from them a true definition of the rightful basis of property, as from the English governing classes themselves. Not but that a few did see it with Lalor, but they were as voices crying in the wilderness. (p.6).

In this way he honed a critical edge of sorts against what he mistakenly saw as the "dissolving view" of Home Rule and against the middle class fragments of the Home Rule movement of the 1890s, divided over Parnell. In looking to Lalor he believed he could challenge these nationalists without thereby standing outside the 'nationalist tradition' itself. Lalor's break with the Repeal movement, in his view, paralleled his own attempt to shake loose from the Home Rule movement and yet still remain within the nationalist tradition in the name of a more militant and plebeian patriotism.

He proceeds to analyse the Land War and the Kilmainham Treaty signed by Parnell which ended it with the promise of gradual peasant proprietary. This, he states, "secured the practical abandonment of the land agitation and the adoption of the single-plank platform of Home Rule" (p.9). His description of the Land War is perceptive. Yet it falls down because it is ambivalent on the issue of the class interests served by Parnell in putting himself at the head of the Land League and in signing the Kilmainham Treaty. Thus, when he refers to the vacuity of the single plank of Home Rule he obscures the 'national interest' of Irish capitalism which stood behind it. He interprets Parnell's role in the Kilmainham Treaty without reference to his bourgeois politics and merely as an error of judgement:

> Gladstone never did a cleverer piece of work in his life, and that is saying a great deal. To this day it is problematical if Mr. Parnell fully understood the land question; certainly his sudden acceptance of some vague nationalisation scheme during the stormy period that closed his remarkable career, while previously he would not hear of it, tends to show that he did not understand it. (p.9)

Leslie then proceeds to develop an abstract perspective for the 'town and country toilers' completely counterposed to the post-Parnell Home Rulers. The repossession of the *soil*, the concept he drew from Lalor, would place *socialism* on the agenda as the very condition for national independence and industrialisation. The first step in his argument is based on a misinterpretation of Lalor's populist demand—land to the peasants—as an intrinsically anti-capitalist measure. Even if we were to interpret Lalor's anti-landlord programme as a form of "nationalisation of the land", Marx is in no doubt but that it belongs to the bourgeois democratic programme. Marx explained that this demand expropriates the feudal landlords, abolishes 'absolute' ground rent and at the same time breaks their power to appropriate a portion of the profits generated by the occupiers of the land.

After the 1905 revolution in Russia, Lenin likewise argued that socialists should address the revolutionary *bourgeois* strivings of the peasantry against the landed aristocracy not only with 'land to the tiller' but also the slogan of land nationalisation. While such a measure, he argued, avoided building a Chinese Wall between completing the bourgeois revolutionary tasks and the goal of socialist revolution, he was absolutely clear that it was not in itself a socialist slogan. It was a slogan of the most revolutionary democracy aimed against the landed aristocracy. This was to be taken up alongside the central bourgeois-democratic slogans against the autocracy— the Republic, and the Constituent Assembly. Thus he defined land nationalisation as:

> on the one hand a partial reform within the limits of capitalism (a change in the owners of a part of surplus value) and, on the other hand, it abolishes monopoly [of land] which hinders the development of capitalism as a whole. (Lenin, *The Agrarian Programme of Social Democracy in the First Russian Revolution*, p.79).

Leslie lacked this rigorous understanding of the land question. Coming as he did from involvement with the Land League and Fenianism, subsequently through the school of British social democracy, and influenced in no small part by the abstract propagandism of William Morris for the socialist maximum, he directly adapted Lalor's radical populism to his own dream of creating in Ireland a socialist "Land and Labour League".

Having adopted Lalor as a 'socialist thinker' he develops a very one-sided picture of capitalist development in post-famine Ireland, which was in his view confined to agriculture. For this he draws from a section in Vol. 1 of Capital in which Marx refers to the substitution of pasture for tillage:

> Notwithstanding Gladstonian Land Bills, the concentration of lands with the decrease in the area of arable and increase in pasture land goes on apace … (*The Irish Question* p.11).

With this process he expected a rapid growth of the rural proletariat and disappearance of small farms. He was unjustified in his sweeping assertion. Engels himself in 1888 noted the slowdown in peasant depopulation in the process of land centralisation. The preponderance of the middle peasantry and the appetite for independent proprietorship among them made him more cautious in his prognosis than Leslie.

But for the suppression of the Land League in 1882, Leslie continues, a Land and Labour League could have evolved out of it and, "there is little doubt but that [it] would have become one of the most formidable working class organisations in the world". He argues that such a departure was once again on the agenda in 1894. Flowing inevitably from this analysis is the attempt to bypass the specific revolutionary bourgeois dynamic that still existed among the masses of peasant tenants against semi-feudal landlordism. Instead, he plots out a path in which the working class of town and country would

> declare, as James Fintan Lalor did, that the emancipation of their class from economic bondage means the emancipation from all bondage; that the interests of their class are paramount and before the interests of all other classes in society. (*The Irish Question*, p.14).

In this manner he equates nationalisation of the land with the expropriation of capitalism and identifies the interests of the rising farmer class with those of the old landlord class. Indeed, he echoes the utopianism of Lalor by arguing that the town and country working class could "have what is termed capital without the capitalist". His variant argues simplistically that the "Irish people" should not "call in the capitalist" but that they should, by repossessing the land, make a leap to socialism, on the basis of which they may industrialise without the "pandemonium" of capitalist exploitation in "their fair island". Leslie fails to challenge Lalor's populist premises:

> that the enjoyment by the people of the right of first ownership of the soil is essential to the vigour and vitality of all other right. (The Irish Question, p.5)

and:

> that the land question does contain but the legislative question [i.e. Repeal] does *not* contain, the materials from which victory is manufactured. (*Readings from J.F. Lalor*, p.73).

Instead, he inserts the working class of town and country as the leading interest in the national struggle where Lalor had designated the peasantry. He wrongly suggests that nationalism, redefined by changing its class content in this way, need no longer be seen as serving the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie, but instead becomes an intrinsically socialist movement.

Leslie's intention was to overcome the retarding influence of the Irish Home Rule movement, to move the SDF beyond its passive acceptance of Home Rule and to hasten Ireland's separation from the Empire. In the programme of a Land and Labour League fighting for repossession of the land from the Empire he thought he had found a way to combine the struggles of the oppressed and exploited against imperialism. However, his denial of the national interest of the Irish capitalist class led him unwittingly to present national independence, redefined after Lalor as the outer echo of the land and labour struggle, as the principal goal of the labour movement.

In the epoch of imperialism it would, of course, become increasingly evident that the working class would be compelled to combine tasks inherited from the unfinished bourgeois democratic revolution with the fight for its own class interests. However, the task stressed by the revolutionary wing of the International—led by Lenin, Luxembourg and Trotsky—was for socialists to challenge the hold of nationalism at the same time as taking up the struggle against national oppression as a struggle against imperialism.

In the Irish context this implied combating nationalism whether in its Fenian and populist expressions or in its bourgeois constitutional form. Leslie did indeed counter Fenian and Home Rule ideologies, but he did so within the tradition of populist nationalism. The consequences of this adaptation were to be revealed fully in Connolly's theory and practice.

Connolly's Populist Regression

One of Connolly's first publications when he came to Ireland in 1896 was an edited selection from Fintan Lalor's writings. The introduction to this pamphlet contains the following revealing statement:

> The Irish Socialist Republican Party, as the only political party which fully accepts Fintan Lalor's teaching, from his declaration of principles to his system of insurrection, hope that in issuing this pamphlet, they will succeed in bringing home to the minds of their fellows, a realisation of the necessity which exists for the creation of a party which will aim at giving effective political expression to the twin ideas of national and industrial freedom now so hopelessly divorced in the public life of Ireland. (Connolly (ed.), *The Rights of Ireland* and *Faith of a Felon*, Introduction, p.ii).

The influence of Lalor, through Leslie, surfaces clearly in the pamphlet Erin's Hope, written by Connolly and dating from 1897. In it, Connolly repeats Leslie's emphasis on the land, as opposed to the rise of Irish capitalism, as the historic basis of the national movement.

> The Irish question has, in fact, a much deeper source than a mere difference of opinion on forms of government. Its real origin and inner meaning lay in the circumstances that the two opposing nations held fundamentally different ideas upon the vital question of property in land. (Edwards & Ransom, pp 172-73).

In fact, far from recognising in the developing Irish bourgeoisie of 18th century Ireland the germ of the various movements for independence, Connolly argues that the Irish middle class only served to subvert this movement. The content of the *real* Irish movement, he argues, was fundamentally against private property. He refers to the ancient "clan system" with its basis in common landed property and portrays the conquest as the attempted subversion of that principle by "feudal-capitalist" private property. With the "dispersion of the Irish clans" he says, "the demand for the common ownership of land naturally fell into abeyance".

He continues that "in the intervening period a new class had arisen—the "Irish middle class". But its role was purely that of an enemy within, based on "the alien social septem" (capitalism) and serving only to bring about "the legal dispossession and economic dependence of the vast mass of the Irish people, as part of the natural order of society". (*Edwards & Ransom* p.176).

On the basis on this analysis, Connolly concludes that now the wheel has come full circle. He takes up Lalor's argument that the reconquest of the land

(which, after Leslie, he interprets as a demand for nationalisation of the land on a socialist basis) is now the sole basis for genuine national independence. He enlists arguments derived from his SDF background in economics—specifically the argument that markets are saturated world-wide and that Ireland is too poor to constitute a home market for its own industry. He writes:

> … tell me how poor Ireland, exhausted and drained of her life blood at every pore, with a population almost wholly agricultural and unused to mechanical pursuits, is to establish new factories, and where she is to find the customers to keep them going. She cannot find new markets. The world is only limited after all … (Edwards & Ransom, p.179).

These arguments combine to form the basis for collapsing the "national, economic and social re-conquest" of Ireland all into one task. They form the basis for his dismissive attitude towards the resurgence of Home Rule in 1898-99 under Redmond. They also lead him to dismiss peasant proprietorship as a utopian ideal. Referring to new farm technology in the USA and Australia, he writes: "How are our small farmers to compete with a state of matters like this" (Edwards & Ransom, p.183) and:

> The agriculture of Ireland can no longer compete with the scientifically equipped farmers of America, therefore the only hope is to abandon competition altogether as a rule of life, to organise agriculture as a public service under the control of boards of management elected by the agricultural population (no longer composed of farmers and labourers, but of free citizens with equal responsibility and equal honour) … (Edwards & Ransom, p.187).

From here, following Leslie, he creates a general schema based on the nationalisation of the land on collective principles and involving an agrarian-based 'socialism' as the very condition for national independence:

> Let the produce of the soil go first to feed the Irish people, and after a sufficient store has been retained to insure of that being accomplished let the surplus be exchanged with other countries in return for those manufactured goods Ireland needs but does not herself produce. Thus we will abolish at one stroke the dread of foreign competition and render perfectly needless any attempt to create an industrial hell in Ireland under the specious pretext of 'developing our resources' (Edwards & Ransom, p.187).

In this form Connolly attempts to solve both the national and socialist tasks. It is a perspective constructed on the national terrain; a strongly autarchic programme for an isolated national system of production. In this respect he is drawn inevitably closer to the programme of petit-bourgeois revolutionary nationalism of the Pearse variety. As already argued, Connolly believed that the uncompromising nationalist would inevitably turn to socialism for a solution "to the labyrinthine puzzle of modern economic conditions". But, through Lalor's populism, which he mistakenly confuses with socialism, the socialist principles are fused with those of the petit bourgeoisie. This merging of programmes could only make more difficult the task of breaking workers and small farmers from the hegemony of bourgeois and petit bourgeois nationalism.

It fails to spell out tactics capable of relating to the actual dynamics of the social and political movements of his day, namely the re-emergent Home rule movement. Thus he lacked a method whereby socialists could fight to break from the bourgeoisie the poor peasant farmers of whom many were not yet covered by land purchase schemes, and win them to the side of the proletariat.

Connolly had *interdefined* the principles of national independence and 'land to the tiller' with the socialist revolution itself to such an extent that he could not deal tactically with each question as it dynamically arose, while connecting it to the strategic perspective for socialism. His belief in Erin's Hope that the rural tenants oppressed by landlordism were doomed anyway—to the mortgages which would follow a land purchase deal—ignored the important potential which remained for arousing the peasants to struggle against the landlords for their demands. Instead, he wished the oppressed farmers to see the fruitlessness of "individualism" as an answer to their conditions and find their way to socialism as the only 'rational' one for them.

In his propaganda he invested popular nationalist aspirations with a socialist essence. "Re-conquest" of the land and nation became dependent on "socialist revolution". That is, he placed these goals in the 'maximum' programme, as part of the ultimate goals of socialism. This was a break with social-democratic Marxism which placed the democratic tasks in the sphere of reforms to be won under capitalism—the minimum programme. In the interim he was left to fight for the practical demands of the 'minimum' programme of the SDF—municipal reforms, the 48-hour week etc.

When analysed in this way we find a basic programmatic confusion behind the slogan which sums up Connolly's politics—*The cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour, the cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland*. This formula has wrongly been interpreted by some commentators as anticipating Trotsky's theory of *Permanent Revolution*. Thus Millotte argues:

> In prosecuting socialism as the aim of the working class in the struggle against imperialism Connolly was not denying that the immediate objective tasks of the coming Irish revolution would benefit the middle class (bourgeoisie) at least as much as the workers: the winning of national independence, the final eradication of landlordism and the establishment of basic political freedoms. He was saying that because the bourgeoisie was incapable of carrying through its own revolution the task fell to the working class and they could only complete it by proceeding *without interruption* to the establishment of a socialist republic. [emphasis in original] (M. Millotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, , p.10).

Others like Desmond Greaves see Connolly's formulae as having their foundations not only in the re-affirmation "of an old Marxian principle", but also in the foreshadowing of the Leninist attitude to national oppression in the epoch of imperialist decay. Unfortunately, that was anything but the case. What Greaves understands to be Lenin's programme on the national question is in

fact the Stalinist distortion of it whereby the working class is disastrously subordinated to bourgeois nationalist forces, as in China in the twenties. The new Stalinist principle "combined" the national-democratic and socialist tasks by confining the working class struggle strictly within the limits of the bourgeois-democratic programme, however radical. Only in a further separate "stage" would the working class struggle for its own power. In practice such a policy meant that the working class helped the national bourgeoisie into power only to see its own mobilised strength broken for the subsequent period.

The real foundations of Connolly's attitude to the Irish national question are, in the first place, a regressive break from the Marxist theory of the nation in a radical populist (and petit-bourgeois) direction. Connolly's SDF Marxism, with its erroneous theory of markets and capitalist development had already led him to derive wrong conclusions which he shared with the Populists. This was made specific by adapting Lalor's idea that the social content of the national struggle was land and labour, as opposed to the needs of capital. In this manner Connolly created a rationalistic schema in which capitalism was portrayed as the least 'practical' option for Ireland, an essentially "foreign" excrescence etc.

Secondly, in contrast to Lenin, who viewed national anti-imperialist revolutions as a necessary and contributing force in hastening the world-wide struggle to establish workers' states and thus the international basis for socialism, Connolly developed the view that socialism and nationalism in Ireland, i.e. on the national terrain, were "not antagonistic but complementary". The Irish socialist, therefore, in order to prove that he is "in reality the best Irish patriot", must "look inward upon Ireland for his justification, rest his arguments upon the facts of Irish history…" (Edwards & Ransom, p.166).

Such statements were more than a matter of pedagogy with Connolly. His own understanding of the Irish revolution represented a non-Marxist adaptation to Irish revolutionary nationalist traditions. It was an adaptation that was to assume more force and significance when he turned to the study of Irish history in his search for a viable socialist theory for Ireland.

CHAPTER 3

LABOUR AND NATION IN IRISH HISTORY

Connolly's general conception of Irish history gave full expression to his hybrid of Marxism and populism. This emerges in a number of distinct themes, centrally the collapsing together of the "nation" and the working class. Starting from the view that pre-Norman Ireland was a communal and democratic Irish nation he goes on to portray all resistance to Norman and English conquests as revolts of labour against the "alien"system of private property. Inevitably this leads him to deny any historically progressive role to the bourgeoisie in Ireland. His major historical work, Labour in Irish History, so often claimed by the Irish left as a Marxist classic, emerges under closer scrutiny as a bold, creative but essentially un-Marxist presentation of Irish history.

In the first issue of The Harp he declared:

> We propose to make a campaign among our countrymen and to rely for our method mainly upon imparting to them a correct interpretation of the facts of their history, past and present. (Vol. 1, no. 1, p.6).

By a "correct interpretation" Connolly intended a Marxist analysis, but with all the limits of the Marxism in which he had developed in Scotland. He makes explicit claims about the method to be applied in approaching Irish history. Again in The Harp he writes:

> The Harp was established to show a more excellent way, to show how a socialist philosophy for Irishmen can be deduced from Irish history and ought to be so deduced; instead of the other method of striving to make socialists of Irishmen by reciting to them the unfamiliar history of England and America. (Vol. 1, no. 6, p. 3).

In this approach to history two distinct tasks are confused. The first, which was central to Marx's work in *Das Kapital*, was to elucidate the laws and nature of capitalism in general. Marx used evidence from England in order to discover and illustrate these laws because England had pioneered industrial capitalism and best revealed its workings. However, in interpreting the concrete experience of particular countries, it was necessary to proceed by rigorously applying political economy as only one part of the broader method of historical materialism in each national context. This second task requires great conceptual clarity and a concrete grounding in the Marxist theory of the national question, the land question, historic modes of production, ideology and religion, forms of class organisation and class struggle. The purpose for Marxists throughout is to lay the basis for a revolutionary programme that is truly concrete in local conditions. It is in this context that we must measure Connolly's interpretation of Irish history.

The misconception which already looms in Connolly's definition of this task—and which emerges fully in his historical writings, is his belief that a "socialist philosophy" can be "deduced" from Irish history. This summary formula is already at odds with the Marxist approach to history. In his own first work on Irish history, *Erin's Hope* (1897), we find him acknowledging the conflict between the analysis to be made by the "sympathetic" student and the scientific materialist analysis of the "ardent student of sociology", i.e Marxism:

> The ardent student of sociology, who believes that the progress of the human race through the various economic stages of communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and wage slavery, has been but a preparation for the higher ordered society of the future; that the most industrially advanced countries are but, albeit often unconsciously, developing the social conditions which, since the break-up of universal tribal communism, have been rendered historically necessary for the inauguration of a new and juster economic order, in which social, political and national antagonism will be unknown, will perhaps regard Irish adherence to clan ownership at such a comparatively recent date as the 17th Century as evidence of retarded economical development, and therefore a real hindrance to progress. But the sympathetic student of history, who believes in the possibility of a people by political intuition anticipating the lessons afterwards revealed to them in the sad school of experience, will not be indisposed to join with the ardent Irish patriot in his lavish expressions of admiration for the sagacity of his Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic organisation of the Irish clan the more perfect organisation of the free society of the future. (*Erin's Hope*, pp 6-7).

The implications of this are radical. He admits that a scientific analysis would conclude that Irish social development had been held back historically, but that a "sympathetic" analysis would reach a very different conclusion.

In *The Harp* he refers to two sets of impressions we all supposedly carry with us—one from our own life experiences and the other from a racial memory of the past—and writes:

> We of the Harp and the Irish Socialist Federation believe in uniting both sources of influences upon our side in showing our fellow countrymen and women that the history of the Irish race combines with the history of the working class in pointing to the workers' republic—a society based on the ownership by all of the means by which all exist, as the true goal of our endeavours, the promised-land of our 1000 year journey in the wilderness. (Vol. 1, no. 6, p.4).

Here we see him accept the framework of Irish nationalist historiography instead of investigating history from the Marxist standpoint of the development of the forces of production, diverse social classes, modes of production and exchange and, especially, distinct historical epochs. As against the materialist method, his approach is idealist. Although he does seek to apply the concept of class struggle to Irish history, he fails to correctly identify or describe the different forms of class struggle but reduces them all to expressions of Irish 'labour' whatever the period.

Centrally, he lends a purpose or teleology to Irish history. He holds that

there is from early times a direction and an inner movement in history towards the socialist system. As a consequence he assimilates all the struggles of "the real Irish", against Norman feudal invaders, English mercantilist colonisers, British capitalist domination, 20th century imperialism and native capitalism. The idealised, abstract, 1000-year struggle would end in the achievement of socialism and the recovery of the supposedly communal and democratic life of pre-Norman Ireland. Further, he dissolves the distinction between the toiling peasant classes of different epochs and the modern working class, composing them into one social force under the name of an Irish "nation" supposedly existing since Celtic times. For Connolly, this "nation" by "political intuition" and the "instinctive racial sagacity of the Celt" anticipated socialism and might have, so to speak, leaped over the capitalist stage of development were it not for the alien importation of capitalist social relations in property. This is a classically Populist position.

For Marx and Engels history is the progressive unfolding of the possibilities of human society, a development driven by conflict, from the more primitive to the more advanced, a movement which they saw as capable, however, of suffering reverses. Transition to a more advanced form of society always pivots on the conflict between the new *forces of production* (new classes and technical means) growing up in the old social formation, and the *social relations of production* (the forms of control and ownership) which increasingly hold back the new development. Marx and Engels understood "primitive communism" as a society unable yet to create a surplus of wealth which could be the basis for a privileged ruling class to crystallize. Primitive communism necessarily gave way to class society—chattel slavery, feudalism, or the Asiatic mode of production. Marxism shows how this is a historically progressive development, just as it understands the transition to capitalism from feudalism as a qualitative step forward for mankind.

Even if it were true that a Gaelic-Celtic primitive communism persisted until broken up by a Norman-British invasion 'importing' a system of private property—and we shall see that Marx himself refutes this—it would be totally foreign to Marxism to lament nostalgically over this inevitability or to rail against the emergence of private property as a cause of regret and woe as does Connolly:

> In Ireland it was private property in land that was the original and abiding cause of all our woes. (*The Harp*, Vol. 1, no. 5, p.3).

Celtic "primitive communism" is portrayed as superior to feudal private property. Even more, it was superior in Connolly's perspective to the capitalism which was later to replace feudalism in Ireland as the dominant mode of production. In this fundamentally populist revision the materialist analysis of Irish history is reduced to the repeated application of an idealist schema of which the following is the most concise expression:

> The history of Ireland ever since the English invasion has been one long history of a conflict between common property represented by the Irish and private property represented by the English". (*The Harp*, Vol. 2, no. 11, p.1).

In this conception of historical progress the future consists of a retrieval of the idealised images of a primitive past. In his *Woodquay Ward Election Address in Jan. 1903,* he wrote:

> There is only one remedy for the slavery of the working class and that remedy is the socialist republic, a system of society in which the land and all the houses, railways, factories, canals, workshops and everything necessary for work shall be owned and operated as common property much as the land of Ireland was owned by the clans of Ireland before England introduced the capitalist system amongst us at the point of a sword. (*Workers Republic* collection, p.45).

Connolly actually acknowledged that Irish society would, if left to itself, have developed through its own stages of feudalism and capitalism but for the foreign conquest. But, because it didn't, he mistakenly makes an *exception* of Ireland from historical materialist analysis, applying instead a nationalist and populist plebeian perspective to deduce a "socialist philosophy of Irish history". Lalor equally looked backwards and idealised the past to find a vision of a harmonious society that might escape the ravages of capitalist development but he looked back only to the small scale producers of early capitalism in general, artisans and peasants, and not to ancient Ireland.

Marxism in Russia developed its materialist analysis only in the fight against the populist and nationalist intelligentsia. The 'father of Russian Marxism', Plekhanov, fought against the abstract schematism of the populist Tikhomirov in terms that could apply equally to Connolly:

> We have already seen that in his opinion history has some kind of independent abstract "movement towards the socialist system"; given such a "movement" one can with impunity "criticise" all the motive powers and springs which first compelled progressive mankind "to face with sober senses their real conditions of life and their relations with their kind". (Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Vol. 1, p.195).

Marxism sees no such abstract movement. The "motive powers and springs" of material necessity and social conflict alone can drive history ultimately forward. The historical 'process' in any epoch is nothing more than the actual contradictions and conflicts stemming from the material realities of class society. Tikhomorov was basing his historical schema on the populist premise that inherent qualities in pre-capitalist Russia would allow it to evolve directly into socialism. The foundations of this view were laid by Alexander Herzen in the middle of the 19th century. Herzen, one of the founders of Russian populism, wrote that Russia was exceptional in possessing a social system that pointed directly towards socialism:

> Strictly speaking, the Russian people only began to be acknowledged after the 1830

> Revolution. People saw with astonishment that the Russians, though indifferent, incapable of tackling any political questions, were nearer to the new social system by their way of life than all the European peoples … To retain the village commune and give freedom to the individual, to extend the self government of the village and volost to the towns and the whole state, maintaining national unity—such is the question of Russia's future, i.e the question of the very antinomy whose solution occupies and worries minds in the West. (Plekhanov, Our Differences, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Vol. 1, p.130).

Connolly's historical schema contains striking parallels. He too detected a socialist future, by-passing capitalism, in Ireland's pre-capitalist past, similarly blinded to the historically progressive though limited character of bourgeois nationalist movements in Ireland. It led him to a wholesale distortion of the nature of Pre-Norman Ireland.

Marx on Pre-Norman Ireland

In the writings now published in English as *The Ethnological Notebooks*, Marx made an incisive analysis of pre-Norman Ireland in which his characteristic thoroughness in going over the available sources arrives at a radically different conclusion to Connolly.

In looking at pre-Norman Ireland Connolly focuses on what he considered to be the social relations of production, with communal ownership of land as the exclusive form of property. This defines Gaelic society overall as "communal" and "democratic". Other forces of production e.g. mills, looms, weavers etc. he merely mentions in passing. Marx also was aware of the existence of tribal forms of land tenure on a very large scale in pre-Norman Ireland:

> The tenure in land in Ireland was essentially a tribal or family right … all the members of a tribe of family in Ireland had an equal right to their appropriate share of the land occupied by the whole. (*The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, [*EN*] L. Krader, (ed.), p.304)
>
> All the unappropriated waste-lands are in a more especial way the property of the tribe as a whole and no portion can theoretically be subjected to more than a temporary occupation. (*EN* p.289)
>
> [Abbreviations and non-English phrases in these multi-lingual notebooks of Marx have been rendered into English in all the excerpts quoted.]

In order to characterise the dominant mode of production and the social formation based on it, Marx examined all salient forces of production—not just land, but factors such as cattle which greatly determined the productivity of land. He also examined the social relations of production—and the associated relations between the different classes which he points to in pre-Norman Ireland. Connolly makes do with a timeless schema of communal ownership and egalitarianism which comes to ruin only at the hands of the invader's alien

system. Marx's writings, by contrast, are rich in analysis of the new forces of production giving rise to new social relations which become pitted in class struggle and war against the remnants of communal control of land. He shows that these remnants were being actively challenged and already far advanced in decay by the time the *Senchus Mor* was written.

Marx notes that the growing power of chieftains in Ireland had transformed them into developing feudal lords before the oldest texts known were written, i.e chiefly the *Senchus Mor*. He followed the scholar Whitley Stokes in attributing the *Senchus* to the 11th century but later scholarship has placed them much earlier, most probably dating from the 8th century. Connolly, on the other hand, suggests that an ancient classless society was not extinguished until the Cromwellian plantations in the 17th century, more than 800 years after the *Senchus Mor* was written. Marx notes of the emergent Irish feudalism:

> Even according to the Irish texts, apparently oldest, much of the tribal territory appears to have been permanently alienated to the sub-tribes, families or dependent chiefs. The glosses and commentaries show that before they were written this process had gone very far indeed. The power of the Chief grows first through the process elsewhere called "commendation", through which the free tribesman becomes "his man" and remains in a state of dependence having various degrees; further through his increasing authority over the waste-lands of the tribal territory and from the servile or semi-servile colonies he plants there; finally from the material strength he acquires through the numbers of his immediate retainers and associates, most of whom stand to him in more or less servile relations. (*EN*, p.294).

By referring to "commendation" Marx is drawing out the similarities to European feudalism in which a vassal was a "commended man".

Repeatedly, Marx notes that availability of land was not an economic problem in itself:

> The difficulty—in ancient Ireland—was not to obtain land but the means of cultivating it. The great owners of cattle were the various chiefs, whose primitive superiority to the other tribesmen in this respect was probably owing to their natural functions as military leaders of the tribe. On the other hand it appears to be entailed by the Brehon laws that the chiefs were pressed by the difficulty of finding sufficient pasture for their herds. They got their growing power over the waste land through particular groups which they dominated, but the most fruitful portions of the tribal territory were apparently those which the free tribesmen occupied. Hence the system of giving and receiving stock to which two subtracts of the *Senchus Mor* are devoted. (*EN*, p.297).

What then were the means of making productive the land one possessed or could control? There were implements, oxen—the tractor of the iron age—and human toilers. The latter included tenants-at-will ("fuidhirs" broken from their own tribes); "sen-chleithe" or hereditary serfs; varying numbers of slaves at the base of society; and different types of vassals resting on this base. Marx gives detailed consideration to cattle, oxen, tenants-at-will, hereditary serfs, base and free tenants and vassalage relationships. He draws a picture of a

quickening transition from decaying clan society to a native Irish feudalism.

In his analysis, cattle—both stock in general and oxen—play the role of 'fief' in binding vassals to their overlords in this period of transition. In tillage they served as instruments of production and sources of manure. When distributed to vassals by clan chiefs who were developing into feudal lords they were the basis for a return of rent in kind while allowing the vassal the means of subsistence:

> Horned cattle showed their greatest value when groups of men settled on spaces of land and betook themselves to the cultivation of food grain. First they were valued for their flesh and milk, but still in very early times a distinct special importance belonged to them as instrument or medium of exchange. In Brehon laws horned cattle figure as medium of exchange; fines, dues, rents and returns are calculated in livestock, not exclusively in kine, but nearly so. They constantly refer to two standards of value, 'sed' and 'cumhal'; 'cumhal' could originally have meant a female slave, but 'sed' is plainly used for amount or quantity of livestock. But later cattle were primarily valued for their use in tillage, their labour and their manure. (*EN*, p.297).

Thus vassals in turn had the means of imposing the same kind of fief on the serfs below them. The role of stock in establishing feudal bonds between social classes and transforming free tribesmen into vassals is referred to as follows:

> Thus the Chiefs appear in the Brehon laws as perpetually giving stock and the tribesmen as receiving it. By taking stock the free Irish tribesman becomes the *Ceile* or Kyle, the vassal or man of his Chief, owing him not only rent but service and homage. The exact effects of commendation are thus produced. (*EN* p.298)

The deepening of this dependency varied and gave rise to higher and lower vassalage—to Saer-Stock and Daer-Stock. These classes are compared to the 'free' and 'higher base' tenants of the English feudal manor. He describes these classes graphically:

> The Saer-Stock tenant receives only a limited amount of stock from the Chief, remains a freeman, retains his tribal rights in their integrity; the normal period of his tenancy was 7 years and at the end of it he became entitled to the cattle which he had in his possession. In the meantime he had the advantage of employing them in tillage, and the Chief received the growth and increase (i.e. the young and the manure) and milk. Similarly it is expressly laid down that the Chief is entitled to homage and manual labour as well; manual labour is explained to mean the service of the vassal in reaping the Chief's harvest and in assisting to build his castle or fort; it is stated that in lieu of manual labour, the vassal might be required to follow his Chief to the wars.
>
> Daer-stock tenancy arose when either any large addition to the stock deposited with the Saer-stock tenant occurred or an unusual quantity was accepted in the first instance by the tribesman. The Daer-stock tenant had parted with some portion of his freedom and his duties are invariably referred to as very onerous… If the Chief placed three heifers with a tenant he became entitled to the calf, the refections—i.e. the right of the Chief who had given the stock to come with a company of a certain number and feast at the Daer-stock tenant's house, at particular periods, for a fixed number of days—and the labour. This rent in kind or food rent had in this, its most archaic form, nothing to do with the

> value of the tenant's land, but solely to the value of the Chief's stock deposited with the tenant; it evolved later into a rent payable in respect of the tenant's land. The most onerous impositions on the Daer-stock tenant were the refections. (*EN*, pp 298-9).

The rising nobility hastened the dissolution of communal land ownership by planting numerous displaced tribesmen as tenants-at-will on waste-lands. The more such tenants came into existence the greater became the control of the chiefs over these lands. Relations between the nobles and the free tenantry, unlike the vassalage relations based on giving stock, involved few ties of mutual obligation. Consequently, such tenants could fall into serfdom if they lost their tenure. Indeed, it became common for dispossessed tribesmen to fall directly into serfdom:

> The most crucial fraction of those classes which the Chief settled on the unappropriated tribal lands (were) those called *Fuidhirs*—strangers and fugitives from other territories, in fact men who had broken the original tribal bond which gave them a place in the community. It is evident from the Brehon law that this class is very numerous; they speak on various occasions about the desertion of their lands by families or portions of families. In certain circumstances the rupture of the tribal bond and the flight of those who break it were eventualities handled by the law.
>
> The responsibility of tribes, sub-tribes and families for the crimes of their members … might be prevented by compelling a member of the group to withdraw from its circle; and the Book of Aicill gives the legal procedure which is to be observed in the expulsion, the tribe paying certain fines to the Chief and the Church and proclaiming the fugitive. The result was probably to fill the country with "broken men" and these could find a home and protection by becoming Fuidhir tenants; everything which tended to disturb the Ireland of the Brehon Laws tended to multiply this particular class. The Fuidhir tenant was exclusively dependent on the Chief and only connected to the tribe through the latter; the Chief was moreover responsible for them. They cultivated his land and were, thus, the first tenants-at-will known to Ireland … On the other hand the Chief had a major interest in increasing Fuidhir tenants. One of the tracts says "He brings in Fuidhirs to increase his wealth". The interests really injured were those of the tribe which suffered as a body by the curtailment of the waste land available for pasture. (EN, pp 301-2).

The fuidhir as a type of tenant-at-will and another of the type, the "bothach"—who had probably been driven down to his status by the lack of enough land and cattle for economic self-sufficiency—were freer to move than the vassals in base-clientship as they could part with their lord at any time by giving due notice that they proposed to abandon their holding, and surrendering two-thirds of the product of their husbandry. But they were more likely to move downwards into the class at the base of Irish feudalism—as with feudalism elsewhere—the hereditary serfs or *sen-chleithe*. McNicholl, a modern historian of the period, writes that "the *sen chleithe* was bound to the land and passed with it when alienated as an appurtenance." He continues:

> Lower yet was slave, male or female, a chattel whose owner possessed the power of life or death over him or her; yet not quite such a chattel that he could be given in fief like cattle. With him ranked the prisoner taken in war who had not been ransomed, who was a much as his captor's mercy as the slave. (G. MacNicholl, *Ireland Before the Vikings*,

p.68).

Connolly did, at least once, acknowledge slavery in Pre-Norman Ireland, in 1908 in The *Irish Masses in History, (Socialism and Nationalism* collection, p.84). It is never reconciled, however, with his repeated view of Gaelic society as communal-democratic without reference to social classes.

The process of forcefully appropriating waste land and colonising it with tenants-at-will gave way to new groupings and relations that undermined clan society. The Brehon legal forms both disguised the realities of feudal exploitation and provided the framework through which it actually came into existence.

The chief who "gave stock", i.e made vassals of the recipients, was not always of the same tribe as those who received it:

> Brehon law sought to place barriers in the way of establishing this vassalage relation between a tribesman and a strange Chief. But there are abundant admissions that this happened. Every nobleman is assumed to be as a rule rich in stock and to have an interest in dispersing his herds by the practice of giving stock. The enriched peasant, the Bo-aire, had Ceiles who accepted stock from him. Hence the new groups formed in this way were often quite distinct from the old groups composed of the Chief and his clan. Again the new relation was not confined to Aires or noblemen and Ceiles (i.e. free but non noble tribesmen). The Bo-aire certainly, and apparently the higher Chiefs also, accepted stock on occasion from chieftains more exalted than themselves and in the end to "give stock" came to mean what was elsewhere meant by "commendation"…
>
> The natural growth of feudalism was not as some eminent recent writers have supposed, entirely distinct from the process by which the authority of the Chief over the tribe or village was extended, but rather formed part of it. While the unappropriated waste lands were falling into his domain, the villages or tribesmen were coming through natural agencies under his personal power. (*EN*, p.300).

This growing power and wealth could be used to subordinate increasing sections of the free tribesmen who occupied "the most fruitful portions of the tribal territory", by turning them into payers of rent in kind (cattle, milk, refections) and later payers of rent on their land.

Marx's understanding of pre-Norman Ireland, therefore, contradicts Connolly's assumptions about it. Connolly, guided by nationalistic sentiment, and with no more basis than a romanticised understanding of the Brehon Laws with their, conjured up an entire social order based on "democracy" lasting until about 1650. Even if it had existed, such terms in any case could not be applied to primitive society, as the basis of primitive-communal forms is understood by Marxism to lie in an economic scarcity so generalised that it compelled groups to co-operate and share the fruits of their toil for the sake of bare survival.

Marx investigated the oldest available literature with a critical scientific eye for evidence of the real social relations rooted in a newly developing mode of

production. He used the writings of scholars who had translated and commented on the oldest documents of pre-Norman Irish clan society. Marx concluded that Irish clan society had undergone rapid decay and replacement by the elements of a native feudalism before a date he assumed to be about 1100. With recent corrections in dating the old documents, Marx's view, corroborated by modern bourgeois scholarship, forces us to conclude that a feudal mode of production was in the ascendant a full three centuries or more before Norman feudalism penetrated the island, and all of eight centuries or more before the Gaelic chieftainships fell finally.

For Connolly the period from the Norman invasion in 1169 to the Cromwellian victory over the Gaelic resistance in the 1650s was a struggle between an imagined native system of communal property and a foreign so-called "feudal-capitalist" system of private property. The scientific view, however, shows that the conflict up until the War of the Roses and Tudor absolutism was between advanced Norman and English feudalism and a more primitive Irish feudalism.

The victory of the invader was made inevitable by the strengths of the Norman system. It had developed to the full the scope of military obligation as a service required of vassals and as a general levy on all free men. Irish feudalism, on the other hand, left the link between fief and military service more indeterminate. And in relation to the economic and social power of its rulers, the Anglo-Norman system had the advantage that when feudal tenures expired the fief lands were remitted to the Crown. In the Irish system there was the absence of any central "register" of titles though there is evidence of local chancery in the decade before the Anglo-Norman invasion. (*New History of Ireland,* Gill & McMillan, Vol 8, p.72). More importantly, vassalages could end, typically after seven years, without such remission. Thus was prevented the development of the kind of vast royal demesne enjoyed by the Anglo-Norman overlordship. Norman feudalism evolved a fully explicit rule of royal and noble succession whereas the native feudalism did not. Struggles over succession were the rule rather than the exception in Ireland.

The victory of the vastly superior Norman system of feudalism had its other side in the cultural assimilation of the Normans to Gaelic language and customs and the integration of many of the Irish chiefs into the new political order. Cultural assimilation of conquering invaders is not historically rare. It serves to underline, however, the similarity in essential property relations of the two social systems—both feudal class systems, both rooted in a similar mode of production based on the exploitative ownership of means of production of a similar kind.

Modern bourgeois study of Pre-Norman Ireland sharply contradicts the claims which Connolly, in contrast to Marx, took uncritically from the nationalist histories of his time. However in spite of assembling the evidence for it, most

modern Irish academics refuse to characterise the period in terms of its class nature and mode of production. The nationalist myths about Brehon-law Ireland thus continue unchallenged.

CHAPTER 4

THE IRISH BOURGEOIS REVOLUTION

Nations are the creation of the bourgeois epoch. In the *Communist Manifesto* we find their emergence described as follows:

> The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation. Independent, or but loosely connected, provinces with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, become lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff. (*Communist Manifesto*, Progress, p.48).

The creation of the "nation-state" and nationalist ideology are thus necessary elements of the bourgeoisie's programme for its own development. The nation-state becomes a key means, a market reservoir, for intensifying and concentrating the accumulation of capital. Thus, for Marx and Engels the "nation" only has meaning within a definite historical epoch, that of capitalist dominance.

Lenin defended this analysis of the nation-state slogan as specific to the epoch of the 'final victory of capitalism over feudalism':-

> What should be understood by that term—the self-determination of nations? Should the answer be sought in legal definitions deduced from all sorts of general concepts of law? Or is it rather to be sought in a historico-economic study of the national movements? … Throughout the world the period of the final victory of capitalism over feudalism has been linked with national movements. For the complete victory of commodity production the bourgeoisie must capture the home market… Unity and unimpeded development are of the most important conditions for genuinely free and extensive commerce on a scale commensurate with modern capitalism … Therefore, the tendency of every national movement is towards the formation of national states, under which these requirements of modern capitalism are best satisfied. The most profound economic factors drive towards this goal, and, therefore, for the whole of Western Europe, nay, for the entire civilised world the national state is typical and normal for the capitalist period. (Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self Determination*, pp 7 ff).

Nation-states with more than one language were possible also but were not so well adapted to the requirements of a developing capitalism; so that a common language did not in itself necessarily mark out a nation and certainly did not create nations. Historically underlying the development of national movements for self-determination is always the tendency of capitalistic development to concentrate and unify as explained in the Communist

Manifesto. Such development may in fact be transplanted into the colonies of capitalist nations and in the epoch of progressive capitalism was even capable of stimulating, as in the United States, economic independence from the former colonial power.

Increasingly, as colonial powers came to carve up the entire globe, the possibility of national bourgeoisies developing in the colonies as effective rivals in the world market was excluded. Thus a dependent or mainly commercial bourgeoisie, tended to predominate in imperialised nations. Necessarily, however, a bourgeoisie emerges in the colony, even if weakly developed. Inevitably it aspires to have the advantages of a national state, even though it may be incapable of or unwilling to struggle for self-determination.

Increasingly in the 20th century, weak colonial or semi-colonial bourgeois classes were unwilling to struggle against imperialism for the national democratic programme—land to the tiller, universal suffrage, Constituent Assembly, civil liberties etc. Sections of the petty-bourgeoisie of town or country, however, took up the fight for such a programme, often securing the revolutionary support of masses of peasants or workers—as recently in Zimbabwe, and Nicaragua. What is significant, however, is that the programmatic heart of those struggles never goes beyond the framework on an independent bourgeois nation state, a framework which can neither fundamentally alter national economic dependence on imperialism nor solve the problems of the working class or peasantry.

Socialists seeking to develop such mass struggle to its fullest potential, that is to give it the goals of working class power and socialism, need nevertheless to distinguish the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian tasks, even when they are effectively combined in the heat of popular struggle. Such an understanding is the key to effective tactics, but it demands a deep-going and historical understanding of national-democratic movements.

James Connolly's failure in this task, therefore, cannot be unconnected to his conception of the nation and nationalism. Failing to see the nation as the specific creation of the bourgeois epoch, he increasingly lost sight of the inherent bourgeois class character, and therefore the limits, of the revolutionary nationalist movement which roused the Irish labouring masses against British imperialism. As events after Connolly's death were to show, mass revolt under the revolutionary nationalist banner only succeeded in installing the bourgeoisie in power in an independent Free State in which the back of the working class was broken by Partition. Neither republicanism nor republican socialism to this day have overcome this confusion about the nation and the limits of the national struggle.

For him the nation was something that existed across all the epochs of Irish history—an essentially metaphysical and un-Marxist idea. He implies that a

communal and democratic nation exists long before the bourgeois epoch. This, he argues, is the basis of the national question and independence struggle:

> Its real origin and inner meaning lay in the circumstances that the the two opposing nations held fundamentally different ideas upon the vital question of property in land… But, whereas, in the majority of countries now called civilised, such primitive Communism had almost entirely disappeared before the dawn of history and had at no time acquired a higher status than that conferred by the social sanction of unlettered and uneducated tribes, in Ireland the system formed part of the well defined social organisations of a nation of scholars and students, recognised by Chief and Tanist, Brehon and Bard, as the inspiring principle of their collective life, and the basis of their national system of jurisprudence. (*Erin's Hope,* 1972, p.6) .

Thus, for Connolly, exceptional circumstances led to the establishment of an Irish nation-state prior to its subversion by English private property. In forging a putative link between the Irish Septs of medieval times and the urban proletariat of his own day, Connolly effectively ignores the reality of a bourgeois nationalist tradition:

> As the Irish septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they rejected or accepted the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by their loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers henceforward will base their fight for freedom, not upon the winning or losing the right to talk in an Irish parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops and farms upon which a people's bread and liberties depend. As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question, the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself, in the last analysis, into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production in Ireland. (*Labour in Irish History*, [LIIH] pp 134-135).

His idealised Irish nation therefore includes the modern labour movement, the 18th century revolutionary nationalists and even a 12th century landlord, Laurence O'Toole, Abbot of Glendalough and Archbishop of Dublin, who was chief witness to treaties treaties such as at Windsor between Irish Chiefs and Henry II:

> When the revolutionary nationalists threw in their lot with the Irish Land League and made the land struggle the basis of their warfare, they were not only placing themselves in touch once more with those inexhaustible quarries of material interests from which all the great Irish statesmen from Laurence O'Toole to Wolfe Tone drew the stones upon which they built their edifice of a militant Irish patriotic organisation, but they were also, consciously or unconsciously, placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of labour. (*Labour in Irish History*, pp 131-132).

The "national struggle" he therefore defines as having the same class content across all the epochs—the conflict of communal property with private property in the means of production. By defining the national struggle in these terms, the identity of interest between native capitalism and Irish nationalism is ignored. The class interest of the proletariat is falsely equated with a narrow

national interest. Consequently, he envisaged a strategic fusion of socialism and nationalism.

The Irish bourgeoisie is denied at any phase in Irish history. Connolly is forced to re-define revolutionary bourgeois figures, such as Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken and Robert Emmet as leaders of the Irish plebeian masses. These alone are seen as continuing the fight 'throughout all the ages' against feudal-capitalist and alien private property in the 1000-year journey to a classless society. No progressive content is discerned in the campaigns and programmes of constitutional nationalist leaders such as Grattan or O'Connell at any time, merely writing them off as heretics to the social struggles of the "real Irish".

In his most important work, Labour in Irish History, Connolly re-scripts the drama of Ireland's bourgeois-democratic revolution and re-casts the actors. His over-arching concern is to demonstrate that genuine Irish separatism took its inspiration from the collective interests of the toiling and propertyless masses at all times. This leads him to overlook the bourgeois character and limits of, most notably, the United Irishmen of Tone, Emmet etc., and to dress them in the garb of precursors of socialism.

Failure to acknowledge an indigenous Irish feudalism is followed by a refusal to recognise the emergence of an indigenous capitalist interest. The most that is conceded is that the implanted capitalism became 'disloyal' to British rule because of legislation restricting trade in the 18th century:

> Already by the outbreak of the Williamite war in the generation succeeding Cromwell, the industries of the North of Ireland had so far developed that the "Prentice Boys" of Derry were the dominating factor in determining the attitude of that city towards the contending English kings, and, with the close of that war, industries developed so quickly in the country as to become a menace to the capitalists of England who accordingly petitioned the King of England to restrict and fetter their growth, which they accordingly did. With the passing of this restrictive legislation against Irish industries, Irish capitalism became discontented and disloyal without, as a whole, the power or courage to be revolutionary. It was a re-staging of the ever-recurring drama of English invasion and Anglo-Irish disaffection, with the usual economic background. We have pointed out in a previous chapter how each generation of English adventurers settling upon the soil as owners, resented the coming of the next generation, and that their so-called Irish patriotism was simply inspired by the fear that they would be dispossessed in their turn as they had dispossessed others. What applies to the land-owning "patriots" applies also to the manufacturers. The Protestant capitalists, with the help of the English, Dutch and other adventurers, dispossessed the native Catholics and became prosperous; as their commerce grew it became a serious rival to that of England, and accordingly the English capitalists compelled legislation against it, and immediately the erstwhile "English Garrison in Ireland" became an Irish "patriot" party. (*LIIH*, p.51).

Here we find the emerging class of manufacturing capitalists in Ireland assimilated to the "ever-recurring" and "false" patriotism of landowning colons, i.e Anglo-Norman landlords. Certainly Irish capitalism was slow to reach

revolutionary conclusions. The point is, however, that viewed historically the developing bourgeoisie of the 18th century in Ireland represented the interests of a new, capitalist mode of production which was necessarily pitched into opposition against feudal and semi-feudal—and colonial—barriers wherever it met them. To portray it in the same terms as the land-holding aristocracy of the previous century is to miss the point that the aristocracy had quite opposite interests to the rising class of capitalists, had no interest in creating a home market, no interest in national independence, no desire for democracy or a Republic, or religious freedom. Moreover, across the continent of Europe in that period it was precisely the bourgeoisie which originated such slogans. The Irish capitalist class may have been, indeed was, at a greater disadvantage but it was nonetheless the rise of this class which provided the conditions for a modern movement for a democratic revolution. It was their rise, too, which created the appetite for the ideas beamed out from the American and French revolutionary ferments 1776-82, 1789-93.

Although forced to acknowledge the existence of capitalism in Ireland as early as the 17th century, Connolly was unable to understand its revolutionary and progressive character in that epoch because of his conception of a superior communal mode of production ruled by a democracy of the toilers. In his Introduction, he makes explicit his unusual focus on labour as the subject of history, as "making" Irish history:

> This book does not aspire to be a history of labour in Ireland; it is rather a record of labour in Irish history. For that reason the plan of the book has precluded any attempt to deal in detail with the growth, development or decay of industry in Ireland, except as it affected our general argument. That argument called for an explanation of the position of labour in the great epochs of our modern history, and with the attitude of Irish leaders to the hopes, aspirations and necessities of those who live by labour. (*LIIH*, p.124).

His concern to vindicate the honour of all the exploited propertyless classes on one side, as the "true" nation across the ages, set against the propertied classes on the other side as the betrayers or false patriots, is a wholly un-Marxist approach to history. Its commentaries on economic and social conditions at several points merely fill in the scene, as it were, for the drama of the toilers in Irish history. Thus, he continues:

> Occasionally, as when analysing the "prosperity" of Grattan's Parliament, and the decay of Irish trade following the Legislative Union in 1800, we have been constrained to examine the fundamental causes which make for the progress, industrially or commercially, of some nations and the retrogression of others. For this apparent digression no apology is made, and none is called for; it was impossible to present our readers with a clear historical position of labour at any given moment, without explaining the economic and political causes which contributed to make possible or necessary its attitude. (*LIIH*, pp 124-125).

His treatment does not systematically distinguish historical epochs and periods or analyse the development of classes in relation to the developing

mode of production. The absence of such a method allows him to intuitively insert labour's interests as the true content of the national struggle where Marxism has classically argued that it is the struggle of the bourgeoisie for the conditions most favourable to their exploitation of labour and accumulation of capital. From this standpoint, Connolly lumps together the patriotism of the 18th century bourgeoisie with the "Patriot Parliament" convened by King James II in 1689, and even the "patriotism" of the Anglo-Norman landlords who joined with native Irish landlords in the 1641 rebellion, as "ever-recurring" agents of a "feudalism-capitalist" and "foreign" system of private property.

His treatment of Swift, Molyneaux and Lucas, who actually prefigured the later bourgeois nationalism of the 18th century, is simply to dispatch them as mere repetitions of Sarsfield who had defended Anglo-Irish and Irish feudal property against the threat of William of Orange.

> Of the trio of patriots—Swift, Molyneaux and Lucas—it may be noted that their fight was simply a repetition of the fight waged by Sarsfield and his followers in their day—a change of persons and of stage costume truly, but no change of character; a battle between the kites and the crows. (*LIIH,* p.21).

Molyneaux's attack (1698) on the subjection of the Dublin Parliament of Cromwellian and Williamite interests, Swift's "seditious" proposal for the universal use of Irish manufactures (1720) and Lucas' claim for Ireland's equal entitlement to England's freedoms (1747-49) all express the development of nascent, capitalist interests in Ireland and their obstruction by English mercantilism in the 17th and 18th century. Their significance is entirely lost here as Connolly presents the transition to capitalism as just another example of English disaffection on Irish soil.

Eighteenth Century Republicanism

The rise of colonial bourgeois interests in Ireland under a patriotic flag is incomprehensible for Connolly, for whom Irish patriotism is inherently democratic and rooted in communal values. Instead of acknowledging that Irish patriotism is entirely consistent with the exploitation of Irish labour, Connolly feels compelled to redefine native capitalist interests as the English disease on Irish soil:

> The Irish Parliament was essentially an English institution; nothing like it existed before the Norman Conquest. In that respect it was on the same footing as landlordism, capitalism, and their natural-born child—pauperism. England sent a swarm of adventurers to conquer Ireland; having partly succeeded, these adventurers established a Parliament to settle disputes amongst themselves, to contrive measures for robbing the natives, and to prevent their fellow-tyrants who had stayed in England, from claiming the spoil. But in the course of time the section of land-thieves resident in England did claim a right to supervise the doings of the adventurers in Ireland, and consequently to control their Parliament. Hence arose Poyning's Law, and the subordination of Dublin Parliament to London Parliament. Finding this subordinate position of the Parliament

> enabled the English ruling class to strip the Irish workers of the fruits of their toil, the more far-seeing of the privileged class in Ireland became alarmed lest the stripping process should go too far, and leave nothing for them to fatten upon.
>
> At once they became patriots, anxious that Ireland—which in their phraseology, meant the ruling class in Ireland—should be free from the control of the Parliament in England. (*LIIH*, p.21).

In this way *Labour* writes off the Irish bourgeoisie as a class opposed to feudal aristocracy or capable of fighting for democracy or independence at any time in Irish history. It concentrates on key political figures in Irish history and draws a line between the constitutional reformers on the one hand (Grattan who entered the Irish Parliament in 1755 and O'Connell, active from 1799 to the 1840s) and the revolutionary democrats on the other hand, Wolfe Tone (1763-98), Robert Emmet (1779-1803), and later John Mitchel (1814-75). While the reformers are presented as representatives of the bourgeoisie and variously castigated for expressing anti-working class sentiments or being freethinkers, the revolutionaries are seen as instinctively representing the interests of the "real producers", the proletariat and peasantry. While a distinction must certainly be made between reformers and revolutionaries, Connolly was quite wrong to ascribe quasi-socialist views and motives to Tone, the United Irishmen or Emmet, or even to deny their bourgeois stamp.

Predictably dismissed, Grattan is seen by Connolly as the bourgeois archetype:

> It will be seen that Mr. Grattan was the ideal capitalist statesman; his spirit was the spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate. He cared more for the interests of property than for human rights or for the supremacy of any religion. (*LIIH*, p.39).

Certainly, Grattan was not a revolutionary—he was prepared to be rewarded by the Irish "Commons" for his role in the 1778-82 period; but neither was he the "spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate", or even of the developing bourgeoisie! He was initially a protégé of the aristocratic Earl of Charlemont (1728-99) and "Grattan's Parliament" (the House of Commons which took its popular name from him) was hardly more a Parliament of the bourgeoisie than of landowners on his account. By 1772 the English-appointed executive had directly usurped much of the power of patronage formerly in aristocratic hands. The Commons—since 1768 to be 'elected' every eight years—soon saw the rise of the reforming opposition movement. It included many lawyers, led by Henry Flood and joined by Grattan in 1775. This opposition attempted to resist the raising of Irish troops which might be used against the Americans, with whom they had sympathies. This Patriot Party's programme sought to copy the constitutional reforms won in England, a 'free constitution' for a 'Protestant nation' within a loyal colony. In this context Grattan was a bridging figure attempting to strike a balance between the interests of the propertied classes in Ireland, the landed aristocracy, and the merchant and manufacturing capitalists.

It was the American Revolution of 1775-79 which weakened the British 'mercantilist' policy of restricting Irish trade and required the raising of the Irish Volunteers for the defence of Ireland when Britain withdrew its armed forces for the American war. The Volunteers became a force for reform against the same mercantile restrictions on Irish trade as affected the other colonies. Grattan rowed with this tide and, with Charlemont, sought reforms under the pressure of the increasingly broad-based Volunteers. Free trade, the repeal of Poyning's Law of 1495 which made Irish Parliaments subject, and the repeal of the 1719 Statute Six of George I subordinating Irish court judgements, were reforms which could have been enforced by the creation of a permanent force out of the Volunteers. But the success of the American Revolution and the re-constitution of the English garrison in Ireland by 1783 presented a formidable challenge to the Irish propertied classes. Instead of having a showdown they accepted a temporary retreat. Indeed, from 1783 the more conservative wing—the aristocracy and conservative elements of the bourgeoisie—defected, and Grattan impotently sought to straddle the divide. But the manufacturing bourgeoisie had yet to stamp its mark on future events.

For Connolly, on the contrary, the Irish bourgeoisie may be written off by 1783. The disarming of the different corps of the Irish Volunteers—by stealth, agreement or the threat and use of force—is for him the final watershed in the separatism of native capitalism as a whole:

> … the capitalist class did not feel themselves strong enough to hold the ship of state against the aristocracy on the one hand and the people on the other, they felt impelled to choose the only alternative—viz., to elect to throw in their lot with one or other of the contending parties. They chose to put their trust in the aristocracy, abandoned the populace, and as a result were deserted by the class whom they had trusted, and went down into bankruptcy and slavery with the class they had betrayed. (*LIIH*, p.32).

In this manner, he dispatches the Irish capitalist class in general. He redefines the whole subsequent period up to 1798 as the convergence of the workers and peasants of Catholic and Protestant religions, independent of and in opposition to indigenous capitalism and all propertied interests, under the banner of a democratic independent Republic in which the social question of the real producers would be solved. With the dissolution of the November-December 1783 convention of delegates of the Irish Volunteers, Connolly effectively ignores the subsequent evolution of the Volunteers into a more republican and revolutionary organisation which was ultimately to fuse with the United Irishmen after 1791.

He also ignores the fact that a parliamentary minority continued to operate as an opposition in Dublin's House of Commons and that Grattan was among this opposition grouping. The scene is set for his characterisation of a straightforward regrouping of the toilers on one side and the aristocracy on the other, the age-old story: "The working men fought, the capitalists sold out and the lawyers bluffed". (*LIIH*, p.37).

The chapter on the Volunteers is closed in 1783 and the new theme of plebeian democratic republicanism is opened with the "contemporaneous" founding of the United Irishmen—though it was another seven years before that organisation was founded. He sets out to heighten the contrast between two trends: the Volunteers in the period of the parliamentary reforms of Grattan & Co., as against the subsequent revolution and insurrection led by the United Irishmen.

For Connolly, the possibility of a revolutionary wing of the Irish bourgeoisie was incompatible with his a priori schema. The Irish capitalist class might temporarily model themselves on the French Girondins, but never on the Jacobins. For him, Jacobinism was not a political expression of the bourgeois revolution, but uniquely a manifestation of the toiling masses in their own interest.

By counterposing two supposedly contemporaneous trends in this way instead of recognising that a revolutionary bourgeois movement had yet to assert itself, within the limits and contradictions of development in a colonial Ireland, Connolly strains to deprive the period up to the Act of Union in 1800 of its bourgeois-revolutionary character, the better to deny to the bourgeoisie of his own day any claim on the aspiration for democratic, independent nationhood. His earnest intentions, however, did not cancel the dangers of re-writing history. For, in arguing that the capitalists in 1783 "sold out" while only the "working men fought", he wrongly transposes the substance and goals, represented by both the Volunteers and United Irishmen, from the capitalist class, whose interests they crystalized, to the working class and tenants. The attempt to portray Irish history in these particular class terms wrongly simplifies the actual class relations of emerging capitalism. Hence national secession, secular political organisation, democracy and equality—which he recognises in the French revolution as the war-cries of revolutionary capitalism—are presented in Ireland as generic slogans of Irish labour.

He places specific stress on the question of universal franchise and the role of the "men of no property", assiduously portrays Tone as their champion as the basis for demarcating him from the reformers in Grattan's Parliament. To this unsubstantiated stress he appends a promise of significant property transformations, attributed to the United Irishmen in general and Tone, Thomas Addis Emmet and Robert Emmet in particular.

We are fortunate that Marx made a detailed study of the period from the founding of the Irish Volunteers to the Act of Union. He shows the continuity in the course of events and, in notes which are considerably more detailed than Connolly's, he also brings out the concrete phases into which the period as a whole may be divided. Early on in these studies, far from ending the history of the Irish Volunteers in 1783, he writes:

> At this place, it will be interesting to anticipate the whole history of this Volunteer force, because, in fact, it is the history of Ireland to the moment when, since 1795, on the one hand, the *general popular national and constitutional movement*, represented by them, stripped of its *merely national* character and merged into a *truly revolutionary movement*, and, on the other hand, the British Government changed secret intrigue for brutal force intended to bring about, and succeeded in bringing about the Union of 1800, i.e, the annihilation of Ireland as nation… . (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.173-4).

From its foundation in 1778, due to the removal of the British garrison to fight the American Revolution, until the interregnum following 1883 when the American war ended, Marx describes the Volunteers as follows:

> In its first formation the Volunteers, the armed Protestantism of Ireland, embrace all vital elements of all classes … Their first object, emancipation from *commercial* and *industrial fetters* which the mere mercantile jealousy of England had thrown around them. Then *national independence*. Then *reform of the parliament* and *Catholic Emancipation* as one of the conditions of National Resurrection! Their official organisation and the disasters of England give them new strength but lay also the germ of their ruin, subordinating them to a weak bigot, aristocratic Whig, the *Earl of Charlemont*… (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.174)..

In spite of the betrayal by Charlemont, when in 1783 in Dublin the Volunteer Convention expressed its demands for "Free Trade or speedy Revolution" (Napper Tandy), the Volunteers remained important, though weakened, until 1791. Marx refers to it in this period as the "armed and popular support of the *national and reforming opposition (minority)* of the House of Commons"

Unlike Connolly, Marx refers to a split between the progressive part and the "reactionary part" of the Irish bourgeoisie after 1783: "The aristocratic element and the reactionary part of the middle class withdrew, the popular element prevailing."

Precisely the same elements of the radical bourgeoisie who had sustained the Volunteers were to found the Society of United Irishmen in 1791. Marx refers not only to Tone, but also to the bourgeois figures in Dublin and more especially in the industrial North-East. At the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 the reforming elements were "feeble and dispirited" but a "different race of men … began to act upon the public". He refers to John Keogh, "a strong, rough, sagacious merchant, and men of his stamp" who, in Dublin, "sent the Catholic nobles flying in slavish dread". In Belfast "Neilson, Russell, McCracken headed a Protestant party, which advocated reform but began soon to think of Republicanism" (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.175). With Tone they founded the United Irishmen in 1791. Marx continues, characterising the new wave of agitation in the 1790s as bourgeois-revolutionary, as follows:

> From this moment, the movement of the Volunteers merges into that of the United Irishmen. The Catholic question becomes that of the Irish People. The question was no longer to remove the disabilities from the Catholic upper and middle classes, but to *emancipate the Irish peasant*, for the vast part Catholic. The question became social as

> to its matter, assumed *French revolutionary principles*, as to its form, remained national. (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.175).

The "social" question here is the rights of the tenantry to develop their agriculture as independent producers governed by the market, freed from the parasitic control of the landlords against whom they were pitted, i.e the radical bourgeois programme for the peasantry. Marx was never ambiguous about the strictly bourgeois character of "French political principles"!

The Volunteers and United Irishmen merged from 1791, with the former in the role of mass organisation, military and political. The movement took on a distinctly Jacobin character as reflected in a manifesto issued by "The Irish Jacobins of Belfast to the Public" (Ireland & the Irish Question, p.210). It was the Presbyterian manufacturers who at this time were the leading element in the North and who openly supported another Volunteer convention in Dungannon in February 1793. This Convention, not mentioned in Connolly's history, rested its support on a mass base exceeding one million. The demands it raised were still logically connected to those of the reform period, and centred on Catholic Emancipation and reform of the parliament. At that time, while the total population was some five million, 90 individuals—aristocrats and higher clergy—controlled the "Commons" majority. The Volunteers and United Irishmen still sought to work through the minority in the Commons to articulate their demands as long as possible. Particularly noteworthy here was John P. Curran (1750-1817) who defended the United Irishmen when repression was stepped up from 1793. Given the nature of the parliament it is clear that the bourgeoisie lacked political power. The attempts to win reform—broaden representation in the House and gain parliamentary independence—were driving them towards a showdown with the British state, its Dublin executive and a reconstructed militia of yeomen led by the conservative aristocracy.

The government's response was to attempt to buy off the most conservative propertied element of the Catholics while doubling their coercion against the Presbyterian bourgeoisie in the North, thus splitting the movement and facilitating the introduction of an Act of Union as a "final settlement". This move towards a Union had been brewing in 1785 in the form of Orde's Proposals, which aimed to create a common tariff around Britain and Ireland and to tax Ireland for the maintenance of England's imperial navy against French, Spanish and American rivalry. The propositions were dropped—amid a close division in the Irish Commons and threats from Curran that if passed they would be answered not merely "by words". The Proposals then merged into the ulterior plan for a Union when the determination of the Irish manufacturing bourgeoisie was broken.

He passes over this stand-off and similarly ignores the manifest opposition of the "bourgesses of Dublin" in the mayoralty "elections" of 1790 when the manufacturing citizens of the city's Common Council rejected eight successive

"handed down" candidates selected by the corrupt aristocratic Privy Council, and eventually elected their own man, Howison. In the thick of these events was Napper Tandy, whose "Liberty Corps"—made up of the plebeian ranks of the Volunteers in Dublin—Connolly singled out for praise in the events of 1783 (LIIH, pp 36-37). While Tandy's followers were the Irish approximation to the sans-culottes element in the French Revolution, it is notable that he convened a meeting of "freemen and freeholders" to back the election of Howison and turn the newly emboldened Dublin merchants, manufacturers and the nascent bourgeois peasants (freehold farmers) towards a more militant republicanism on the lines of the Northern movement. Tandy's meeting—the substance of whose resolution was a clear declaration in favour of independence, economic protection and the rule of the whole citizenry, a resolution to alter the compromising attitude of previous years—was chaired by Hamilton Rowan (1751-1834), soon to suffer coercion and imprisonment as secretary of the Dublin United Irishmen.

It was events such as these which led to the re-arming of the Volunteers, the foundation of the United Irishmen and the Dungannon Convention of 1793. The platform was explicitly that of bourgeois democratic revolutionaries, inspired by the French revolution in particular. The transformation taking place was not a shift from the bourgeoisie to the workers and peasants, even though the artisans, labourers and tenantry were a vital popular component, but the crystalizing-out of a revolutionary bourgeois republican method instead of reliance on parliamentary reform, for the same goals. As Marx put it:

> The vain attempt—in 1790-91—of the parliamentary minority against Government corruption proves on the one hand its increase, on the other the influence of the revolution of 1789. It also shows why, at last, the foundation of the United Irishmen in 1791, since all Parliamentary action proved futile, and the majority a mere tool in the hands of the Government. (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.198).

Connolly's version of the origins and nature of the United Irishmen differs considerably in that he sees it as based on a union of workers and peasants in opposition to the aristocracy with the 'middle class' as effectively a null factor or outright betrayer.

> The middle-class growing up in the midst of the national struggle, and at one time, as in 1798, through the stress of economic rivalry of England, almost forced into the position of revolutionary leaders against the despotism of their industrial competitors, have now also bowed the knee to Baal …
>
> The Protestant workman and tenant was learning that the Pope of Rome was a very unreal and shadowy danger compared with the social power of his employer or landlord, and the Catholic tenant was awakened to a perception of the fact that under the new social order the Catholic landlord represented the Mass less than the rent roll. The times were propitious for a union of the two democracies of Ireland. They had travelled from widely different points through the valleys of disillusion and disappointment to meet at last by the unifying waters of a common suffering. (*LIIH*, pp 52-53).

The French Revolution, Connolly tells us, acts upon the minds of the "Protestant workers" and their Catholic counterpart. Wolfe Tone comes to the fore in this union of these two toilers' democracies. Tone's attitude and relation to the bourgeoisie are passed over, simply stressing his total disavowal of any role for the aristocracy and implicitly simplifying Tone's understanding of the class dynamics of the time. Connolly, after blanking out the bourgeois interest, continues:

> It will thus be seen that Tone built up his hopes upon a successful prosecution of a class war, although those who pretend to imitate him today raise up their hands in holy horror at the mere mention of the phrase (*LIIH*, p.54).

While he affirms the international character of the thought of the United Irishmen, its American and continental roots and ultimate hopes for a harmony of nations which must first be rooted in freedom to secede, he wrongly assumes this outlook belonged exclusively to the toiling masses—"the real people of Ireland—the producers".

He attempts to show that workers and peasants were the exclusive agents of revolution in '98 and the subsequent 1803 Emmet conspiracy, particularly by reference to the vital role of "weavers, tanners and shoemakers" in the Coombe district of Dublin in 1803. Most of these were deeply oppressed at the time and thousands had been unemployed in the years before the first reforms of the 1780s. They were oppressed and exploited by the rent they paid for equipment and the cost of raw materials supplied by big merchants. But in form most of them were of the artisan class, commodity producers, and despite growing attempts to organise themselves in craft unions they still saw their main hope in ending the dead weight of English mercantilism, i.e in national independence and protection. Many of them feared the very idea of industrial revolution, so that while they had definite social interests to express they were in no position to transcend the capitalist system but rather felt the need to free Irish capitalism from the shackles of landlordism and trade restrictions in the hope of improving their own situation.

Connolly presents these forces as equivalent to the industrial proletariat and attributes to them an "internationalist" attitude to national independence. In this context, Emmet is presented as a champion of political and social emancipation of the working class without any analysis of the political, class content of his politics. He is characterised, therefore, not on the basis of his radical, bourgeois programme but on the basis of the social forces roused in his ill-fated insurrection of 1803. Connolly's anachronistic picture of the 'working class' only compounds the error. The artisans and the 18th century labourers were not comparable to the industrial workers of a century later whose numbers, organisation and developed antagonism to the employers made them an independent class force in society.

Labour in Irish History opens a chapter on the Untied Irishmen with Wolfe Tone's most quoted words—most quoted because they have become a talisman of Irish 'republican socialism'.

> Our freedom must be had at all hazards. If the men of property will not help us they must fall; we will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community—the men of no property. (*LIIH*, p.43).

With this as the central motto, an image of Wolfe Tone as a man utterly opposed to the tradition of the reforming bourgeoisie of 1778-83 is carved out by Connolly. He is depicted as the representative of the toiling producers in pursuit of fundamentally different goals. Connolly quotes from Tone's criticisms of the "1782 Revolution" (in *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 1791) such that the reformers might almost appear to be the object of Tone's revolution.

But Tone's polemic is highly qualified. His own development over time from a Grattanite to a revolutionary democrat illustrates the continuity in the rising struggle of the Irish bourgeoisie. Tone refers to some of the reformers as "leaders [who] were of high integrity and some of consummate wisdom…" Referring to the compromises of 1783, he suggests: "The minds of men were not at that time perhaps ripe for exertions which a thousand circumstances that have since happened cry aloud for" (McDermott, *Wolf Tone and His Times*, Anvil, Tralee, 1968, p.68). This might seem like mere tactical rhetoric during a dramatic turn of events toward more militant republicanism. However, Tone, in the self-same pamphlet, declares his allegiance to Ireland, and to the King, in whose service he would gladly spill his blood (McDermott, p.70). Defence of the Catholics, moreover, was clearly limited to enfranchisement of the "Liberal" classes on the basis of which property would be defended:

> The wealthy and moderate party of their own persuasion, with the whole Protestant interest, would form a barrier against the invasion of property … Extend the electoral franchise to such Catholics only as have a freehold of ten pounds per year [and] abolish the wretched tribe of forty-shilling freeholders. (Quoted in T. Dunne, *Theobald Wolfe Tone—Colonial Outsider*, p.31).

Tone had great hopes for the commercial potential of an independent Republic "abounding in all the necessary materials for unlimited commerce" and "teeming with inexhaustible mines of the most useful metals" (Wolf Tone and His Times, p.69). These, and not the social questions of the peasantry and the workers, were the axis of his concerns, and burning concerns they were for a bourgeois Irish Jacobin. By contrast, Connolly's method, conspicuously lacking Marx's central concern with the development of the forces of production in history, produces a pessimistic view of the possibility of Irish economic development then and a century later. He denies that it was possible even before the attempt at an Irish bourgeois revolution and again in the context of

O'Connell's campaign for the Repeal of the Union.

> …the Act of Union was made possible because Irish manufacture was weak, and consequently, Ireland had not an energetic capitalist class with sufficient public spirit and influence to prevent the Union … this we are certain is the proper statement of the case. Not the loss of the Parliament destroyed Irish manufacture, but that the decline of Irish manufacture ... made possible the destruction of the Irish parliament (*LIIH*, p.31).
>
> It is difficult to see how a promised repeal of the Union some time in the future could have been of any use to the starving men of Clare, especially when they knew that their fathers had been starved, evicted, tyranised even before, just as they were after the Union. (*LIIH*, p.80).

Tone, moreover, in 1796, when urging the French to send as large as possible an expedition, was concerned precisely that it would be big enough to inspire "men of a certain rank as to property [to] at once declare themselves" (*Tone's Life*, edited by William Tone, his son, Vol 2, p.197). In the same work his views as late as 1798, on the question of wholesale confiscation of the aristocracy's land are revealing. While he observed that the gentry, "miserable slaves", "had furnished their enemies with every argument for a system of confiscation", along the lines of the radical bourgeois land reform of the French Revolution, Tone argued that it would be "a terrible doctrine to commence with in Ireland" (*Tone's Life*, Vol. 2, p.133). This weighs against even seeing Tone as the most politically advanced representative of the claims of the peasantry to the land. So, what is the meaning of his reference to the "men of no property"?

We believe it is essential to see the reference in its context. It arises in an account, in Tone's own work (*Tone's Life*, Vol. 2, p.46), of his negotiations with Delacroix, a representative of the French government, in March 1796. Delacroix doubted that it was possible to send an army on the scale required to attract the support of "those men of some property which was so essential in framing a government" (Tone had in mind a Convention including the liberal Catholic Committee on whose behalf he had written An Argument). Delacroix proposed a provisional military government if the invasion succeeded, just in case the Irish middle class did not rally to the French forces. The strong suggestion, in the whole context as explained by Tone himself, is that the rallying of the "men of no property" was put to Delacroix as a possibility that might further urge him on, rather than as something that was central in Tone's own preferences. However, even if we "read" Tone as strategically aspiring for support from the "men of no property", this in no way justifies a claim that his programme was defined centrally by their interests. Rather it enhances his political genius as a revolutionary in rallying the popular masses for a *bourgeois* revolution.

In this respect there is probably a similarity between Tone and Robespierre who was quite ready to free French capitalism through the mobilisation of the men of little or no property, even though this caused consternation among more substantial bourgeois elements in France. But in any case, Wolfe Tone's

supposed concern with "the men of no property" is far from being a theme, let alone a general characteristic, of his political thought. The quotation used by Connolly is the only known reference of its kind by Tone to mobilising the support of the "men of no property".

Nineteenth Century Nationalism

Connolly's evaluation of Daniel O'Connell, "The Liberator", echoes his attitude to Grattan. He sees little progressive content in Repeal of the Act of Union as a goal of the national struggle. He poses for O'Connell the stark choice between standing with the English ruling class or the Irish working class and seeks to demonstrate that because O'Connell was anti-working class and anti-socialist in the extreme—which he undoubtedly was—the Repeal agitation was purely a means of diverting the masses from their real interests.

This position derived logically from the influence of Lalor and Leslie for whom the "legislative question" was nothing more than the outer expression of the land, labour or "social" struggle. The dismissal of such "merely political" slogans, incidentally, occurs also in syndicalism, another important influence in Connolly's thought from about 1902.

Marx and Engels understood the significance of the Union and the struggle for Repeal in the opposite light. While Engels, in particular, identified the manipulative use which O'Connell made of Catholic Emancipation and later Repeal, he also believed that had the fight for them been taken up consistently they could have been won:

> If O'Connell were really a man of the people, if he had sufficient courage and were not *afraid of the people*, i.e if he were not a double-faced Whig, but an upright, consistent democrat, then the last English soldier would have fled Ireland long since … (letter from Engels, 1843, *Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.45).

Engels acknowledged the importance of the Chartists in backing Repeal during the 1840s, pointing out O'Connell's dread of such support. In contrast, Connolly appears to be suggesting in Labour in Irish History that labour and Chartism were united in opposition to O'Connell. While this was undoubtedly so in relation to its social and democratic demands, such as on the franchise, it was clearly not so in relation to Repeal. He fails to acknowledge the need for the conditional and conjunctural alliances which this imposed on the emerging working class forces. United action of Chartists in Ireland and Britain is simply counter-posed to any consideration of a tactic towards the Repeal movement.

The significance of Repeal, which at its height drew hundreds of thousands together in monster meetings, is expunged by Connolly as he pursues his theme—the anti-working class nature of its leaders. He implies that the masses were *deceived* into endorsing Repeal "partly because they accepted

O'Connell's explanation of the decay of trade as due to the Union" (*LIIH*, p.93).

In summary, while Engels saw the general slogans of Repeal and Catholic Emancipation as potential detonators for mass agitation and a trigger for other struggles, Connolly saw them as diversionary. To them he counterposed what he perceived as direct demands of the toiling masses. This flowed from the false premise that the latter demands were the real foundation of the Irish question anyway.

The treatment of radical republican movements in the 19th century fits into his overall populist schema. In discussing the Young Irelanders of the 1840s, he argues that the only thing that divided them all from the Repealers was what he described as a "purely theoretical divergence" over O'Connell's view that Irish independence was "not worth the shedding of a single drop of human blood".

The differences between Repealers and Young Irelanders as a whole are placed side by side with a more fundamental division which he prefers to emphasise between different elements within the Young Irelanders. He divides them into a private property camp and a socialistic one. On the side of private property he places Smith O'Brien and Gavan Duffy, while Lalor and John MItchell are placed in the socialist wing—a false distinction which overlooks the petit bourgeois strivings of the rural tenantry for proprietorship, as we saw in Chapter 2.

The putschist wing of the Young Irelanders is dismissed as adherents of private property concerned only with their "merely political" demand for independence. Approved are the demands of the other wing, who called for land to those who work it. Connolly upholds Lalor's view that the slogan of an independent republic amounted to nothing, even if taken up among the peasantry, because what they really wanted was land. Once again, the reason for this counterposition of agrarian demands and national democratic demands was the belief that the land or "social" question was the real core of the national struggle.

The sketchy treatment of the Fenians of the 1850s and '60s follows the same lines. The support Fenianism found among urban artisans and workers is strongly emphasised. Furthermore, by "throwing in their lot with the Land League", he believed, these revolutionary nationalists were "consciously or unconsciously placing themselves in accord with the principles which underlie and inspire the modern movement of labour". (*LIIH*, pp 131-132).

It is an uncritically one-sided view of Fenianism which differs significantly from Marx's own characterisation. In a letter to Engels in 1867, he states that "Fenianism is characterised by a socialistic tendency", but in a "negative sense", directed against the attempt to impose pasture over tillage in Ireland and to supplant the tenants "by sheep, pigs and oxen" (Letter from Marx to

Engels, in *Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.157). Indeed, while Connolly writes ringingly of the "proletarian" Fenians, we find Marx—only two weeks after the correspondence cited above, writing in the aftermath of the Clerkenwell bombing, that "one can't expect London proletarians to allow themselves to be blown up in honour of the Fenian emissaries". (*Ireland & the Irish Question*, p.159).

Fenian revolutionary nationalism thus escaped rigorous class analysis. Connolly wrongly discerned in the Fenians a spontaneous tendency towards socialism within the revolutionary nationalist tradition.

Despite aimimg to chart a course for the Irish working class of this day, his attempt to "deduce a socialist philosophy" from Irish history blinded Connolly to the rich programmatic tradition of Marxism on the national question. His idealist fusion of the Irish nation and labour lead in practice to the political collapsing of the working class struggle into that of the revolutionary nationalists. It established the perspective within which he was to adapt also to obscurantist elements in what had become, by the end of the 19th century, a specifically Catholic nationalism.

CHAPTER 5

FIGHTING SHY OF RELIGION

Little serious attention has been paid by Marxists to Connolly's analysis of religion, and in particular to his attitude to the Catholic Church in Irish society.

Where the subject has been touched upon, with few exceptions the conclusions reached have been uncritical or mildly critical on certain apparently minor weaknesses seen to have no real importance, (e.g. Ransom—*Connolly's Marxism*). Non-Marxist writers have, on the other hand, hailed Connolly for "blending" in one way or another the ideas of socialism and Christianity. In the latter school is the extended essay *The Mind of an Activist: James Connolly* in which Owen Dudley Edwards even characterises Connolly as a "Christian Socialist".

The importance of analysing Connolly's position on religion goes beyond the general issue of his grasp of philosophical materialism. He had to address, in day-to-day agitation and propaganda in Ireland, the specific concrete features of a proletariat and society in which mass religious consciousness and ecclesiastical power were central. Such an analysis, therefore, also has a practical application in to-day's ideological struggle to build a revolutionary communism movement in Ireland.

An examination of Connolly's own early background shows that his transition from an orthodox Catholic family life to socialism was in important respects constricted. Born to a Catholic emigrant Irish labouring family in Edinburgh in 1868, Connolly was educated in a Catholic school and the evidence suggests that, at the earliest, he stopped practising Catholicism in the early 1890s. At the time of his marriage in 1892 to Lillie Reynolds, a member of the Church of Ireland, he wrote to her about the need to abide by the then relaxed Ne Temere decree of the Catholic Church which required an undertaking from the non-Catholic partner to raise the children of the marriage as Catholics. While Connolly recognised that this would involve a "distasteful job" for Lillie—to meet with the local curate—he went on to add, in a letter to her:

> surely you will not grudge speaking for a quarter of an hour to a priest, especially as the fulfillment of these promises rests with ourselves in the future, though I'd like you to keep them. (Levenson, p. 26).

His involvement with the socialist movement was deepening around this period and apparently his Catholicism diminished in the ensuing years. This is evident in a letter to Matheson in 1908 in which he wrote:

> For myself, though I have usually posed as a Catholic, I have not gone to my duty for 15 years, and have not the slightest tincture of faith left. I only assumed the Catholic pose in order to quiz the raw free-thinkers, whose ridiculous dogmatism did and does dismay me, as much as the dogmatism of the Archbishop. (Reeve C. & Reeve A.B., *James Connolly and the United States,* p.242).

The picture is not entirely clear. Following his return from the USA, according to the memoirs of his daughter Nora, he went to mass with her in Belfast—on one such occasion only to be vilified by the priest in the pulpit. It is virtually certain that Connolly accepted the last rites from the Capuchin, Father Aloysius, as he awaited his execution in Kilmainham jail on 12th May 1916.

As an apprentice to socialism in the 1890s Connolly was subject to a variety of influences. In chapter one, we referred to the Reverend John Glasse, Connolly's tutor and a minister of the Church of Scotland. In fact, Connolly did not adopt Glasse's "Christian Socialist" position—that is to say, he avoided defining socialism as the political fulfillment of practical Christianity. In an article in *The Harp*, in April 1909, he expressed his own position:

> Every time we approach a Catholic worker with a talk on "Christian Socialism" we make this a religious question, and on such a question, his religion teaches him that the clergy must say the last word. Why should we go out of our way to give the clergy the right to interfere in out politics, by giving a religious name to an economic and political movement? (Reeve & Reeve, p.242).

The fact that Connolly was not a Christian Socialist does not, however, imply that his attitude to Christianity, or religion generally, was scientific. The very ambiguity about his own personal commitment to Catholicism at different points in his life should itself raise a question. Even if we take literally his letter to Matheson it still begs the question regarding Connolly's attachment to the substance, morality and ethics of Christianity. We know from accounts of his political career in Edinburgh that Connolly was very intolerant of any attempt to introduce atheist and secularist ideas into the Scottish Socialist Federation. At the 1895 winter meetings of the SDF, according to Ransom, Connolly attacked various exponents of free thought on the grounds that assaults on religion and "morality" had no place in the socialist movement. At a later date he would refer to atheism as an "excrescence" on the socialist movement. There is some reason to doubt that Connolly was merely a man of his time in this. Irish immigrant workers in Britain were not at all drunk on religion! As Ransom points out:

> The near ghetto living conditions of the Scottish Catholic workers of Irish descent that we have already noted in the Lanark coalfield naturally gave rise to advanced labour and socialist ideas which were deeply anti-clerical and secularist in content. (Ransom, 1975).

We must, therefore, turn our attention firstly to the intellectual setting in the Scottish wing of the SDF, particularly its grasp of Marxism, as part of the task of unravelling Connolly's ambivalent attitude to religion. As we have shown, one of

the main weaknesses of the SDF's Marxism was precisely the lack of a firm grasp of historical materialism. The SDF based itself solely on texts dealing with the narrower ground of political economy. Consequently there was considerable confusion over the issues of religion, Church and state, the family and ideology generally. The Scottish Socialist Federation tended to treat ethical issues in a timeless manner. For two of Connolly's mentors, Haldane Smith and Gilray, all things "immoral" were born out of "competitive Nazareth" of capitalism itself and the SSF insisted in its own ranks on a commitment to "Truth, Justice and Morality". From this point of view, morality was defined in absolute and ultimately subjective-idealist terms instead of historically.

The concept of materialism, for Connolly's mentors, was often understood in the pejorative sense—i.e. as greed, lust etc., while the concept of morality was set against it. In the 1840s Marx and Engels had originally defined their revolutionary communist position against just such abstract appeals to eternal moral standards as these. In *Anti-Duhring*, written in the mid 1870s, Engels reaffirmed their historical materialist view that no such eternal and ahistorical standards exist. Marxists recognise that people's ideas reflect their social and economic circumstances and therefore that moralities rise and fall in accordance with class interests. This was not a harmless error on the part of the Scottish Socialist Federation. By accepting the falsehood that socialism expresses abstract general ethical laws rather than the interests of the working class they were immediately vulnerable to the ethical norms established by the bourgeoisie, and to the preaching of the clergy which supports these norms with "eternal" truths about god's will, social peace, respect for established authority and other-worldly justice. The SSF outlook thus embodied a potentially crippling weakness.

In the same period as Connolly was subject to this influence, the leaders of the SDF, in particular Belfort Bax, were involved in controversy about the range and application of Marx's method of historical materialism. In an interesting parallel with the Edinburgh socialists, Bax believed that historical materialism as a method could not comprehend and explain the interaction of the economic basis of society with all the social, political, ideological and intellectual superstructures. But Bax was wrong to ignore that Marxist historical materialism specifically understood the reciprocal effects of culture and ideology in the total movement of historical forces. Marx and Engels did allow for this but regarded such effects as ultimately subordinate to the underlying material conditions. Furthermore, for Marx and Engels, even cultural, artistic and religious phenomena have complex roots in material conditions of human existence in the broadest sense. Bax correctly rejected the crude economic reductionism common in the Second International, which denied that politics, religion, culture (the 'superstructural' factors) had any reciprocal influence on the material economic reality (the 'base'). However, he did not accept that the superstructural factors themselves were ultimately determined by the base:

> I allow fully that the peculiar form of a movement, be it intellectual, ethical or artistic, is determined by the material conditions of the society in which it asserts itself, but it will also be equally determined by the psychological elements and tendencies from which it is produced. [emphasis added] (B. Bax, The Materialist Conception of History).

The logic of this position is that irreducible or unpredictable psychological factors have played a role in history on a par with the development of the forces of production and independent of them. This is a dualist position. In this perspective, whole areas of social psychology are not accessible to materialist analysis and critique. Moreover, the spheres of culture and religion do not have material foundations located in the history and development of class society. Thus it is also an idealist position.

This eclecticism is echoed in certain assumptions of Connolly. For him religion was "unknowable" and outside the legitimate interest of socialism and Marxism. The latter, he argued, were concerned with the facts of economic life in a limited sense. Religion was, for him, a separate matter, essentially neutral in the class struggle. Thus, writing in 1901, Connolly clearly implied that socialists may passively ignore religion and its advocates in their propaganda:

> Socialism, as a party, bases itself upon its knowledge of facts, of economic truths, and leaves the building up of religious ideals or faiths to the outside public. (*The New Evangel*, p.31).

Such a position, we believe, is fundamentally wrong and proved to be a crucial weakness in Connolly's political career. Marxists do not exclude any forms of social consciousness from the range of their analysis and, as far as religion is concerned, cannot afford to be in the least indifferent. Marx frequently exposed religion to criticism because it was a shroud of illusions by means of which the oppressed masses learned to accept their social condition as a natural destiny, the will of God, etc. To "pluck the religious flowers from the chains of oppression" was the first step toward revealing the chains themselves and hence toward consciously breaking them! Connolly, as we shall see, was clearly outside that tradition.

One of the difficulties about Connolly is the use he made of terminology often used by Marx and Engels to distinguish between themselves and purely anti-religious atheists and freethinkers.

However, the root of the confusion is that when Marx and Engels referred to vulgar materialists they meant people who had not fully developed their materialism; that they remained incapable of applying the materialist method to society and social consciousness as it develops historically, and that consequently they generally regressed into forms of idealism, eclecticism or agnosticism. Connolly, by contrast, attacked "vulgar materialists" for going too far in the criticism of religion! In his view, scientific socialists "neither affirm nor deny" religious beliefs. This amounted to an agnostic position at the very best,

but in practice, in spite of Connolly's wish to steer clear of religious controversy, he was forced time and again to express some view on the matter. As early as 1895 in Scotland he took up the cudgels against any speakers who defended free thought (or "free love") at SDF gatherings. Later in the USA he had to do so again against De Leon and subsequently he never could escape debate on the subject.

Capitalism and Irreligion

The dominant theme in Connolly's writings on religion is, on the one hand, his refusal to recognise religion as an expression of class society—the "inverted world consciousness, because consciousness of an inverted world" as Marx put it, and on the other his adamant assertion that atheism and materialism are the expression of the capitalist class alone. Hence he always attempted to distance socialism from atheistic materialism and to shun any criticism of religion. This position included rejection of the 18th century French materialists. The following extract, from 1908, which refers to the French revolutionary period, is typical of this deeply unscientific position:

> To the free-thinkers and rebels of those days and the professional free-thinkers of today have not advanced much beyond that mental stage—God and the Church were nothing more than the schemes of a designing priesthood intent on enslaving and robbing the credulous masses ...
>
> That many otherwise excellent comrades have brought such ideas over into the camp of socialism is also undeniable. But that they are also held by an even greater number of enemies of socialism is truer still. And it is in truth in the camp of the enemy such ideas belong, such ideas are the legitimate children of the teachings of individualism and their first progenitors both in England and France were also the first great exponents of the capitalist doctrines of free trade, free competition and free labour. (Roman Catholicism & Socialism, in *The Workers Republic* collection, p.58).

This is a grossly erroneous formulation on the question of materialism's history and yet another example of Connolly's failure to roundly comprehend the progressive character of the bourgeois revolution. It is completely at odds with the sentiments expressed by Engels in his 1892 introduction to Socialism Utopian and Scientific, where he wrote:

> About the middle of this century, what struck every cultivated observer ... was what he was bound to consider the religious bigotry and stupidity of the English respectable middle class. We at the time were all materialists, or at least advanced free-thinkers. ...
>
> In order to find people who dared to use their intellectual faculties with regard to religious matters, you had to go amongst the uneducated, the "great unwashed" as they were called, the working people, especially the Owenite socialist. (p.13).

Behind these different observations lies a fundamental difference of method and analysis. Connolly claimed that the capitalists brought atheism and

irreligion forward as the means of stamping the hallmark of capitalism on the oppressed and exploited classes of capitalism.

In fact the bourgeoisie opposed the Church and religion in a wholly progressive struggle to bring down feudalism which was crowned with religion and under which the Church was the dominant landowner. The rise of bourgeois manufacture and trade also forced the progress of science beyond the flat-earth obscurantism of the Church and the narrow provincial oppression it sanctified.

Historically, Connolly's account of religion and the bourgeois revolution runs counter to the facts. A serious study of the real social and revolutionary struggles that underlay the 16th century German Reformation and the rise of Calvinism in Holland and Britain, and the l8th century French revolutionary attack on religion shows that, at the very moments when these bourgeois revolutionary struggles appeared to mobilise from below a threat to the bourgeoisie themselves, this class sought compromises with the Church and religion. Even in the Great French Revolution, bourgeois materialism and deism gave way to the restoration of religion when the Revolution was brought to a halt by the bourgeoisie. The reason is summed up in the cynical words of Napoleon Bonaparte:

> There can be no society without inequality of wealth, and inequality cannot exist without religion. When someone is dying of hunger while the next man has more than he can eat, there is no way he can accept the difference unless there is an authority there to tell him: It is God's will; there must be rich and poor in the world. But after this, and for all eternity, things will be divided differently. (Quoted in D. Guerin, *Class Struggle in the First French Republic*, p.43).

Here too, lies much of the explanation for the regression to religious stupidity in 19th century English bourgeois thought, something which was all the more significant for Engels since he and Marx appreciated that the progenitors of modern materialism—Bacon (1561-1626), Hobbes (1588-1679) and Locke (1632-1704)—were all English. Precisely the consolidation of capitalism required the enlistment of religion against the threats of "the great unwashed". Moreover, Engels, far from sharing Connolly's dismissal of the French materialists, referred to them as that "brilliant school of French materialists who made the 18th century ... a pre-eminently French century, even before the French Revolution". (Anti-Duhring, p.430). As materialists they were historically progressive in the 18th century Enlightenment struggle against religion, in which they gave a lead to the whole world.

Connolly's hostility toward atheism is, therefore, a product of his own failure to become a genuinely Marxist materialist, and internally connected with this—indeed at the bottom of it—his failure to fully break out of his original Catholicism. His views on Henry Grattan are illuminating in this respect.

> It will be seen that Mr. Grattan was the ideal capitalist statesman; his spirit was the spirit of the bourgeoisie incarnate. He cared more for the interests of property than for human rights or for the supremacy of any religion. His early bent in that direction is seen in a letter he sent to his friend, a Mr. Broome, dated November 3, 1767, and reproduced by his son in his edition of the life and speeches of his father. The letter shows the eminently respectable anti-revolutionary, religious Mr. Henry Grattan to have been at heart, a free-thinker, free-lover, and epicurean philosopher, who had early understood the wisdom of not allowing these opinions to be known to the common multitude whom he aspired to govern.
> We extract:- "You and I, in this as in most other things, perfectly agree; we think marriage is an artificial, not a natural institution, and imagine women too frail a bark for so long and tempestuous a voyage as that of life ... I have become an epicurean philosopher; consider this world as our 'ne plus ultra', and happiness as our great object in it ... Such a subject is too extensive and too dangerous for a letter; in our privacy we shall dwell upon it more copiously. (*LIIH*, p.39).

His attitude to "free thought" was that, like "free love", it merely expressed the destruction of morality by capitalism, morality which he viewed in abstraction from its class basis.

For the most part, Connolly sought to avoid any discussion of religion in the party on the grounds that religion was concerned with the unknown and the unknowable. Thus, in 1901, he wrote:

> The Socialist Party of Ireland prohibits the discussion of theological or anti-theological questions at its meetings, public or private ...
>
> They as a party neither affirm or deny these things but leave it to the individual conscience of each member to determine what beliefs on such questions they shall hold ...
>
> This is the main reason why socialists fight shy of theological dogmas and religious generally: because we feel that socialism is based upon a series of facts requiring only unassisted human reason to grasp and master all their details, whereas religion of every kind is admittedly based upon "faith" in the occurrence in past ages of a series of phenomena inexplicable by any process of mere human reason. (The New Evangel, pp 29-30).

The implication of these statements is that religion is of no consequence to the struggle for socialism. The only sense in which one could attempt to uphold such a view would be by arguing that religion is class-neutral. In one of the few places where he ever attempted to offer any material or historical explanation for religion, he expressed precisely this view. Reviewing the pamphlet *Roman Catholicism and Socialism*, by one of his Irish-American and Catholic comrades, Patrick J. Cooney, he argued that religion is merely the means whereby humanity struggled to express its understanding of the *natural* world:

> In the light of this modern conception of the conditions of historical progress, religion appears as the outcome of the efforts of mankind to interpret the workings of forces of nature, and to translate its phenomena into terms of a language which could be understood.

Quoting from the pamphlet under review, he continued:

> The point to be noted in this: The different stages of development of the human mind in its attitude towards the forces of nature created different priesthoods to interpret them, and the mental conceptions of mankind as interpreted by those priesthoods became, when systematised, Religion. Religions are simply expressions of the human conception of the natural world; these religions have created the priesthoods. Only he who stands upon the individualistic conceptions of history can logically claim that priesthoods created religion. Modern historical science utterly rejects the idea as absurd. (*Workers Republic* collection, p.59).

In this analysis, Connolly overlooked the principal component of a Marxist analysis—namely the social roots of the "inverted social consciousness" of religion, i.e, the social division of labour into classes. At most, his argument puts religion down to the undeveloped state of human consciousness, the "pre-scientific" age of human thinking. This is at odds with Marx's own analysis, though, ironically, it bears some fleeting resemblance to the position of Ludwig Feuerbach, whom Marx criticised in the 1840s as part of the process of elaborating the materialist conception of history. Feuerbach, a radical materialist and seminal influence on the young Marx, remained eclectic, combining elements of materialist atheism with a static notion of the human individual—all in abstraction from the history of class societies and their modes of production.

More seriously, whereas Feuerbach solidly identified the need to confront and do battle with the illusions of religion because it alienated humanity from its own creativity and its capacity to mould nature to its own needs, Connolly failed to see this characteristic of religion. Indeed, he failed to pursue even the lines of thought which he drew from Cooney's pamphlet. He contented himself with the "economic" arguments of Marxism and identified clearly, as the class enemy, only the capitalist as employer. Religion and its institutions he believed to have no essential bearing on this matter and he considered any attempt to bring the subject of religion into socialist debate and criticism to be "an impertinence" and an "absurdity". This was an expression of economism on the theoretical level—the attempt to steer clear of "non-economic" issues as though they were inessential in the class struggle.

Marx, in contrast to this narrow focus on immediate economic facts, recognised the implications of social revolution for religion. In the development of historical materialism in the 1840s Marx and Engels surpassed the critics of religion of the time—the Bauers, Feuerbach and others. In doing so they did not abandon the criticism of religion but, having taken it as their starting point, proceeded to put it on a scientific footing. They did this by criticising and outlining a programme for overthrowing the very foundations of religious obscurantism—class society and exploitation. The following quote from Marx's 1844 Introduction to his critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state captures the thrust of the argument:

> The basis of irreligious criticism is: *man makes religion*, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self esteem of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being encamped outside this world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society produce religion, an *inverted world consciousness* because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic is a popular form, its spiritualistic *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, its universal source of consolation and justification ... The struggle against treligion is therefore indirectly a fight against the world of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*. (*Marx and Engels on Religion*, p.38).

By "inverted world" Marx meant the world created by a society whose real nature is exploitation of the masses by a ruling class. On this foundation rests the division of labour within the ruling class between its practical exploiters and its ideologists whose world view—religion and ideology—sanctifies the existing social order. In another scathing reference to religion Marx argued that the role of the clergy was to make out that the roots of oppression were not the social mode of production but merely a consequence of external nature. That is why the major mass religions promise a "hereafter"—an imagined world of happy rewards which is conditional upon acceptance of the existing social order and which thus acts as a lightning conductor for the anger of the oppressed and exploited.

In various analyses of Connolly and religion, especially that of Reeve & Reeve (1977), it has been argued that his position closely paralleled that of Marx, Engels and Lenin in adopting a "sensitive" approach to the religious beliefs of the masses, the peasantry and the proletariat. However, their sensitiveness was rooted in concrete, historical, materialism; they defended atheistic propaganda as an essential element of party work. Lenin quite rightly attacked those who contemptuously dismissed the religious superstitions of peasants and workers as mere backwardness, but not because he was indifferent to such illusions. Rather, he argued, consistently on the basis of Marx and Engel's position, that since class oppression was the most important source of religion among the masses—the "sigh of the oppressed creature" in Marx's words—therefore the class struggle would, by revealing the active power of the mobilised workers and peasants to themselves, contribute profoundly to ending the thrall of religion. In this light, anti-religious propaganda had to be subordinated to the concrete tasks and goals of socialism. But was this to say that general anti-religious propaganda was ruled out? Lenin answered this question unequivocally:

> Does this mean that education books against religion are harmful and unnecessary? No, nothing of the kind. It means that Social Democracy's atheist propaganda must be *subordinated* to its basic task—the development of the class struggle of the exploited *masses* against the exploiters. (Lenin on Religion, p.22).

This conclusion is plainly at odds with Connolly's ban on party members propagating atheism or even bringing any discussion of it into the party. These

contrasting approaches to propaganda rest on opposed analyses of the roots of religion. Lenin, in criticising "bourgeois progressists" and "radicals" and "bourgeois materialists", did not suggest that they went too far. On the contrary, in suggesting that "the ignorance of the people" was the basis of religion these critics, argued Lenin, were locked into a superficial and ultimately idealist view:

> It does not explain the roots of religion profoundly enough; it explains them, not in a materialist but in an idealist way. In modern capitalist countries these roots are mainly social ... the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in the face of the blind forces of capitalism... (*Lenin on Religion*, p.21).

It is this social basis that was omitted in Connolly's attempt to offer a "materialist" account of religion. Yet this is the very key to the Marxist critique of bourgeois free-thinkers and atheists. Connolly's attacks on them amounted to nought because he continued to view religion as class-neutral.

Socialists and Religion

Whenever Connolly tried to defend the ban in the socialist party on any discussion of religion, he claimed that he was consistent with the Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International.

> This is in conformity with the practice of the chief socialist parties of the world, which have frequently, in Germany for example, declared Religion to be a private matter, and outside the scope of socialist action. (The New Evangel, p.30).

Here is reproduced the opportunist posture to which the 1891 Erfurt Programme of the German Social-Democratic Party (SPD) so easily lends itself. This programme stated that "religion is a private matter". It did not explicitly say that it was therefore "outside the scope of socialist action". Even in its original form, and in spite of the fact that it was written against the background of Bismarck's "war on religion"—the Kulturkampf—Engels was unhappy that it was open to opportunist interpretation. As Lenin wrote:

> This point in the Erfurt Programme has come to be interpreted as meaning that we Social-Democrats, our Party, *w* religion to be a private matter, that religion is a private matter for us Social-Democrats, for us as a party. Without entering into a direct controversy with this opportunist view, Engels in the nineties deemed it necessary to oppose it resolutely in a positive, and not a polemical form. To wit: Engels did this in the form of a statement, which he deliberately underlined, that Social Democrats regard religion as a private matter *in relation to the state*, but not in relation to themselves, not in relation to Marxism, and not in relation to the workers' party. (*Lenin on Religion,* p.20).

Quite plainly, Connolly took exactly the opposite position in pressing the view that the party must "fight shy" of disputes with religion. The position itself follows directly from a failure to appropriate what was distinct and progressive

in the bourgeois democratic revolution—namely the complete separation of Church and State (and Church and School). Such demands would be vitally important in developing a combined programme for a country like Ireland where the democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution overlaid the strategic task of the socialists. This was and remains all the more important given the role of Catholic and Protestant churches in providing part of the ideology and machinery of class rule for nationalist and unionist wings of the Irish bourgeoisie. Yet in his writings there is the clear lack of such a theme which should have been at the centre of socialist activity.

The call for separation of Church and Church, as a bourgeois democratic demand, is only one side of the issue as far as socialists are concerned. Socialists must go further because, even should the bourgeoisie establish state power and enforce such demands, capitalist society itself perpetuates religious obscurantism as a means of prettifying and sanctifying the obscenities of oppression it brings in its train. Marx explained how "freedom of conscience" in relation to the state—while it is the end of the matter for consistent bourgeois democrats—was by no means the end of the religious question for socialists:

> Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by banishing it from the sphere of public law to that of private law ...
>
> The endless fragmentation of religion in North America, for example, gives it even externally the form of a purely individual affair ... But one should be under no illusion about the limits of political emancipation. The division of the human being into a public man and a private man, the displacement of religion from the state into civil society, this is not a stage of political emancipation but its completion; this emancipation therefore neither abolishes the real religiousness of man, not strives to do so. (*On the Jewish Question*, p.155).

Thus, alongside the need for socialists to take up the 'unfinished business' long reneged upon by the bourgeoisie, it is essential to counter the influence of a "welter of religious diversity" which surfaces in the "private" arena of social life by virtue of capitalist class oppression. Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875, distinguished clearly between the right to freedom of religious expression—from the interference of the state—and the need for socialists to be aware of the *limits* of "freedom of conscience"—that capitalism claims to offer:

> 'Freedom of Conscience!' If one desired at this time of the Kulturkampf to remind liberalism of its old watchwords it surely could have been done only in the following form: Everyone should be able to attend to his religious as well as his bodily needs without the police sticking their noses in. But in this connection the worker's party at any rate ought to have expressed its own awareness of the fact that bourgeois "freedom of conscience" is nothing but the toleration of all possible kinds of *religious freedom of consciousness*, and that for its part it endeavours rather to liberate the conscience from the witchery of religion. But one wishes not to transgress the "bourgeois" level. (in L.S. Feuer, Marx & Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, pp 171-2).

Although, as we see here, Marx attacked bourgeois free-thinkers, he did so not because they offended against religion but because once bourgeois society succeeds in separating Church and state it has reached its limit as regards religion. Capitalism cannot eradicate religious consciousness precisely because its own social conditions require the consolation of religion. Thus bourgeois freedom of conscience is not real liberation of the human conscience but the futile struggle for that freedom within the restrictions of the blind social forces of the capitalist market.

Marx pointed out how the separation of exploitative economic public life from private life in the family and community gave religion a new footing rooted in the property relations of the capitalist mode of production. He understood how the petty antagonisms between capitalists and clergymen were a necessary product of capitalist society as a whole, notwithstanding which, religion remained the "solemn complement" of capitalist oppression because it sanctified existing conditions while appearing to restore humanity to a sense of self-esteem.

Despite the victory of the bourgeoisie historically over the pre-capitalist systems which gave rise to the immense power of organised religions, religion continues to play a reactionary role within the capitalist system. The "Christian Socialist" programme which seeks to make religion, on the whole, a progressive force against capitalist exploitation and inequality is a delusion. It is camouflage for an outlook and institutions which, overall, are wedded to the maintenance of ruling class authority, a camouflage arising among lower clergy forced to adopt a radical posture in local conditions of extreme oppression in order to maintain their influence. Liberation theology expresses a modern form of such.

Wherever the capitalists rely on religious castes and religion to bolster their class rule, the struggle against capitalism requires that socialists should educate the working class in the spirit of militant anti-clericalism. Socialists must educate the vanguard to a consciousness of the fact that exploitation and oppression are the material basis of the continuing hold of religion on the masses.

By interpreting the Erfurt Programme in the worst possible way on the "privacy" of religion, Connolly confirmed his inablility to grasp the social foundations of religion. His consequent censorship of party discussion of religion severely impoverished the fight for socialism in Ireland. It would have been bad enough in a developed capitalist country where the role of the churches was less important to the bourgeoisie. In Ireland it was disastrous. He openly denied any contradiction between scientific socialism and religion, although he was himself a living embodiment of those contradictions. The tragedy is that, although he was drawn into polemics with Irish—usually Catholic—clergymen on this issue, his approach always evaded the substance of the matter. This legacy still dogs the progress of Marxism in Ireland.

Catholicism and the National Movement

While, in general, Connolly sought to rule out questions of religion and the private life from the socialist programme and to limit this programme to the economic "straight fight" against private property, he was also quite prepared to enlist any interpretations of a socialist nature that could be procured from Biblical sources. Likewise, he had no reservations about taking into account the national peculiarities of religion arising out of Irish history. Of course, Marxism must treat religion concretely in different periods and countries, but in Connolly's case the reasoning contained important flaws, allowing secondary features to predominate. Connolly, even in his polemics with the Jesuit Father Kane, started by distinguishing between the "intelligent Catholic" who at different times disobeyed the clergy and hierarchy, and the hierarchy themselves who strayed from "true religion". He believed that "true religion" was compatible with the "reformers and revolutionaries" down the centuries and, by extrapolation, with the socialists of today. In Irish history specifically this analysis identifies members of the Catholic hierarchy time and again as allies of the Crown against the interest of the oppressed Irish. But he avoids laying the same charge against Irish Catholicism, the Church as a whole, or religion generally.

The reason is twofold. First, he believed that religion was essentially a good thing—the expression of humanity's innate morality. Secondly, he believed that Irish Catholicism in the minds and hearts of the plebeian masses, by virtue of its history, is not a reactionary force but a revolutionary-democratic one. The former element in his reasoning lies at the root of his backwardness on divorce and other democratic rights which the Church defines as moral evils, a view he more or less accepted. The second element was to repeatedly intrude into his political perspectives and ultimately weaken his ability to assert the vital interest of the working class in destroying reactionary Catholic social power.

This view of Catholicism in Ireland is inseparable from his central thesis about Irish history. He viewed pre-Norman Ireland, in which the Christian Church was deeply rooted, as a "communal and democratic" society. (In fact it was a developing feudal society, see Chapter 3). Thus, Irish Catholicism is implicitly construed as distinct from its European counterpart—which he accepts was based on feudalism. In *The Re-conquest of Ireland* he portrays this original Ireland as:

> a country in which the people of the island were owners of the land upon which they lived, masters of their own lives and liberties, freely electing their rulers, and shaping their castes and conventions to permit the closest approximation to their ideals of justice as between man and man. (T*he Re-conquest of Ireland*, p.1-2).

Because his overriding political perspective contrived to root Irish "socialism" in this ancient supposedly "democratic" Irish tradition "true" Irish

Christianity could not but be accommodated in his perspective for restoring that ancient communism in a Workers Republic. Not long before publishing the Re-conquest of Ireland, he wrote:

> Catholicism, which in most parts of Europe is synonymous with Toryism, lickspittle and loyalty, servile worship of aristocracy and hatred of all that savours of genuine political independence on the part of the lower classes, in Ireland is almost synonymous with rebellious tendencies, zeal for democracy and intense feelings of solidarity with all strivings of those who toil. (Catholicism, Protestantism and Politics, in *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, p.25).

Contrast his view of what he took to be Irish Protestantism:

> .. the Protestant elements in Ireland were, in the main, plantation strangers upon the soil from which the owners had been dispossessed by force. ... The Protestants were bound to acquire insensibly a hatred of political reform and to look upon every effort of the Catholic to achieve political recognition as an insidious move towards the expulsion of the Protestants ... The Catholics, for their part, and be it understood I am talking only of the Catholic workers, have been as fortunately placed for their political education as they were unfortunately placed for their political and social condition. (*Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, pp 25-26).

He continued in this vein, arguing that every gain for oppressed Catholics involved a gain for their oppressed Protestant counterpart. Therefore, he lamely deduced that, with Home Rule and the "entrance of Catholicity into a mere numerical voting power", there would be no attempt to "impose fetters" upon others that we ourselves have worn" and as to the future, under Home Rule, the tale to tell "will be a hopeful one"

This approach among other things ignored the actual class nature of Irish Catholicism in his own time and before. This locked him ideologically into a Catholic-patriotic discourse and, in practice, into accommodating to Irish bourgeois anti-colonialism. He strove to draw the Protestant peasant and worker into this perspective—nowhere more artfully than in the Re-conquest where he attempted to spell out how "the Catholic was dispossessed by force, the Protestant dispossessed by fraud". But it remained a perspective of necessary stages which deferred the proletarian programme (especially as Connolly expected the Third Home Rule Bill of 1912 to succeed), and disastrously so, given the need to fracture the unionist alliance and break its hold on the Protestant section of the proletariat if even that first "stage" was not be be aborted in the eventual "carnival of reaction".

In the closing pages of *Re-conquest* his weakness on Catholicism becomes an important element in his adaptation in practice to the limited horizon of anti-colonial bourgeois patriotism. He writes later:

> The Gaelic League realises that capitalism did more in one century to destroy the tongue of the Gael than the sword of the Saxon did in six; the apostle of self-reliance among Irish men and women finds no more earnest exponents of self-reliance than those who

> expound it as the creed of Labour; the earnest advocates of co-operation find the workers stating their ideals as a co-operative commonwealth; the earnest teacher of Christian morality sees that in the co-operative commonwealth alone will true morality be possible and the fervent patriot learns that his hopes of an Ireland re-born to national life is better stated, and can be better and more completely realised, in the labour movement for the Re-conquest of Ireland. (pp 64-5).

The fact that Connolly should assume that the Gaelic League, the Sinn Fein protectionists, the agricultural co-operativists, the "earnest" preachers of religion and "Christian morality" and the peasantry would identify implicitly with the struggle for socialism is an ironic measure of the degree to which he had adapted to these forces. To the extent that Connolly relied upon such cultural wellsprings for programmatic inspiration the prospect of breaking any sections of the Protestant proletariat from unionism receded more and more. He could do even less to break the Catholic section of the proletariat from the banner of bourgeois Catholic nationalism, to defend the independence of the Red from the Green.

Connolly's perspective lacked any foundation in a concrete historical materialist analysis of Catholicism in Ireland in the 19th century. In such an analysis the contrast with the oppressed Catholicism of the Penal Law days would have begun to reveal the modern class character of Irish Catholicism.

The goal of Catholic Emancipation, resolved legally in 1829, retained a progressive content as a bourgeois-democratic demand into the 19th century. But, in the rapprochement of the Catholic Church and British colonialism in 1795, Catholic control in education was granted in return for support for the Act of Union and the suppression of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Subsequently, Catholic primary-school education and growing sectarian division developed on the basis of a cautious bourgeois national reform of the tithe payments to the established Protestant Church, and repeal of the Union etc. In the pre-Famine period of the 19th century the Church acted as the mass organiser and spiritual police of the peasantry. It played this role as the agent of a growing Catholic bourgeois interest, initially led by Daniel O'Connell.

The rise of the Repeal movement after 1841 depended crucially on the seal of approval given to O'Connell by the Archbishop of Tuam, John McHale who took the ground from under the left wing of the bourgeoisie, soon to emerge as Young Ireland, in a period of profound social and political crisis.

In no period, therefore, can the Catholic Church ever be identified as representing the interests of the poor, the middle tenantry or of the rural proletarian or cottier masses.

After the Famine of 1845-8 the hand of the Church on the movement of bourgeois reform was strengthened. With the decimation of the most oppressed tenants and cottiers the mass base of Catholicism became more homogeneous.

Middle-sized tenants ceased to subdivide their land-holdings. The family structure that still obtains in Irish farming society began to be consolidated. The Church acted to bolster this development with renewed emphasis on sexual abstinence, puritanism, deferred marriages and abstinence from alcohol.

Thus the shaping of social morality evolved in close connection with the changes in property relations in the post-Famine period. The role of the Church, its increasing devotionalism and repressive moral tone and teachings, served to control the often militant tenantry and their aspirations and subordinate them to the numerically weaker but politically decisive interests of the growing capitalist class in the south. Until the land war broke out in 1879 the Catholic hierarchy and clergy had succeeded in holding back any independent peasant mobilisation. At the same time it virulently opposed and hounded the revolutionary nationalist Fenians.

In these ways the Church acted as the agency of mass control and incorporation, delivering the support of the tenants to the Irish capitalist class in a controlled way. Even in the land war of 1879-82, the Church involved itself under pressure only in order to hold the movement back. It grew hugely in its influence and power. It already controlled the national system of education organised along sectarian lines. It won for itself ever growing control of intellectual and ideological life with the growing proliferation of new Church buildings, monasteries, seminaries and schools in the second half of the century. So strong was its position by the 1860s that Cardinal Cullen felt confident that the offer of joint “Establishment” of the Catholic Church alongside the Church of Ireland was less attractive than the complete disestablishment of the Protestant Church.

Here was the growth of an intimate alliance between a weak, conservative nationalist bourgeoisie and a powerful Irish Catholic Church. This embryo of a ruling class, aspiring to eventual Home Rule, could not fail to foresee, in the sectarianism that it endorsed, the seeds of terrible reaction. But even the most far-sighted of Irish bourgeois nationalists was unwilling to fight to avoid this. Nourished from its foundations in deference to the independent caste power of the hierarchy, the very survival of the nationalist bourgeoisie remains intrinsically intertwined with the Church to this very day.

Had Connolly addressed the social character of Irish Catholicism in this way he would have to have radically revised his political conclusions about it. Instead, as he told his Scottish comrade, Tom Bell, he believed that in Ireland a Catholic education produced rebels—a view ironically still held by Republicans in the North in the divided school system. On this basis he believed he was reconciling his Marxism with Catholicism. whereas in reality he was denying vital elements of the democratic programme which Marxists championed everywhere.

In the Irish context this meant leaving unchallenged, among the vanguard of the working class, entrenched religious ideologies that were to powerfully serve the ruling class in smashing any challenge to its property, and which would even contribute to aborting the national struggle through the partition of the nation and the further consolidation of clerical power.

It also meant failing to recognise the potential reservoirs of passive mass support for the most conservative sections of the nationalist movement in town and country. The Catholic Church played a key role for a century in systematically consolidating the political authority of the Catholic bourgeoisie over a peasantry and working class by its deeply conservative outlook.

True, Connolly castigated the Church for turning against Parnell over his affair with Kitty O'Shea and for thus dethroning the most successful leader of the bourgeois Home Rule movement. But he drew no general political conclusions from it. He failed to uncover the essential relationship between bourgeois interest and Catholic power and ideology. Thus his references to the political "rise of Catholicity to a numerical majority" fatally glossed over a fundamental danger to both the democratic and socialist programmes, the virtual certainty that an unopposed Catholicism would copperfasten its intellectual and moral domination over the rising "nation".

The furthest point of conflict with Catholicism beyond which he refused to go was to claim that its principles were perverted by self-interested capitalists and mammon-serving bishops. Thus in Labour, Nationality and Religion, faced with the clear hostility of the Church to socialism, he can do no better than ineffectually use 'true' religion against the Church:

> Men perish but principles live. Hence the recent efforts of ecclesiastics to put the Socialist movement under the ban of the Catholic Church, despite the wild and reckless nature of the statements by which the end was sought to be attained, has had a good effect in compelling Catholics to examine more earnestly their position as laymen, and the status of the clergy as such, as well as their relative duties toward each other within the Church and toward the world in general. One point of Catholic doctrine brought out as a result of such examination is the almost forgotten, and sedulously suppressed one, that the Catholic Church is theoretically a community in which the clergy are but the officers serving the laity in a common worship and service of God, and that should the clergy at any time profess or teach doctrines not in conformity with the true teachings of Catholicity it is not only the right but is the absolute duty of the laity to refuse such doctrines and to disobey such teaching. ... Whenever the clergy succeeded in conquering political power in any country the result has been disastrous to the interests of religion and inimical to the progress of humanity. (*Labour, Nationality and Religion*, p.4).

Sometimes hailed on the Irish left as a brilliant pedagogic approach to Catholic workers, this conceded more to religion than it gained for socialism. It might, perhaps, for some militants, reconstruct their relationship to Catholicism, but it would ultimately leave intact their vulnerability to religion and the clergy,

not free them from it.

To summarise, Connolly's position on religion started from the inadequately grounded Marxism of the SDF. He did not believe it possible to critically understand religion from a Marxist standpoint and failed to acknowledge its roots in class society. He banned the discussion of religion within the ISRP and took the wrong meaning from the Erfurt Programme on the attitude of the party to religion. Lacking any general method of understanding religion and ideology, he treated Irish Catholicism as essentially democratic and communal in its historical roots and general orientation. This blinded him to its insidious role in consolidating the strength of the rising native bourgeoisie and the sectarian divisions between the Protestant and Catholic sections of the working class.

CHAPTER 6

JAMES CONNOLLY AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION

While no discussion of the struggle for women's emancipation in Ireland seems complete without quoting Connolly's work, rarely has any attempt been made to evaluate his contribution and thought on the question as a whole. Attempts have been made to mould his image after Lenin, as by Reeve & Reeve in *James Connolly in the United States*, or to enlist his support in differentiating between socialists and feminists. But as with religion, there are profound weaknesses in his analysis which have enabled contradictory conclusions to be drawn. That Connolly, the supporter of women's rights, was also opposed to divorce is only the most obvious example.

His early years of socialist activity in the 1890s coincided with the period in which the Marxist theoretical understanding of women's oppression began to be translated into practice. Its foundations had been elaborated in Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Bebel's *Die Frauen und der Socialismus* published in English with the mistranslated title *Woman Under Socialism*. By the time Connolly was active on the Scottish left the practical, organisational and political development of socialist work among women had begun. The centre of activity was Germany, where Clara Zetkin had founded the paper Die Gleicheit (Equality). In Austria the work had begun with the publication of *Arbeiterinnenseitung* (Working Women's Journal) under the editorship of Louise Kautsky with contributions in 1892 from Eleanor Marx and Laura Lafargue (Marx's daughters, both).

This essentially continental development only emerged with the maturing of the socialist movement and the defeat of backward traditions, most significantly in Germany. The working class tradition of Lassalle's followers during the 1860s and 1870s was heavily male-dominated and opposed both the entry of women into capitalist production and also women's suffrage rights. Marx and Engels had fought such trends in the years of the First International (1864-72) and and subsequently in relationw with the growing mass organisation in Germany in the 1870s, e.g. in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The classic publications of Engels and Bebel have to be seen against this background. The recognition that women were entering the world of wage slavery—and were there to stay—did not come about automatically. This was often masked by concern over the appalling conditions under which women (and children) were sucked into industrial production in the interests of capital accumulation.

Eleanor Marx, in creatively applying the ideas of Marx, Engels and Bebel during the 1890s, had to reckon with the tendency towards conservatism of the

trade unions which expressed itself in the exclusion and ghettoising of women workers into separate unions. This tendency, which persisted in the formation of the New Unions of unskilled workers, echoed the previous male craft exclusiveness of the older unions. She expressed this in one of her contributions to the Austrian Working Women's Journal:

> The new Union of women cigarmakers, which I mentioned in my last letter, was founded about three years ago. Its members do not belong to the men's union, although the two unions work together. To the outsider it seems deplorable that the two unions do not merge, albeit working together. The reason adduced by the men against amalgamation is that the women almost always view their work as a temporary thing and regard marriage as their real trade, one that frees them from the need to earn their own living. Of course, in the vast majority of cases marriage does not reduce the woman's work but doubles it, since she not only works for wages but also has to do hard unpaid 'household' labour into the unholy bargain. In spite of all this, the women unfortunately do look on their work as temporary all too often, and defend this attitude of the men, who regard their wage-labour as 'lifelong' and are therefore much more eager to improve the conditions they work under. (May 1892).

It was in a period of struggle to organise the mass of the working class in Britain and in Europe generally, that the fight for equality at work, equal pay for women, was taken up by Eleanor.

Politically, the development of a socialist programme for women was centred in German-speaking countries. So developed was the German Socialist Women's movement that the Erfurt Congress of 1891 passed the following resolution on the franchise, calling for:

> Universal equal and direct suffrage, with secret ballot, for all citizens of the Reich over 20 years of age without distinction of sex. (Thonessen, *The Emancipation of Women; the rise and decline of the women's movement in German Social Democracy 1863-1933*, p. 47).

The position was far in advance of what the English Suffragists were demanding up to the first world war as they did not agitate against the property qualification. Moreover, the foundation of *Die Gleicheit* in 1891 was just the beginning. By the time of the 1913 lockout in Dublin, it was selling 112,000 copies in Germany and its role in recruiting and organising proletarian women was inestimable. It is notable also that during that war, in spite of the capitulation of the majority of the German Social Democratic Party to the imperialist war effort, *Die Gleicheit* and Zetkin were on the left of the party, proletarian anti-militarists. This, again, contrasts with the disintegration of the bourgeois suffragettes in Britain and Ireland in the face of the same events.

We refer to these developments in order to situate our evaluation of Connolly in its proper context. While this remarkable movement was on the rise in Germany and Austria, he was variously in Scotland (1889-96), Ireland (1896-1903) and America (1903-10) before returning finally to Ireland. He would have been largely cut off from what was going on in Germany and Austria. His

eventual confrontation with Bebel's book, *Woman Under Socialism*, would take place only in 1904 when the American Marxist Daniel DeLeon translated it into English and published it in the SLP paper for the first time - although it had seen many editions over the previous 20 years. By that time the book had become a staple Marxist text and part of the traditions of continental Marxist women.

Connolly like the Social Democratic Federation in general in Britain, was very much outside that whole tradition. But when we consider the views of SDF leaders Hyndman and Bax on the question of women's emancipation it is clear that his healthy impulses enabled him to rise above his peers. In a letter to one of his acquaintances in 1904 Hyndman wrote that women who advocated their own emancipation as a "sex question" ought to be sent to an island by themselves. Bax's views were even more woeful. He was against extending the franchise to women and belonged to the "Anti-Suffrage league". This chauvinist club apparently discoursed on the "inferiority" of women and her "sex-privileges". He continued his reactionary views as late as 1909. (See Tsuzuki, *Hyndman and British Socialism,* p.191).

The SDF, under pressure of events, had to make some accommodation to the struggle for women's suffrage and the trade unionisation of unskilled women workers. An important figure in turning its attention towards the socialist women's tradition was Dora Montefiori. In the beginning of the 1900s she worked along with the Pankhursts' Women's Social & Political Union (WSPU), but soon developed criticisms of it on class lines under the influence of the continental movement. The WSPU confined its demands strictly to the extension of the franchise to women within the existing property qualification. Montefiori, to her credit, irritated Hyndman greatly. He said she was worse than the 'imps'—the 'impossibilists' who had broken from the SDF in 1903 to form the Socialist Labour Party on the principle that it was impossible to get to socialism via parliament. After being in the thick of agitation in 1905-7 alongside the WSPU, she attended the first International Socialist Women's Conference, held in Stuttgart in 1907 as a delegate of the Adult Suffrage Society. It was against any property qualification on votes for women. This brought Montefiori into direct contact with the continental movement. Under this influence, in 1909, she published a pamphlet, *The Position of Women in the Socialist Movement*.

Montefiori is known in Irish socialist tradition for her role in the 1913 lockout when her effort to offer British accommodation to children of locked-out workers was sabotaged by Irish clerical backwoodsmen. Her role as a propagandist has, perhaps, been unfairly overshadowed by this. The following quotation from her 1909 pamphlet very definitely anticipates the words Connolly was to use in The *Re-conquest of Ireland* in the period 1912-14 and which are almost ritually quoted by Irish socialists:

> The working woman is more sweated, more despised, more downtrodden in the last resort than is the working man, because, though under capitalism, the working man is

> the wage slave, yet his wife is the slave of the slave". (Tsuzuki, p.191).

Connolly possibly read the pamphlet some time after his return to Ireland in 1910. At any rate it seems fair to suggest that his contact with the theory and practice of the European Marxist women's movement was very tenuous and late. In none of the countries in which he was active did he come into living contact with this movement. Its developed political culture, tactics on union organisation, on relations with bourgeois and petit bourgeois feminist movements, on sexuality, marriage, divorce and democratic rights etc., largely passed him by. Before going on to examine the often unhappy nature of such contact as he did have with that tradition, it is worth stressing that this rich heritage, and its further development in the Bolshevik and early communist movement, remains largely unacknowledged by the Irish Marxist left today. The degeneration of Social Democracy, leading to its capitulation to the imperialist bourgeoisies in the first world war, banished this healthy movement and replaced it after the war with a vulgarised idea of 'women's issues'—effectively a domesticated women's movement. The Stalinist degeneration of the young Comintern after 1924 put paid to the high hopes and real gains made through the work of Zetkin and Kollontai after the October Revolution.

Family, Monogamy, Divorce

It is against this background that the one major point of confrontation between Connolly and the revolutionary Marxist perspective on women's emancipation becomes especially important in illustrating his outlook and the tradition still associated with his name. We refer to the polemic Connolly was to wage against DeLeon in the United States over August Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism*.

> Again, while touring this country in 1902, I met in Indianapolis an esteemed comrade who almost lost his temper with me because I expressed my belief in monogamous marriage, and because I said, as I still hold, that the tendency of civilization is towards its perfection and completion, instead of its destruction. My comrade's views, especially since the publication in "The People" of Bebel's "Women", are held by a very large number of members, but I hold, nevertheless that such works and such publications are an excrescence upon the movement. The abolition of the capitalist system will, undoubtedly, solve the economic side of the women question, but it will solve this alone. (Wages, Marriage and the Church, in *The Connolly-DeLeon Controversy*, p.8).

Thus Connolly opened his polemic against Bebel's classic work. He added in the same article that such a book could only be popular:

> … because of its quasi-prurient revelations of the past and present degradation of womanhood, but I question if you can find in the whole world one woman who was led to socialism by it, but you can find hundreds who were repelled from studying socialism by judicious extracts from its pages. (p.9).

His comments reveal a depth of personal feeling on the issues, but his

claims about the effects of Bebel's book seem a desperate grasping at straws when set against the reality that Bebel and Engels were the standard socialist works on the question for at tens of thousands of organised women in Europe. He cannot have been unaware of the stature it had acquiring over 20 years. Evidently it fundamentally challenged key certainties of his personal psychology. Bebel had critically exposed all of the prevailing ideology which viewed the existing patterns of sexual life and the family as 'natural destiny'. By carefully citing evidence of the profound changes that the family and sexual life have experienced throughout history, he established the economic, social and historical roots of the oppression of women:

> Conditions lasting through a long series of generations, finally grow into custom; heredity and education then cause such conditions to appear … as 'natural' ...
>
> For the purposes of this work a cursory presentation of the elations between the sexes, since primitive society, is of special importance. It is so because it can therby be proved that, seeing that these relations have materially changed in the previous course of development, and that the changes have taken place in even step with the existing systems of production, on the one hand, and on the distribution of the product of labour, on the other, it is natural and goes without saying that along with further changes and revolutions in the system of production and distribution, the relations between the sexes are bound to change again. Nothing is "eternal" either in nature or in human life; eternal only is change and interchange". (Bebel, Woman Under Socialism, pp 9-10).

Today it is easy to fault Bebel on many points of detail and to see changes that he failed to envisage. What keeps his work astonishingly fresh is the way in which he linked the evolution of property relations to the available data on relations between the sexes, showing how much variety has existed. In so doing, Bebel was fleshing out the basic elements sketched by Marx and Engels in various writings. In broad historical terms he was wholly consistent with Engels in relating the emergence of monogamous marriage to the development of private property. Though discursive in form, the great merit of the book was its frank exposure of the layers of cant and hypocrisy which sanctified the contemporary civil, political and intellectual denial of women's existence. The bourgeois form of marriage and the hypocritical concepts of adultery and illegitimacy that flow from it have their roots in the fact that marriage serves to secure the transmission of private property and wealth to legitimate heirs. As such it runs contrary to the notion of marriage based on voluntary love and is hostile to legalising divorce. The main burden of this social function of marriage is borne by women who, in the property owning class, are dependent on the property of their husbands. Furthermore,

> ... under pressure of social conditions it is forced even upon those who have nothing to bequeath: it becomes a social law, the violation of which the state punishes by imprisoning for a term of years the men or women who live in adultery and who have been divorced. (p.346).

Thus the proletarian family under capitalism bears the form of the

bourgeois family—but only as an impediment. However, the absence of property and the emergence of women into socialised capitalist production on a large scale outside the home pose the question of the socialisation of domestic toil. Co-operation, albeit under capitalist production, flies in the face of the privatised family and sexual world of monogamous relationships. Of course, working class men and women may well choose a monogamous relationship. In a future socialist society this may also be the case. If this does turn out to be the case under socialism and communism then it will be so as a result of choice and not, as it is under capitalism, as a consequence of the existence of private property and the use of the family as the mechanism whereby men effectively take possession of women to ensure the transmission of wealth:

> In future society there is nothing to bequeath, unless the domestic equipment and personal inventory be regarded as inheritance: the modern form of marriage is thus devoid of foundation and collapses … Woman is accordingly free, and her children, where she has any, do not impair her freedom: they can only fill all the fuller the cup of her enjoyment and her pleasure in life. (*Woman Under Socialism*, pp 346-7).

It is clear from the tone of Connolly's attack on the book that he was reacting with all the indignation of someone whose sense of 'decency' and 'morality' had been deeply offended. He found it impossible to concede that it was inspired by scientific interest and scientific socialist interest in particular. Railing against Bebel he wrote:

> I have used the word 'pruriency'. Let me make it stronger and say indecency, and explain what I mean by indecency in this respect. I consider that whosoever tells of the sexual act needlessly or in any other manner, but as a scientist would speak of his investigations or a surgeon of his operations, is acting indecently. (The Connolly DeLeon Controversy, p.30).

He regarded the suggestion that the "modern form of marriage collapses once its basis in private ownership of the means of production goes" as grossly unscientific:

> He might as well say: The concentrated tool of production is the result of bourgeois property relations; in future society these relations will have disappeared, therefore the concentrated tool of production will collapse (*The Connolly DeLeon Controversy*, pp 30-31).

He missed the essential point. In Bebel's terms the family would be free to evolve more 'naturally', i.e free from the dictates of property. Connolly referred to anthropologist Lewis Morgan in an attempt to complete his refutation:

> Bebel declares openly and avowedly that under socialism the modern monogamic marriage will collapse, and yet his work we we are told is based upon that of Morgan, and Morgan declares as unreservedly his belied in the beauty and permanency of modern marriage. (*The Connolly DeLeon Controversy*, p.30).

What Morgan actually wrote, however, in his major work Ancient Society,

was:

> When the fact is accepted that the family has passed through four successive forms and is now in a fifth, the question at once arises whether this form can be permanent in the future. The only answer that can be given is that it must advance as society advances, and change as society changes, even as it has done in the past. It is the creature of the social system and will reflect its culture. As the monogamian family has improved greatly since the commencement of civilization, and very sensibly in modern times, it is at least supposeable that it is capable of still further improvement until the equality of the sexes is obtained. Should the monogamian family in the distant future fail to answer the requirements of society ... it is impossible to predict the nature of its successor (Morgan, Ancient Society, p.499).

More significant still is the inflexible and undialectical understanding of monogamy that Connolly employed compared with Engels, Morgan or Bebel. Engels while exploring the possibility of monogamy's survival in the future, argued that it must meet certain conditions as to its content and form—conditions absent in the bourgeois form of marriage. Under capitalism and societies based on private property in general, he argued, neither the man nor the woman is truly monogamous, for the man has possession of the woman because of his control of property and not by virtue of love or elective affinity. Thus he suggested:

If now the economic considerations also disappear which made women put up with the habitual infidelity of their husbands—concern for their own means of existence and still more for their own children's future—then, according to all previous experience, the equality of woman thereby achieved will tend infinitely more to make men really monogamous than to make women polyandrous. (Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, pp 144-5).

In sharp contrast to Connolly's definition of monogamy as the indissoluble union, Engels counterposes one that is fundamentally free:

But what will quite certainly disappear from monogamy are all the features stamped upon it through its origin in property relations; these are, in the first place, supremacy of the man and secondly, the indissolubility of marriage. (Origin… p.145).

This projection, and Engels was quite clear that it involved some speculation, did not merely envisage freer access to divorce for all; rather, freedom to separate would not even require wading "through the useless mire of a divorce case". The emphasis may differ from Bebel at points but the two positions are fundamentally in agreement and completely at odds with Connolly's beliefs. At root is a clear difference in method.

The key weakness in Connolly's Marxism was that he narrowed its scope to the immediate economic conditions of capitalism. Here, as with nationalism

and religion, the absence of a more complete materialist method weakened his grasp of the nature of women's oppression and the family. Socialism would, he believed, quantitatively lessen the economic hardships of working class and family life. But qualitatively, sexual relations and conflicts would still be sustained by the same forces in exactly the same way as before:

> The abolition of the capitalist system will, undoubtedly, solve the economic side of the woman question, but it will solve that alone. The question of Marriage, of divorce, of paternity, of the equality of woman with man are physical and sexual questions, or questions of temperamental affiliation as in marriage, and were we living in a Socialist Republic would still be hotly contested as they are today. One great element of disagreement would be removed—the economic—but men and women would still be unfaithful to their vows, and questions of the intellectual equality of the sexes would still be as much in dispute as they are today, even though economic equality would be assured. (*Connolly DeLeon Controversy*, p.8).

The rigid demarcation which he makes between the economic relations of production and the 'private' sphere of the family, sexuality etc., could not be clearer. His insistence that Marxists were confined to discussion of the economic 'sphere' alone led directly to the conclusion that the question of divorce, like religion, was not a question for socialists. His own attitude to marriage and divorce remained rooted in the combination of Catholic and Victorian ideology, under which he grew up, with their notion of a timeless "decency" and "morality"—actually bourgeois morality. His eagerness to make socialism relevant to Irish Catholic workers, both while in the United States and in Ireland, tended to reinforce this weakness and push him into adaptation to the very institutions that sanctified women's oppression—the Catholic Church in particular.

The contradictions of this position are revealed in his anti-capitalist polemic *Labour, Nationality and Religion* (1910), written in reply to the Lenten pastorals of the Jesuit, Father Kane. In his attempt to simultaneously tackle Kane's denunciation of the economic theories of socialism and steer clear of what he regarded as the legitimate terrain of the clergy—marriage, the family etc.—he conceded to the clergy on divorce. His only answer was to suggest that divorce was a social evil foisted on a society by an amoral capitalist class who could escape the criticism of the clergy while indulging themselves to the limit:

> Who then are the chief defenders of divorce? The Capitalists. And who can come fresh from the divorce courts, reeking with uncleanliness and immorality, to consummate another marriage, and yet know that he can confidently rely upon Catholic prelates and priests to command the workers to "order themselves reverently before their superiors" with him as a type? The Capitalist.
>
> The divorce evil of today arises not only out of socialist thinking but out of the capitalist system, whose morals and philosophy are based upon the idea of individualism, and the cash nexus as the sole bond in society. (Labour, Nationality & Religion, New Books, p.38).

On these grounds Connolly opposed divorce. His answer to Kane's suggestion that divorce would lead to women becoming the mistress of one man after another was to say that this was a slander on the virtue of womanhood—Irish womanhood in particular, and that such a thought was a reflection on Kane's own imagination:

> Aye, verily, the uncleanliness lies not in this alleged socialist proposal, but in the minds of those who so interpret it. (*Labour, Nationality & Religion*, p.39)

He clearly holds with Christian theology's ideal of woman as a faithful wife and mother as a counterposition to its own darker portrayal of woman as unclean temptress. This is in line with his general approach to all criticism of the Church, namely to use aspects of Christian ideology against the hierarchy who have apparently forgotten it in order to serve mammon instead of God. One can only speculate about how Connolly would have stood on the Parnell crisis had he been in Ireland in 1890 when the greatest popular leader of the Home Rule movement was destroyed and his party split with the aid of the Catholic Church's denunciation.

Marxism, contrary to Connolly's assertions, defended unconditionally the democratic right to divorce. His protestations about the morality of women—"the superior morals of the women of the real people"—serve to evade the legal-democratic side of the divorce question to which socialists must address themselves—the unconditional right to end a marriage. From Marx through to Lenin and Trotsky, the scientific socialist movement defended this right, but without any illusion that it was the solution to women's oppression. Not only did they fight for divorce as an important freedom in itself, but they regarded its legal attainment under capitalism as important in removing an obstacle to recognition that the fundamental root of women's oppression is capitalist class society itself. As Lenin expressed it:

> In most cases the right to divorce will remain unrealistic under capitalism, for the oppressed sex is subjugated economically. No matter how much democracy there is under capitalism, the woman remains a "domestic slave" a slave locked up in the bedroom, nursery, kitchen.
>
> The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their "domestic slavery" is capitalism, not lack of rights ... Under capitalism the right of divorce, as all other rights without exception, is conditional, restricted, formal, narrow and extremely difficult of realisation. Yet no self respecting Social-Democrat will consider anyone opposing the right of divorce a democrat, let alone a socialist. This is the crux of the matter. All "democracy" consists in the proclamation and realisation of "rights" which under capitalism are realisable only to a very small degree and only relatively. But, without the proclamation of these rights, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of this struggle, socialism is impossible. (*Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp 73-74).

The difference between Lenin and Connolly could hardly be clearer. In

terms of theory and general method it is further evidence of the latter's failure to grasp the importance and distinctness for socialists of the democratic programme. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that Lenin and the Russian Social-Democrats, had behind them the tradition of struggle of two decades of the German Socialist Women's movement.

Irish Womanhood

To grasp more fully Connolly's understanding of the "woman question" it is necessary to go further than pointing to his distance from the tradition of a working class women's movement. We must also point out the significance of what we have termed his populist regression from Marxism. In relation to women this implied that Irish women needed to be emancipated from the legacy of the English conquest and centuries of English rule. For Connolly this is nowhere posed as a distinct tasl from liberating women from their oppression by capitalism.

The chapter entitled "Woman", in *The Re-conquest of Ireland*, illustrates this clearly. This pamphlet, published in 1915, contains his only attempt at a rounded statement of his perspective on women's emancipation. In *Re-conquest* he repeats his schematic version of Irish history and draws a picture of a communal democratic Gaelic society destroyed by the English and replaced by the greed and tyranny of this "alien system". In his chapter on women he considers the implications of the conquest for Irish womanhood:

> The daughters of the Irish peasantry have been the cheapest slaves in existence—slaves to their own family, who were, in turn slaves to all social parasites of a landlord and gombeen-ridden community …
>
> The system of private capitalist property in Ireland, as in other countries, has given birth to the law of primogeniture under which the eldest son usurps the ownership of all property to the exclusion of the females of the family. Rooted in a property system founded upon force, this iniquitous law was unknown to the older social system of ancient Erin, and, in its actual workings out in modern Erin, it has been and is responsible for the moral murder of countless virtuous Irish maidens…
>
> Just as the present system in Ireland has made cheap slaves or untrained emigrants of the flower of our peasant women, so it has darkened the lives and starved the intellect of the female operatives in mills, shops and factories. Wherever there is a great demand for female labour, as in Belfast, we find that the woman tends to become the chief support of the house. Driven out to work at the earliest possible age, she remains fettered to her wage-earning,—a slave for life. Marriage does not mean for her a rest from outside labour, it usually means that to the outside labour, she has added the duty of a double domestic toil.
>
> Of what use to such sufferers can be the re-establishment of any form of Irish State if it does not embody the emancipation of womanhood. As we have shown, the whole spirit and practice of modern Ireland, as it expresses itself through its pastors and masters, bears socially and politically, hard upon women. That spirit and that practice had their

> origins in the establishment in this country of a social and political order based upon the private ownership of property, as against the older order based upon the common ownership of a related community. (*Re-conquest*, p.42).

For him, therefore, "Irish womanhood" refers to working and toiling women of town and country, "the real women of the people". This conception distinguishes them from bourgeois women. But at the same time it obscures the uniquely important features of working women, and working class women in general, upon which the continental movement was founded. Under Zetkin, this had meant a programme fighting for the right to work on equal terms with men, unionisation, maternity leave, divorce and political equality—all backed up by industrial muscle.

But it was not the working women of Ireland, rather the mainly bourgeois and petty-bourgeois women of his own day who were conducting the agitation for women's suffrage rights in Ireland and Britain. Connolly recognised the progressive elements of these women's struggle and thus sought to relate positively to them. To do this, however, he avoided explicitly acknowledging their bourgeois and petit bourgeois class character, following a pattern which, as with the national struggle, blurred the independent working-class interest.

He noted how in Ireland the "women's movement" arose not *out* of the working class but at a time, nevertheless, when women were being drawn into factory labour. In making this association he hoped that the middle-class women's movement would develop a social conscience about the conditions of working and toiling women:

> It will be observed by the thoughtful reader, that the development of what is known as the women's movement has synchronised with the appearance of women upon the industrial field, and that the acuteness and fierceness of the women's war had kept even pace with the spread amongst educated women of a knowledge of the sordid and cruel nature of the lot of their suffering sisters of the wage-earning class.
>
> We might say that the development of what, for want of a better name, is known as sex-consciousness, has waited for the spread amongst the more favoured women, of a deep feeling of social consciousness, what we have elsewhere in this work described as a civic conscience.
>
> In Ireland the women's cause is felt by all Labour men and women as their cause; the Labour cause has no more earnest and whole-hearted supporters than the militant women. (*Re-conquest*, p.40).

Nothing, however, in the history of either labour or women's movements in Ireland justified such optimism. There were, of course, honourable exceptions within both movements, women like Helena Moloney and Louie Bennett who proved vigorous union organisers. Connolly himself was a stalwart supporter of women's suffrage within the labour movement. But in truth the Irish labour movement showed no particular sympathies to the women's struggle and the

franchise agitation was led by middle class women who did not identify with the needs of the working class—even on the limited issue of the franchise.

The conjunction of forces did, momentarily, lead to mutual benefits. The 1913 lockout saw a deepening conversion of some militant suffragists to the cause of trade unionism. Connolly's own support for the feminists during 1912 when they were fiercely attacked by reactionary elements, and jailed, is also on record. (*Smashing Times*, by R. Cullen Owens, 1985, pp 74-95).

The suffrage movement sought the vote for women, not the removal of the property qualification that would have enfranchised workers in general. In the debate at the Irish TUC & Labour Party in 1914, Connolly advanced a partially feminist case. As Cullen Owens writes:

> At the 1914 Irish Trade Union Congress Larkin made the point that suffrage could be used for or against the working class. Connolly, however, stated that he was in favour of giving women the vote even if they used it against him as a human right! (*Smashing Times*, p.85).

Larkin was against the franchise for women if limited by property. Connolly's support was unconditional although his position and that of the ITUC & LP was actually for universal franchise—"adult suffrage". While debating the women's suffrage struggle, he did not, however, have a perspective of mobilising for adult suffrage. In fact, he did not fight at all to mobilise the rank and file of the ITUC & LP—of which he was a leading figure—around any political action programme. Neither did he warn of the dangers of the limited aspirations of militant feminism. In other words, he failed to make his stance one of strictly *critical* support for the half-measure sought by the feminists.

On the other hand, when a Liberal, Geoffrey Howard, in 1909 introduced a private members' Bill in the House of Commons to introduce universal adult suffrage without property qualification, the majority of the suffragettes refused to support it. In this instance the working class found a consistent socialist ally in Dora Montefiori and the section she had formed in Britain of the International Socialist Women's Bureau and brought Clara Zetkin over from Germany to speak to a rally in support of the Bill. The class character of the suffrage movement was beyond dispute, but Connolly's position left him unable to move at all in the direction of Montefiori's attempt to build a proletarian women's movement.

In fact Connolly settled for the view that the middle class "women's righters" (as they were described by Zetkin) were a healthy example to the mass of toiling women of Ireland:

> In Ireland the soul of womanhood has been trained for centuries to surrender its rights, and as a consequence the race has lost its chief capacity to withstand assaults from without, and demoralisation from within. Those who preached to Irish womankind fidelity

> to duty as the only ideal to be striven after, were, consciously or unconsciously, fashioning a slave mentality, which the Irish mothers had perforce to transmit to the Irish child.
> The militant women who, without abandoning their fidelity to duty, are yet teaching their sisters to assert their rights, are re-establishing a sane and perfect balance that makes more possible a well-ordered Irish nation. (*Re-conquest* p.43).

In Connolly's paradigm, then, militant women from the "more favoured" and "educated" sections of society have earned their moral right to be counted in the ranks of those who will re-construct the nation after the Re-conquest of Ireland from the grips of an English-originated and English-maintained capitalist enslavement. The maximum goal is "a well-ordered Irish nation"—a slogan which, in subordinating the proletarian slogan of the Workers' Republic, underlined his belief that the two were identical, because only those forces which had at heart the interests of the oppressed and exploited would play any role in the reconquest. The phrase "a well-ordered nation" clearly fudges class boundaries and legitimises fusion with the militants of another class and their programme in the struggle of the "real Irish".

The militant separatist nationalist movement of his second period in Ireland did not identify itself with the emancipation of women. In order to write the equality of women into his programme he needed the militant suffragist women. For, it is clear he had no perspective of mobilising working class women in a specific struggle, using class action, for women's emancipation.

He was correct in seeing that historically the women's agitation coincided with the rise of militant trade unionism in the first 15 years of the century. But it was essentially a temporary coincidence. In fact, as Margaret Ward points out, the collapse of the suffrage movement in Ireland was inevitable for a single issue movement. She adds:

> The pity was that in losing the suffrage movement, Irish women lost their only independent voice, as nothing emerged in its place. With no organisation to give priority to women's needs post-partition Ireland was able to implement, with little resistance, highly reactionary policies in relation to women, whose domestic role within the family became endowed with almost sacramental qualities. (An account of the Irish Suffrage Movement, p.35).

The consolidation of women's oppression in partitioned Ireland happened in spite of the extension of the franchise. The Free State ban on introducing divorce legislation and the outlawing of contraception as well as the introduction of reactionary censorship legislation all served the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie and its ally—the Catholic Church.

But Connolly didn't anticipate these dangers. He effectively offered a separate minimum programme of adapting to, and indeed "cheering on", the efforts of the non-working class suffrage movement, contenting himself with the promise that in the last analysis, the working class would have its say:

> None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In a march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thraldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour.
>
> But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raze it to the ground. (*Re-conquest* , p.45).

The separation of immediate struggles centred on the vote for women from the goals of socialism and the workers' republic could not be starker. There is no perspective here for bridging the gap between the goals of a liberal or radical feminist movement and those of working class women which go far beyond the limits of capitalism; no warnings about the inevitability that the Suffragists' "alliance" with the working class will at some point turn into its opposite, and no concrete perspective for the class-independent organisation of working women around clear and concrete action goals.

If Connolly's initial grounding in Scottish Marxism left him flawed on divorce rights and related questions, his populist adaptation to native plebeian traditions forced him to concede ever more ground to forces such as the Churches in Ireland which stoutly underpinned the "outworks" of oppression. In his celebrated chapter on "Woman", Connolly called for the combination of the fight for rights with "the serene performance of duty". What did this mean? From its context it is clear that each was to exercise a check on the other. As to "duties", it is clearly linked to the bonds of marriage and the family, for it is these bonds he claims that have been undermined by the Conquest, resulting in the emigration of the daughters of Erin to America and England to undergo hardships and succumb to "temptations", and in the "moral murder of countless virtuous Irish maidens".

True, Connolly distinguished between "rights" as the term "is used by, and is familiar, to the Labour Movement" and "the thin and attenuated meaning of them to which we have been accustomed by the liberal or other spokesmen of the capitalist class, that class to whom the assertion of rights has ever been the last word of human wisdom". However, his distinction lacks the sharpness found in Lenin, for whom the incomplete and indeed unrealisable nature of all rights under capitalism demanded that socialists fight all the harder for them as part of the task of showing the masses the limits of reforms within capitalism. By contrast, Connolly's schema meant that women's "rights" had to be checked by "fidelity to duty", as a condition of the "well-ordered Irish nation".

At the level of basic working class unity in the economic struggle, Larkin opposed allowing women into the one big union with men, i.e into the ITGWU, for largely chauvinist reasons. Connolly's healthy class instincts led him to the opposite view. He got around Larkin at first by organising them alongside the

Irish Transport as the Irish Textile Workers Union but was eventually compelled to usher them into the Irish Women Workers' Union. In his concluding chapter of the Re-conquest, where he outlines the task of building Industrial Unions he writes:

> With the Industrial Union as our principle of action, branches can be formed to give expression to the need for effective supervision of the affairs of the workshop, shipyard or railway; each branch to consist of the men and women now associated in Labour upon the same technical basis as our craft unions of today. (*Re-conquest* , p.62).

Despite these strengths, i.e his industrial unionism and his readiness to respond to working class women in struggle, his perspectives did not include a central role for working class women at the point of production. While it would be quite unfair to ascribe to him the reactionary view that a woman's place is in the home, his views on marriage and his populist adaptation to left-nationalism prevented the transition to a consistently Marxist outlook. Hence, although the textile workers of Belfast were predominantly married women and Connolly sided with their fight against being sacked, there is no evidence that he ever raised the general demand for the right to work for married women or for the linked demands of child care facilities, paid maternity leave etc. Yet demands were high on the list of priorities in the German women's movement of Zetkin. (See P.S. Foner (ed.)*Clara Zetkin: Selected Writings*).

It is notable that in his description of the conditions of Belfast's working women in *Re-conquest* Connolly did not draw any implications for the strategic role of working class women. They are portrayed only as passive victims. This is all the more notable in view of his practical involvement with their struggles in the same period. In the end he simply exhorted toiling women to support the suffragists against the 'outworks' now, while supporting 'Labour' in its eventual razing of the "citadel of oppression". Moreover, even these struggles were fused with the national goal of re-conquest of Ireland. If not entirely passive, it was certainly not a leading or independent class role for proletarian women.

Hence his silence about the socialist programme for socialisation of housework—significant in a socialist and militant trade union organiser who expressed such anger about the double burden of toil and labour on women. The 1910 anti-socialist polemical sermons of the Jesuit Kane quoted Bebel's book on the socialisation of child-rearing. Kane, of course, twists it into a nonsense about the child growing up "a stranger to its father and mother". Connolly, in his reply to Kane, under the chapter heading of "The honour of the home" clearly baulks at advancing any positive content of the socialist answer:

> The reader will observe there is nothing whatever in the words quoted from Bebel which justifies this statement that the child is to be taken from the parents, or brought up a stranger to its father and mother, or without the influence of a home. There is simply the statement that it is the duty of the state to provide for the care, education and physical and mental development of the child. All the rest is merely read into the statement by the

> perverted malevolence of our critic. And yet this same critic had declared, as already quoted in this chapter, "the reason of civil society is in the insufficiency of the family alone to attain that fuller perfection of human nature which is the heritage of its birth". But when he comes across the Socialist proposal to supplement and help out that "insufficiency" he forthwith makes it the occasion for the foulest slanders. (*Labour, Nationality and Religion, p*.40).

Like his reply to Kane on divorce in the same chapter, the content of this position uncritically accepts the existing conception of the family and evades any positive statement of the socialist alternative.

Many factors made for Connolly's weaknesses as a socialist on the question of women's liberation. These included his religious background, the Victorian world in which he grew up, and the flawed Marxism to which he had been apprenticed in Britain. Finally, his attempt to link the class struggle with the national question in Ireland further reinforced his conservative views of women, marriage, the family etc.

In identifying these political weaknesses we in no sense impugn Connolly's class instincts or even his personal attitude towards women in struggle. In fact his personal qualities played a significant role in surmounting any acquired paternalism towards women. At this level, the evidence is ample that he sought to encourage women to take leadership positions at every possible moment, whether in trade union organisation or in the Irish Citizen Army.

The purpose of this assessment of Connolly's view of the emancipation of women is not to damn him for failing to independently match the programmatic advances of his Marxist contemporaries in the more developed working class movements of the continent. We have aimed, rather, to evaluate him in the light of those advances while seeking to understand him in his historical, political and cultural context. Criticism of his legacy can reveal to women militants and socialists the richness and living relevance of the Marxist proletarian and revolutionary women's tradition

CHAPTER 7

THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS

Critical scholarship on Connolly's attempts to grapple with the nature and roots of Loyalist ideology has failed to pursue the very obvious shortcomings of his analyses. The work of Bew, Patterson, Morgan etc., while correctly locating Connolly's weaknesses in his failure to understand the unique features of social and economic development in Ulster, do so from a position hostile to the traditions and method of classical Marxism. Nowhere among whose who claim that tradition in Ireland has there been any attempt to draw upon the rich lessons of Bolshevism and the Third International on questions of imperialism.

As we have argued throughout, Connolly's Marxism suffered from both an inadequate grasp of historical materialism and the specific influence of the politics and intellectual milieu of the SDF. The significance of this has already been demonstrated especially in relation to religion in general and Catholicism in particular.

Rather than help Connolly confront religion and Catholicism, his theoretical position accommodated to it and a fortiori the grip of nationalism upon the Irish worker masses in town and country. Equally they were to have tragic consequences for his understanding of Protestantism in Ireland and shaped the attempts he would make, in his second period in Ireland, to both explain and relate to the Protestant working class.

Connolly's revision of classical Marxism in regard to the national question was connected to a qualitative revision of the Marxist materialist explanation of religion. For Marx and Engels, religion functions as part of the class-based forms of society which have grown up in history. But the role of specific religions in history can only be understood within definite social conditions and in relation to specific social classes.

This was not Connolly's approach. Catholicism in Europe, he argued correctly, was the reactionary consciousness of the hierarchical feudal lordship. But Catholicism in Ireland was, on the contrary, the spontaneous expression of the moral sentiment of the organic community—the sept. Like the 'Irish community' itself, Irish Catholicism became subordinated to the anti-democratic bureaucratic spirit and organisation of the pro-English (and pro-capitalist) authoritarian church. Furthermore, as the national struggle in Connolly's schema was simultaneously 'a class struggle', the continued loyalty of the plebeian masses to their Irish faith represented evidence of healthy collective values as against the alien values of 'individualism' and 'materialism'—the norms of private property.

Connolly's schematic and metaphysical rendering of Irish history as a constant struggle for the realisation (recovery) of an indigenous class-less nation severely restricts the scope of his enquiries into the complexity and periodisation of the Irish social formation and its development after the Norman invasion. By the period of the Anglo Norman influx the Irish social formation already represented an indigenous feudalism, weak compared to its European counterparts, and ultimately, if unevenly, incorporated into the Anglo Norman lordship. But by interpreting the conflict between two feudal entities as a class struggle for the Irish 'nation' Connolly does not grasp the implications and significance of the invasion and of the changing nature of English rule in Ireland. These changes were brought about by the slow emergence and then the break-up of Absolutism from the War of the Roses up to Cromwell and the Williamite coup in England. It is this period that is crucial for the real significance of Protestantism, and its part in the development of merchant capitalist social relations and the market.

As Marxism classically understands it, absolutism represented the effort of a threatened nobility to re-organise the basis of its state power after the breakdown of serfdom, the rise of towns and the dissolution of local economy. Regional power tended to be replaced by the centralised state of an emergent nation, represented by the absolute monarch. On the one hand this absolutist state sought to maintain feudalism by preventing the separation of manufacturing production from the land (a precondition of capitalist production). On the other hand, it helped to further dissolve feudalism by creating a unified and centralised state and superstructure, which aided the rise of merchant capital. Absolutism, then, carried out certain necessary functions of primitive accumulation which was a crucial early historic stage in the emergence of the modern industrial capitalist system.

The complete subjugation of native feudalism and the policy of systematic colonisation in Ireland from the early 17th century absorbed Ireland into the developing modern capitalist world system mainly through Ireland's relationship with England and its emerging capitalist economy. The nature and role of Protestantism in Ireland has to be connected with these events. But for Connolly if Catholicism had an exceptional character so too Protestantism. Writing in 1913 he says:

> I mean that whereas Protestantism has in general made for political freedom and political radicalism it has been opposed to slavish worship of kings and aristocrats. Here in Ireland the word Protestant is almost a convertible term with Toryism, lickspittle loyalty, servile worship of aristocracy and hatred of all that savours of genuine political independence on the part of the lower classes. (*Ireland on the Dissecting Table*, p.25).

And earlier, in his debate with Father Kane in 1909, linking the seizure of the monasteries in England with the conquest of Ireland:

> How do the Catholic clergy dare to defend the possessors in the present possession of

> their stolen property when they publicly proclaim from the altar their knowledge of the inhuman crimes against God and man by which that property passed out of the hands of Church and people? The reformation was the capitalist idea appearing in the religious field; as capitalism teaches that the social salvation of man depends solely upon his own individual effort, so Protestantism, echoing it, taught that the spiritual salvation of man depends solely upon his own individual appeal to God; as capitalism abolished the idea of social interdependence which prevailed under feudalism, and made men isolated units in a warring economic world, so Protestantism abolished the independent links of priests, hierarchy and pontiffs which in the Catholic system unites man with his Creator, and left man at the mercy of his own interpretations of warring texts and theories. In fine, as capitalism taught the doctrine of every man for himself, and by its growing power forced such doctrines upon the ruling class it created its reflex in the religious world, and that reflex, proclaiming that individual belief was the sole necessity of salvation, appears in history as the Protestant Reformation. Now, the Church curses the Protestant Reformation—the child; and blesses capitalism—its parent. (*Labour, Nationality and Religion*, p.58).

Thus he acknowledges the role of Protestantism in the development of capitalism in the period of the Reformation, but he omits anywhere to recognise this as a progressive development and even significantly inverts its actual meaning to fit the tenets of his schematic reading of Irish historical development from the period of the rise of absolutism onwards. He achieves this by identifying Protestantism with capitalism and its values of 'individualism' and 'materialism'.

Since capitalism and its values are alien, Connolly interprets Protestantism as an alien system of religious belief, one synonymous with the conquest. From such a position he interprets the dissolution of the monasteries and the seizure of the property of the feudal Catholic church by Henry VIII as nothing more than a regrettable expression of capitalist individualism. Such a method cannot unravel from a materialist standpoint the real significance of Protestantism for the economic, social and political processes in Ireland from the 15th to the 18th century.

For Marx an understanding of English absolutism and Protestantism flows from an analysis of the development of capitalism in England. Of that Marx wrote:

> "the different moments of primitive accumulation ... in England at the end of the 17th century ...arrive at a systematical combination, embracing the colonies, the national debt, the modern mode of taxation and the protectionist system. These methods depend upon in part brute force, e.g. the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode ..." (*Capital*, Vol. I, p.751).

Colonisation was one of the main elements of the absolutist state's policies which promoted the development of capitalism in England. For Marx the key to explaining political events in Ireland lay first in the nature and purpose of the

struggles within the English feudal nobility as the process of absolutism develops, and then, secondly, through the expanding penetration of merchant and commercial capital, in a growing conflict as the new forces and mode of capitalist production emerges.

Connolly's position is different. In both *Erin's Hope* where he concentrates on the period 1169-1649, and in *Labour in Irish History* which deals with both the Jacobite wars and 1691-1900, it is abundantly clear that he lacked Marx's framework and insights. In neither does he give any detailed analyses of the period crucial to his schematic reading of Irish history, 1169-1649. It is simply described as "war against the foreign oppressor" and a war against "private property".

No distinction is drawn between the periods before and after the War of the Roses. Yet it was on the basis of victory in that war that the Tudor kings established a state which both desired and needed to transform its own role in Ireland. From that point on, the varying forms of attack on Irish feudal property and the transfer of land ownership in the 16th and 17th century express the interests of the absolute Tudor monarchy. In failing to explain any of these phenomena Connolly cannot link the resurgence of English interest in Ireland under the Tudors to the process of primitive accumulation in England. A central part of this was the expropriation of Catholic Church lands and the establishment of the Protestant Church of England.

Therefore, the spread of Protestantism in Ireland, and especially the spread of radical Presbyterianism, had a historically progressive character. It represents one vital element of the process, from the point of view of the development of the productive forces, whereby the feudal mode of production in Ireland, as in England, was increasingly subordinated to the process of accumulation of capital and, by the 18th century, to the rising interests of the merchant and industrial bourgeoisie. This is not to say, of course, that the process was progressive through and through. It was Marx who more than once made the point that the bourgeoisie, right from its first successful seizure of state power from the feudal aristocracy in the Cromwellian revolution, combined bourgeois revolution in Britain with murder, dispossession and persecution of native and Anglo-Norman Irish as part of Cromwell's Irish wars and plantations. That is, the liberation of Britain through bourgeois revolution has as its penumbra the greater enslavement of the Irish.

In contrast to Marx's extended explanations in *Capital*, Vol. 1 and elsewhere (*Ireland and the Irish Question*, p.133), Connolly cannot connect absolutism's desire for land in Ireland with the transition from feudalism to capitalism. He fails to place religion in this process. Without such a framework, which relates ideological forms to their role in the development of the forces of production and the struggle of social classes, he sees it as no more than a conspiratorial ideological device used by the ruling classes to dupe the plebeian

toilers. This finds expression in Connolly's various accounts of Ulster history.

In the Ulster Plantation and the Jacobite wars of 1689-91—in his view merely a feud between two factions of the English feudal aristocracy in Ireland—religion (and patriotism) are only seen as cynically employed to mobilise the soldiery and support for the respective monarchs. (*Labour in Irish History*, p.7). A Marxist account, on the other hand, recognises these wars as being fought in Ireland for the control of the British state: the role of religion could only be understood in relation to the interests of both Ulster Protestant planters and Irish Catholic aristocracy in the class struggles of the commercial and merchant capitalist interests against reactionary Stuart absolutism. Marx describes…

> the fear felt among the new great landowners created by the Reformation of the re-establishment of Catholicism, in which case they would, of course, have to surrender their stolen church property, as a result of which seven-tenths of the total acreage of England would have changed owners; the fear of Catholicism felt by the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, since it by no means suited their business interests; the nonchalance with which the Stuarts, to their own advantage and that of their court nobility, sold the whole of English industry and commerce to the government of France—the only country which at that time was endangering England with its competition, in many respects successfully. (*Surveys from Exile*, pp 253-254).

The re-establishment of Catholicism had become, in this analysis, the issue over which the fate of English capitalist development would be decided.

While Connolly acknowledges the connection between the Jacobite wars and "English politics" (*LIIH*, p.10), he cannot identify the special significance of religion to them. Both Catholicism and Protestantism are mobilised to confuse the masses. Whereas for Marx, religion is an active and meaningful factor in explaining how different classes and fractions understood their social interests and pursued them.

Bourgeois market-relations and interests expanded and deepened both in England, and in Ireland. Within the ruling alliance Ireland was a stronghold of the landowners, and the extra strength they drew there was to have serious repercussions for the balance of power within the English ruling class. Meanwhile in both countries, with the smashing of the Stuart absolutist party Catholicism slowly ceased through the 18th century to represent the ideology of that reactionary alliance of monarchy and aristocracy. By the end of the 18th century many of the anti-Catholic measures lost the economic and political significance they had in the early years of Penal Laws.

The North-East—Uneven Development

The meaning of the alliance of the planted Ulster Protestants with the bourgeois revolutionaries of Cromwellian England escapes Connolly. Ulster's plantation in

the first decades of the 17th century had marked differences from the other plantations either earlier or later. Not only in the humbler socio-economic status of the colonists, the relative smallness of their settlements—none more than 2,000 acres—their strong adherence to the precepts and 'democratic' organisation of anti-Anglican Presbyterianism; but also vitally important is the fact that they had developed by the mid-17th century the most advanced core area of domestic linen production in Ireland.

Thus in Ulster alongside a native peasant-based economy emerged a small farmer economy geared towards petty commodity production in domestic textiles: a development which reflected and deepened the process of class, regional and ideological differentiation in Ireland, i.e. uneven and combined development. This was the concrete form taken by the intensification of the grip of merchant and commercial capitalisation of Ireland. It is this which enables us to explain the historically progressive support of Ulster Protestants for Cromwell and the Puritans whose victory in the English civil war ensured the effective destruction of the absolute monarchy and the partial break-up of its Catholic base in Ireland.

The Cromwellian settlement was crucial for the future path of development and the complexity of the Irish social structure. First, the forced transfer of the Catholic aristocracy (who had supported the Royalist cause) to the west, thereby further accelerating the rhythm of uneven regional development. Second, their replacement by the new English and Scottish landowners everywhere but in Ulster, whose share of land from 1640-1688 almost doubled to 78 per cent—creating in the process a new landowning Irish ascendancy as a right wing to the British ruling class. Third, the introduction into Ireland on a hitherto unprecedented scale, of merchant capitalist adventurer companies and their speculative activities in land, which in turn meant that the land increasingly took the form of a commodity.

For Connolly, however, the nature of the plantation in Ulster assumed no special importance for the development of capitalist property relations or the role of Orangeism in Irish history. It merely signalled the expropriation of the real Irish from the land and consolidation two-fold of foreign rule and cultural oppression—private property and Protestantism. This aided the conspiratorial manipulation of religion by the ruling classes as a means to divide the plebeian masses.

> I have pointed out before that the Ulster plantation of James I was a scheme under which lands stolen from the natives were given to certain crown favourites and London companies and that the rank and file of the Protestant English and Scottish armies were only made tenants of these aristocrats and companies ... All the Antrim lands were settled by a Protestant tenantry ... they worked hard, reclaimed the land, built houses, drained, fenced and improved the property ... (*Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, p.43).

and again:

> If the north east corner of Ireland is therefore the home of a people whose minds are saturated with conceptions of political activity fit only for the atmosphere of the l7th century ... the fault lies not with these toilers but with those pastors and masters who deceived it and enslaved it in the past ... and deceived it in order that they might enslave it (*Socialism and Nationalism* collection, p.103).

Therefore, for him the key point of the 18th century was that:

> The Protestant and Catholic tenants were suffering one common oppression ... To the vast mass of the population the misery and hardship entailed by the working out of economic laws were fraught with infinitely more suffering than it was at any time within the power of Penal Law to inflict. (*LIIH*, pp 51-52).

Under the appearance of religious differences, class conflicts between owners of property and labourers were the truly significant dividing line:

> Class lines ... were far more strictly drawn than religious lines as they always were in Ireland since the break-up of the clan system and as they are today. (*LIIH*, p.33)

The point of this characteristically economic-reductionist interpretation, liberally supported by accounts of plebeian struggles against property, resides in his need to explain the emergence of Grattan's Volunteers and later the United Irishmen. For Connolly it is "labour", as the material and ethical embodiment of the nation which alone can realise freedom. He is forced to dispense with all struggle by sections of the ascendancy and the bourgeoisie. The democratic demands of native capital are not recognised.

> ... the patriots who occupied the public stage in Ireland during the period ... never once raised their voices in protest at such social injustice. Like their imitators today they regarded the misery of the Irish people as a convenient handle for political agitation... (*LIIH*, pp 20-21).

and:

> The Irish parliament was essentially an English institution; nothing like it existed before the Norman Conquest.. England sent a swarm of adventurers to conquer Ireland; having partly succeeded these adventurers themselves established a parliament to settle disputes among themselves to contrive measures for robbing the natives, and to prevent their fellow tyrants who had stayed in England from claiming the spoil. (*LIIH*, p.21).

Even the claim, popular in his period among nationalists, that the legislative independence and free trade won by the Volunteers and Grattan's parliament occasioned a growth in prosperity and economic expansion, is strongly rejected by Connolly:

> We must emphatically deny that such prosperity was in any way but an infinitesimal degree produced by Parliament". (*LIIH*, p.26)

and

> …not that the loss of Parliament destroyed Irish manufacture but that the decline of Irish manufacture ... made possible the destruction of the Irish parliament. (*LIIH*, p.31).

Having disposed of the roles and motives of the reforming ascendancy or bourgeois reformers, Connolly suppresses the real economic, social and political goals of the leaders of the revolutionary wing of the bourgeoisie from the reform movement. As a consequence, the importance of their religion to their class interest is never understood. He ignores the origins of Tone's United Irishmen in the series of political and economic developments which led the most militant advocates of change from their initial position of support for reform (and loyalty to the Crown) to their final position of revolutionary bourgeois republicanism. He distorts the real significance of the economic conflict between the British and Irish propertied classes by refusing to recognise that the underlying economic purpose of their democratic struggle *was* to open a path for the development of native Irish capitalism. So he merely notes:

> The development of industry has drawn large numbers of the Protestant poor from agricultural pursuits into industrial occupations and the suppression of these latter left them both landless and workless (*LIIH*, p.52).

This suppression refers to British measures and economic competition. Thus:

> The Protestant workman and tenant was learning that the Pope of Rome was a very unreal and shadowy stranger compared with the social power of his employer or landlord; and the Catholic tenant was awakened to the perception of the fact that under the social order the Catholic landlord represented the Mass less than the rent toll. The times were propitious for a union of the two democracies of Ireland. They had travelled from widely different points through the valleys of disillusion and disappointment to meet at last by the unifying waters of a common suffering. (*LIIH*, pp 52-53).

The democratic programme is emptied of its real economic and class significance. Instead, the United Irish leaders emerge to express a popular will for "democracy" and "sovereignty" by taking their stand on two things:

> The national will was superior to property rights and would abolish them at will" and "the producing class could not be expected to rally to the democratic revolution unless given to understand that it meant their freedom from social as well as political bondage. (*LIIH*, p.66).

Social, economic and regional differentiation, in developing modes of production—involving conflicts between landlords and tenants, landlords and bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie and independent producers, bourgeoisie and workers, agricultural labourers and cottiers etc. are selectively ignored to establish the pre-conceived identification of labour and nation in the revolutionary events of the 18th century. Thus we are left with no means to grasp the significance of the fact that while it was Presbyterian manufacturers and merchants in Belfast who led tens of thousands of Presbyterian tenant farmers to Antrim in the '98

revolution, it was Anglican (Church of Ireland) cottier weavers—Orangemen—of the Ulster countryside around Armagh and south Down who crushed them. To do so we need to see the relationship of the competing social classes to the process of change and development in Ulster within the momentum of capitalist industrialisation.

Class Struggle in the Formation of Ulster

It is necessary to begin with the perspective and interests of the British state after the Williamite Glorious Revolution. The state was dominated by the Whig landed aristocracy who were committed to the protection of existing industry and the defence of British trading (what Marx calls 'merchant') capital, against the emergence of an Irish rival. According to Marx, the primary purpose of the British state in controlling Ireland in the 18th century lay in ensuring the implementation of mercantilist policies promoting English commerce, and to prevent any possible alliance between Irish merchants and the landed ascendancy in Ireland. This meant strengthening the Established Church, and ensuring state control of the judiciary to gain control over land titles.

Mercantilist policies (i.e. taxes and other state policies to promote English industry), as they had developed in the 18th century, reinforced the tendency of the Irish economy to orientate to the needs of the British economy. In the period 1650-1750 the Irish landlord and merchant bourgeoisie on most of the island ceased to be, to all intents and purposes, potential competitors with their neighbours. Ireland became within that period an agricultural province supplying cheap food and labour for the growing industrial market of England.

Only in one sector was economic growth of Irish manufacturing fostered and developed—in linen where no competition could be offered, as England possessed no comparable industry. Through the 18th century the export of linen became the single most important item of trade—by 1720 it accounted for over one half of all exports to England. In 1700 half a million yards were exported but by 1800 the figure had reached 38 million yards. Clearly the main external reason for its growth was the existence of a rapidly expanding market to which Irish linens had duty-free entry. By the end of the 18th century the industry existed all over the country in the hands of merchants with no interest other than to supply the English market. Only in Ulster did control of the industry rest in the hands of the direct producers themselves. It is this that provides the key to an understanding of both the drive towards mechanised factory production in both linen and cotton, the emergence in Ulster of a force among the cottier weaver class in reaction against these developments.

The primary economic significance of the Plantation in Ulster lay in the type of agriculture it established, proving conducive to the development of domestic handicraft linen industry. Smallholdings, whether of tenant farmer or cottier

weaver, were used for the growing of not only food but also flax for domestic consumption. In general domestic industry, prior to the development of the factory system required the existence of a peasantry independently possessing a dwelling and a source of subsistence. Such was the case in Ulster. Marx explains the nature of this mode of production, i.e domestic industry:

> .. it attains its adequate classical form only where the labourer is the private owner of his means of labour set in action by himself ... This mode of production presupposes parcelling of the soil, and scattering of the other means of production. As it excludes the concentration of these means of production, so it also excludes cooperation, division of labour within each separate process of production, the control over the productive application of the forces of nature by society, and the free development of the social production process ... At a certain stage it brings forth the material agency for its own dissolution. (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp 61-2).

Taking advantage of the British market and increasingly attracting financial support from the landlords, its development in Ulster hastened a process of social, cultural, economic and regional differentiation of Ulster from the rest of Ireland, which would culminate in the period of mature industrial capitalism in the second half of the l9th century.

One of the most important effects of the 18th century growth of this mode of production was its effect on merchant capital. A weak merchant capital had existed in Ireland in the 16th century. During the 17th century merchant capital all over the island depended on local trade and importing consumer goods for the local landowners, administrators, the Army and the Established Church, while exporting limited amounts of wool and foodstuffs. These developments continued into the 18th century, when, with the increasing growth of commercial agriculture and a merchant capital allied with the producers, conflict developed with feudal agricultural forms and relations as well as with the British state in Ireland which supported them.

But it was in relation to the linen and cotton industry that merchant capital began to emerge, increasingly freed from dependence on agriculture. As they developed, merchants became less dependent on landlords because the local markets grew extensively on the basis of trade with England. In the linen industry merchants began to overlap increasingly with bleachers, the final most capital intensive aspect of the industry, and the stage with the most fruitful promise of capital accumulation. One important indication of these changes occurred when alternative Linen Halls were built in Newry and Belfast to break the Dublin-based state Linen Board monopoly of the export trade. The concentration of capital in the hands of these merchants led to the increasing mechanisation and capitalisation first of cotton production and later linen production, as market force and competition intensified. Concentration of capital, mechanisation and intensified competition led in turn to the expropriation of the previously independent and domestic producers in Ulster. Part of this expropriation was well under way by the 1780s with the deliberate

introduction of Catholics into the industry—previously excluded due to lack of capital and tradition—in order to sharpen competition and lower the wages of Protestant spinners and weavers.

Here we witness the two-fold dialectical process central to Marx's classical theory of capitalist development—the sharpening of competition and market forces leading to the gradual separation of the immediate producers from their means of production. Simultaneously, because of the increasingly available "free" labour power, land and capital and other means of production could be combined in the most profitable manner in mechanised factory production.

Connolly had correctly observed the results of these processes at work in Ulster but concluded that they heralded the beginning of the end for private property in 1798. In fact they signified only the first stage, the end of the beginning of capitalist private property. On one side in this process were the Anglican rural cottier weavers' class, while on the other were the newly expanding Presbyterian urban manufacturing bourgeoisie. This constitutes the material basis of their conflict, located at different ends of the objective process of capital accumulation. It is also the framework for placing the specific role of Presbyterian and Orange ideology. Moreover, it is only through an understanding of the outcome of their conflict—the political defeat of the urban bourgeoisie and their economic subordination to the dynamic industrialisation of British colonial capitalism—that we can explain the 19th century conversion of Presbyterianism into an ideology allied to Unionism, and thus the greater consolidation of Orangeism throughout Ulster.

This objective development towards the realisation of a mature capitalist mode of production set in motion processes which brought the most economically advanced merchants and manufacturers to the head of a struggle for a bourgeois republic and the defeat of English colonialism and Irish landlordism. The same events led also to the mobilisation of one of the most oppressed social groups, in defence of colonialism and landlordism, under the banner of Orangeism.

Traditional Protestant tenant defence organisations—out of which Orangeism grew—were thrown up originally when Catholics were encouraged to compete as linen weavers in the countryside. These organisations, which existed to protect jobs and conditions from Catholic dilution—grew over into a mass organisation with a general pro-colonial anti-national programme and ideology only indirectly related to its original purpose.

Increasingly cottier weavers could be serviced by being in the same Orange Order. They were threatened by the expansion of factory production carried out by a growing bourgeois strata in the vanguard of social and political change. They were further exacerbated by the encouragement given to Catholics to compete as linen weavers in the countryside and as factory

labourers in the towns. The calculated organisation and mobilisation of the Catholic peasantry by the United Irishmen threatened to accelerate these economic assaults on the cottier weavers and to generalise those assaults by radical political change. The continued growth of manufacture would, in the long term, spell the end of the independent domestic producer and his mode of production. In the short term, however, it was the cottier weaver and the stratum immediately above him who would be the first victims of the development of manufacture. This outcome would be made even more certain by a revolution which sought to destroy landlordism for ever and remove the British ruling class and state interest in Ireland.

For Connolly, on the contrary, the material root of Orangeism and Loyalism was landlordism, with its historical foundations in the plantation of Ulster three hundred years ago:

> I have explained before how the perfectly devilish ingenuity of the master class had sought its end in North-East Ulster. How the land was stolen from Catholics, given to Episcopalians but planted by Presbyterians; how the latter were persecuted by the Government but could not avoid the necessity of defending it against the Catholics and how out of this complicated situation there inevitably grew up a feeling of common interest between the slaves and the slave driver. (North-East Ulster, in *Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, p.38).

No subsequent event is considered relevant. As he saw it Protestant workers and toilers, taking their place alongside their fellow Catholic workers in the events of 1798, were assuming and confirming their place in Labour as the destiny of the nation. Even as the Loyalist Orange working class were being mobilised in hundreds of thousands in 1911, He continued to assert that Orangeism was a declining phenomenon of landlordism.

> .. there is no economic class in Ireland today whose interests as a class are bound up with the Union. The Irish landlords who had something to fear ... have now made their bargain under the various Land Purchase Acts ... only the force of religious bigotry remains an asset to Unionism ... it may be assumed that the 12th of July this year will be exceptionally large as every effort will be made, and no money spared, to make an imposing turn-out in the hope of averting Home Rule ... but the parade will be the last flicker of the dying fire which blazes up before totally expiring. (A Plea for Socialist Unity, in *The Connolly Walker Controversy*, p.1).

Hence his false expectation that economic and class struggles would dissolve such antiquated division.

Protestant Working Class

If Connolly didn't understand the nature of Orangeism in the 18th century, even less did he grasp its ability to survive and develop with an entirely different complex of factors in the 19th century and the period of industrial capitalist expansion in the North East. The Act of Union underlined this new situation. It

set firmly in motion economic processes whose maturation would result, by the end of the 19th century, in the complete integration of a highly industrial north-east Ulster into the British colonial capitalist system. Simultaneously the rest of Ireland would experience a similarly dependent development but as stagnant commercialised agricultural reserve providing food and labour to the expanding capitalist British market.

This pattern of intensified colonial dependency was in turn to produce its own contradictions. By the 1860s the industrial sector of British capitalism and the newly emerging Catholic bourgeois class in the agricultural south increasingly sought to come together to pursue their mutual interests in developing a rationalised and efficient agriculture within a redefined political framework of Home Rule. This provided the general framework for development in the second half of the 19th century and explains the relationship between industrial development and the role of Orangeism and Loyalism be understood.

The development of capitalist agriculture in Ireland in the 19th century, the strengthening of merchant capital especially in Dublin and in Cork with the development of the railways and shipping (and the tentative re-emergence of a southern Irish industry (e.g. the co-op movement) towards the end of the 19th century) brought into existence a distinctive Catholic bourgeoisie. As Engels describes it:

> Soon after the establishment of the Union (1800) began the liberal-national opposition of the urban bourgeoisie which as in every peasant struggle with dwindling townlets (for example Denmark) finds its natural leaders in lawyers. These also need the peasants; they therefore had to find slogans to attract the peasants. Thus O'Connell discovered such a slogan first in the Catholic Emancipation, and then in the Repeal of the Union. (*Ireland and the Irish Question, p*.451).

Support from one wing of the liberal industrial bourgeoisie to the partial solution of the democratic tasks in Ireland and the opposition of the Tory interests, reflects the different perceptions of these sections of the British ruling class to the best means of pursuing and protecting British interests as a whole.

For the liberal bourgeoisie in England the fact that the new Irish bourgeoisie was Catholic became less and less important. For the Tories, given their perspective on protecting imperial interests, Protestantism and Loyalism remained vital as an ideological basis for rule in Ireland, and Tory strength in particular. The economic basis of this is graphically described by Marx when commenting on one of the earlier reforms granted by the British state to accommodate the Catholic Church and its bourgeoisie, by disestablishing the Church of Ireland in 1867:

> You see, the *English* Established *Church in Ireland*—or what they used to call here the *Irish church*—is the religious bulwark of *English landlordism* in Ireland, and at the same time the outpost of the Established Church in England herself. (I am speaking of the

> Established Church as a *landowner*.) The overthrow of the Established Church in Ireland will mean its downfall in England and the two will be followed by the doom of landlordism—first in Ireland and then in England. I have, however, been convinced from the first that the social revolution must begin *seriously* from the bottom, that is, from land ownership. (*Ireland and the Irish Question*, p.160).

Protestantism would once more assume a key role within the outlook of the industrial proletariat of the North East. The defeat of Belfast and the United Irishmen did not lead to an immediate assault on the Belfast bourgeoisie in the Act of Union. The maintenance of full protective duties on cotton until 1816 and of some protection until 1824 gave Ulster capital the opportunity to use its development of factory production to avoid the fate of the rest of Ireland's industry as it crumbled before the superior competitive might of British industry. The vital period, however, occurred around 1825 when, with the development of wet spinning, the linen industry was transformed, by an injection of capital from the declining cotton industry, into a highly mechanised and qualitatively new industry. The growth of the Brewery and the Shipping industries followed in the wake of this expansion of steam-powered linen mills throughout the Lagan Valley and the rapid expansion of population in Belfast. Joint stock banking promoted a further stage of developments within the industry, one peculiar to Belfast—the combination of weaving and spinning. With the increase of commodity farming as industrial expansion continued, the character and shape of the class structure in Ulster began to take on the features unique to that part of Ireland.

The figures for the population growth in Belfast from 1770 onwards underline the enormous scale of development and change in the class structure.

1770 8,500 1841 70,000

1800 20,000 1851 100,000

1815 30,000 1861 120,000

1831 50,000 1901 350,000

The massive 14-fold increase from 1760 to 1861 hides the process of rural impoverishment, forced migration and urban competition for jobs so typical of the way in which capitalism had developed in Britain. The situation of Catholics in Belfast was not, therefore, unlike that of the Irish in English cities as described by Marx:

> ... the English bourgeoisie has not only exploited Irish poverty to keep down the working class in England by forced immigration of poor Irishmen, but it has also divided the proletariat into two hostile camps. ... The average English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers wages and the standard of life. He feels national and religious antipathies for him. He regards him somewhat like the poor whites of the Southern States of North America regard their black slaves. This antagonism is artificially

> nourished and supported by the bourgeoisie. It knows that this scission is the true secret of maintaining its power. (*Ireland and the Irish Question,* p.254).

Thus in the growth and concentration of Belfast's urban industrial working class, job competition from impoverished Catholic rural migrants (10% of Belfast in 1800, 33% in 1835) gave life 'spontaneously" to Orangeism as an expression of Protestant workers' attempts to protect themselves from Catholic dilution, just as it led to anti-Irish racism in English cities. As in England, described by Engels in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1844), this, aided by a bourgeoisie who owned the land and controlled housing developments, created large scale ghettoised divisions especially in West Belfast, as the city expanded. Employment in the mills became, as a result, sectarianised and stratified in terms reflecting the dominance of Protestant workers in the labour market.

This labour market was cruelly harsh as the conditions for survival of the Presbyterian bourgeoisie against English capitalist competition made it necessary to extract a significantly higher amount of surplus value out of its workforce. Thus the breaking of the textile workers' struggles after the end of the Napoleonic war created the conditions for using every device to lower wages and conditions. The textile workers' union disappeared in 1825, not to appear again for 40 years.

Against this background O'Connell and the Catholic bourgeoisie emerged through the Catholic Association formed in 1823 to fight for emancipation, against the tithe payments to the landowners' church, and to win Repeal. The complete union of the Catholic peasantry, the Catholic Church and the Catholic bourgeoisie raised once more the nationalist threat to the colony. The regional mobilisation of the Protestant working masses under the banner of Orangeism and Loyalism began to develop. The leaders of this mobilisation were not only the ascendancy but, from 1830 onwards—the Presbyterian bourgeoisie. Their evangelical counter-revolution, led by the demagogue anti-Catholic Cooke, signalled the complete class submission of this group to the interests of imperialism. By the end of the 1830s more than half the Orange Lodges in Ireland were located in the greater Belfast region.

However, competitive job rivalry between workers, and the Catholic Emancipation movement, cannot fully account for the ability of the landowners and bourgeoisie to mobilise Protestant workers behind the banners of sectarian anti-nationalism. For it is clear that as industrialization continued throughout the century, the proportion of Catholics in the working class population of Belfast declined relative to Protestants. Between 1861 and 1910 the total population of Ulster declined by 10% mainly due to emigration from the land. But the proportion of Catholics also declined from 33% of the total to 25%. In Belfast in particular the number of Catholics rose from 40,000 to 85,000 over the same period due to migration from the land. But as a proportion of the total

population of Belfast they also declined from 34% to 24% in the face of large scale Protestant migration to Belfast from the countryside. These figures indicate that in Belfast, as in major English cities, Catholics tended to become a smaller proportion of the available workforce towards the end of the 19th century. As a result, as Engels noted in 1892, anti-Irish ideology became less and less effective as a tool of Conservative influence among English workers in England's major industrial centres. But this did not happen in Belfast. We need to understand why, contrary to Connolly's experience in Scotland or Larkin's experience in Liverpool, this was not happening in Belfast.

The underlying cause lay in Belfast's hinterland, quite different from the rural surroundings of English cities. Catholic-Protestant divisions were solidly sustained among domestic weavers and rural labourers in Ulster throughout the 19th century, where proportions remained more stable. These divisions acted as a powerful reservoir feeding sectarian divisions in the industrial workplaces and urban areas in Belfast and Derry. They did so all the more sharply in the context of the second stage of Belfast industrial development in the latter half of the 19th century.

The key to the development of capitalism in the latter half of the 19th century is the growth of imperialism, as free trade and laissez-faire competition were transformed into the stage of monopoly. Britain was the first and most powerful capitalist power and so was able to allow certain improvements in the conditions of the whole of the English working class from 1847 onwards. As large scale manufacturing emerged, certain strata, in particular craft skilled workers, benefited most, in return for industrial peace. Engels referred in 1892 to this strata as an 'aristocracy of labour'. We need to look briefly in the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky in order to see more clearly the specific form and function an aristocracy of labour had (and still has) within the Protestant working class of Ulster.

> The truth is this, during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have to a certain extent shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most but even the great mass had at least a temporary share now and then (*The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, p.34).

> Secondly, the great Trades Unions. They are organisations of those trades in which the labour of grown-up men predominates, or is alone applicable. Here the competition neither of women and children nor of machinery has so far weakened their organised strength. The engineers, carpenters and joiners, the bricklayers are each of them a power to that extent, that they can even successfully resist the introduction of machinery. That their condition has remarkably improved since 1848 there can be no doubt ... they form an aristocracy of labour among the working class; they have succeeded in enforcing for themselves a relative comfortable position and they accept it as final. They are the model working men of Messrs Leane Levi and Giffen, and they are very nice people nowadays to deal with, for any sensible capitalist and for the whole capitalist class. (*The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, p.31).

Engels recognises the aristocracy as a fraction of the English working class while aware that materially all workers benefited from Britain's role as the first monopoly capitalist state. Engels believed, correctly that the emergence of New Unions of the unskilled, semi-skilled and especially of women, heralded the end both of Britain's monopoly position in world capitalism and of the dominance over the working masses of the narrow, conservative outlook of the aristocracy of craft workers.

Lenin developed these insights to give them their fullest expression in a theory associated with his examination of imperialism as a higher stage of capitalism. He bases his analysis on the points already observed by Engels. He notes:

> ... two important distinguishing features of imperialism were already observed [by Engels] in Great Britain by the middle of the 19th century viz. vast colonial possessions and a monopolist position in the world market. Marx and Engels traced this connection between opportunism in the working class movement and the imperialist features of British capitalism systematically, during the course of several decades.
>
> The causes are: 1) exploitation of the whole world by this country; 2) its monopolistic position in the world market; 3) its colonial monopoly. The effects are: 1) a section of the British proletariat becomes bourgeoisified; 2) a section of the proletariat permits itself to be led by men bought by, or at least paid by, the bourgeoisie. (Lenin, *Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, pp 100-102).

Finally, he characterised the situation in 1916 as one where imperialism has grown from an embryo into a predominant system and specifies some of the effects:

> The distinctive feature of the present situation is the prevalence of such economic and political conditions that are bound to increase the irreconcilability between opportunism and the general and vital interests of the working class movement ... instead of the undivided monopoly of Great Britain, we see a few imperialist powers contending for the right to share in this monopoly, and this struggle is characteristic of the whole period of the beginning of the 20th century. Opportunism cannot now be completely triumphant in the working class as it was in England in the second half of the nineteenth century; (*Imperialism*, p.102).

And even more strongly:

> The bourgeoisie of an imperialist "Great" Power can economically bribe the upper strata of "its" workers by spending on this a hundred million or so francs a year, for its superprofits most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labour ministers, "labour representatives" (remember Engels' splendid analysis of the term), labour members of War Industries Committees, labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft unions, office employees, etc., etc., is a secondary question...
>
> It was possible in those days to bribe and corrupt the working class of one country for decades. This is now improbable, if not impossible. But on the other hand every

> imperialist "Great" Power can and does bribe smaller strata (than in England in 1848-68) of the labour aristocracy. (Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, p.13).

Lenin elaborated from these points the role of the late 19th century 'labour aristocracy', the craft trades of the vast shipbuilding and engineering complexes in Britain, in providing the base for a trade union bureaucracy and officialdom complicit in British imperialist rapacity in the world market. The politics of 'reformism' expressed the outlook of this stratum in Britain and in Belfast in the emergence of a Labour party in the first decade of the 20th century:

> Formerly a "bourgeois labour party", to use Engel's remarkably profound expression, could arise only in one country, because it alone enjoyed a monopoly but, on the other hand, it could exist for a long time. Now a "bourgeois labour party" is inevitable and typical in all imperialist countries. (*Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, pp 13-14).

Trotsky, following on from Lenin's analysis, attempted to relate his key ideas to the changed conditions in the 1920s and 1930s. Trotsky notes in particular a distinction between the nature of the labour aristocracy in imperialised countries compared to the labour aristocracy in the imperialist countries:

> Mercilessly plundering its Asiatic and African slaves and its Latin American semi-slaves, foreign capitalism is at present compelled in the colonies to feed a thin layer of aristocracy, pitiful, pathetic but still an aristocracy amid the universal poverty. Stalinism has in recent years become the party of this labour "aristocracy" as well as of the "left" section" of the petty bourgeoisie. (Trotsky Leon, *Writings* 1938-9, p.73).

Let us now turn to the significance of these points for a deeper understanding of the Belfast Protestant proletariat. The second half of the 19th century saw the emergence of the shipbuilding and engineering industries, spatially concentrated within the Lagan Valley. These developments created like elsewhere, a stratum of the most highly skilled workers, with the traditional craft prejudices and privileges relative to all workers. However, we need to place this development with three important contexts. First the enormous historical advantage that British capitalism had as the first complete monopolist of the world market. Second, Britains role as a colonial power, which as Lenin pointed out gave an added basis to the monopolist role and the advantages accruing to all sections of workers in England from 1848 onwards. Third, Ireland was a colony within which Ulster's mature, advanced industrialisation was achieved through its full economic integration with British capitalism; whereas the rest of the island stagnated. All these factors affected the nature of the labour aristocracy in Belfast.

The first successful stage of industrialisation, in linen, took place against the background of fierce assault on the working class by the bourgeoisie. Competition between Catholic and Protestant workers was an added factor to the lower wages of all workers. A sectarian stratification pattern of employment

emerged, which reflected the ability of Protestant workers, through Orange patronage, to control the labour market. With the onset of bourgeois Catholic nationalism and its threat to the colonial rule of the aristocracy and Protestant capital in Ulster, the political mobilisation of Protestant workers behind the Orange banner intensified (e.g. 1837 demonstrations against O'Connell's visit to Belfast). By the 1850s employer patronage grew as a result of both this threat and the expansion of the economy.

It was within these social relations that the labour aristocracy of craft workers—carpenters, plumbers, fitters etc.—which existed in the 1850s had grown up. Many of those who made up this stratum in the 1850s had been migrants from the declining Dublin Protestant working class. Many were also soon involved in leading the Orange riots of 1857. Events in the second half of the 19th century did not dissipate these sectarian divisions, as occurred in England, but intensified them as the Belfast labour aristocracy developed to a level unique in Ireland. The process deepened with the generalisation of manufacture from cotton to linen, engineering and shipbuilding, involving the crystallization of a classical labour aristocracy on the basis of access to the British market while at the same time the Catholic peasantry was being mobilised behind an emergent Catholic nationalist bourgeoisie.

Two points need to be underlined here. First, the labour aristocracy constituted proportionately a larger section of the working class in Belfast than in any other part of the colony of Ireland, and was thus an especially key section of the Protestant working class. Its impact and its material ability (through the link of family, ghetto and Lodge) to hegemonise the rest of the Protestant proletariat throughout Ulster was correspondingly greater. Second, its relationship to the employing class was further structured by the position of Ulster within the most powerful colonial and industrial power of the globe. As a result its sense of political identity was anchored in resistance to any threat from Irish nationalism, whose goals and character threatened both these material foundations of the Ulster economy and the ideological hegemony of loyalism. The labour aristocracy of Belfast sought to ensure its supremacy within the labour market under capitalism by its defence of the political conditions guaranteeing its privileges.

The fact that Protestant labour aristocrats created the very model of exemplary trades unions, in defence of their wages and conditions against the employing class and other strata of workers; the fact that they, simultaneously, were the most resolute in defence of Orange political principles, is not evidence, as some suggest, for some mysterious 'relative autonomy' separating their ideas off from their economic conditions as workers. As Marx, Engels and Lenin pointed out again and again, it underlines the compatibility of trade unionism per se with capitalism. Trade unionism, as the organised expression of workers within capitalism, has no necessary connection with socialist politics. Trade

unions have been and often are, anti-socialist, Catholic or liberal, or even racist. As Lenin pointed out:

> All those who talk about "overrating the importance of ideology", about exaggerating the role of the conscious element etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself if only the workers "wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders". But this is a profound mistake. (Lenin, *What is to be done*, p.39).

> There is much talk about spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology... for the spontaneous working class movement is trade unionism... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working class movement from this spontaneous, trade unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of the revolutionary Social-Democracy. (p.41).

The form that such enslavement took in Ulster, for reasons that have been made clear, is ideologically bound up with the Protestant bourgeois hostility to Irish nationalism in the 19th century. Significantly, as Gibbon correctly points out, it was in the late 1860s when Gladstone and the Liberal Party first put their proposals for Home Rule, that the Protestant Working Men's Association, made up of the skilled strata, acted to force the employers into an alliance of Orange men against Home Rule. This became the basis for an expanded Orange Order—an all-class alliance. In turn this was later to be mobilised by the Unionist Party against Sinn Fein. It embraced the grandees of the aristocracy and the Tory Party as well as the masses of Protestant workers, labour aristocrats and much of the Protestant bourgeoisie. The ability of Orangeism, and the closely related Masonic and other orders bound up with Protestantism, to hegemonise the Protestant working class population in towns and country, reveals the extent to which all Protestant workers relative to Catholics, were in a position to receive marginal privileges in return for support for a political cause.

These privileges do not mean that unskilled Protestant workers were also labour aristocrats. But they enjoyed, preferential treatment in the allocation of available jobs and houses and in the determination of working conditions, job security and possibly wage rates. These marginal privileges were perceived by Catholics, and understood by Protestant workers themselves, to represent a superior position within the labour social and political hierarchy. Such marginal privi;eges, relative to the mass of Catholic workers, did not mean that the mass of Protestant labourers shared anything of the material levels of privilege of the labour aristocracy proper. The labour aristocracy remained the key basis for bourgeois influence within this section of the working class as a whole.

The Protestant loyalist working class across Ulster was enveloped by a strong sense of inner belief in the communal and personal superiority of the Protestant. What Marxists observe is that such belief has a material foundation and in that sense can be said to specify a shared 'labour aristocratic' outlook,

despite the recurrent tensions and conflict among economic layers of Protestant workers against their employers.

Connolly never developed any such understanding of the conditions giving rise to Orangeism in the Lagan Valley. His view was that its historical foundation lay in the plantation of Ulster in the early 17th century, and that its conditions of existence and survival were the maintenance of that rural landlord-dominated society.

> At one time in the industrial world of Great Britain and Ireland the skilled labourer looked down with contempt upon the unskilled and bitterly resented his attempt to get his children taught any of the skilled trades: the feeling of the Orangemen towards the Catholics is but a glorified representation on a big stage of the same unworthy motives—an atavistic survival of a dark and ignorant past. (*Ireland Upon the Dissecting Table*, p.40).

This was clearly wrong. It led him to underplay the potential strength of Irish nationalism among the majority of Catholic workers and to ignore the increasing reality of Orangeism and Loyalism among Protestant workers in the first decade of the 20th century. Inevitably he was swept along by events because he lacked any method of arming his socialist party, the Labour Party or the trade unions with a perspective or tactics which could break the most concentrated industrial proletariat in Ireland from its pro-imperialist and Unionist coalition with Orange capitalism.

From his point of view it was simply because they were toilers that Protestant workers would be essentially sympathetic to the national struggle. All that remained in working class Loyalism was, therefore, a false consciousness which could be erased by educating Protestant workers to their class-wide interests in the trade union and Labour Party organisations. And when in the heat of the massive anti-Home Rule mobilisations of 1912-14 this had clearly not happened, Connolly moved closer and closer to the nationalist position that Protestant workers must be dragged against their wishes, but for their own good, into a united Ireland whose benefits would win them over.

CHAPTER 8

THE PARTY AND THE WORKING CLASS

The whole history of revolutionary communism is bound up with the struggle for an effective relationship between the party of the socialist revolutionaries and the mass of the working class. For Marx and Engels, for Lenin, for Trotsky and for each of the Internationals this issue of party and class has been central to political struggle with rival socialist currents.

Confusion on this question is one of the hallmarks of Connolly's politics. It may be argued that his failure to create a fighting party which would survive after him was the greatest tragedy in his political legacy to socialists in Ireland. Though unquestionably a socialist revolutionary in his own outlook and purpose, his failure to work out and fight for an effective form of political organisation for the Irish working class places him ultimately in the camp of centrism, unable in the last analysis to provide the vanguard of the working class with a means for revolutionary struggle.

That is not to liken him, however, to the centrists of the 1920s and '30s who tried to find a middle ground, rejecting the degenerated Second International but in practice turning their backs on the revolutionary alternative of Bolshevism. It would be a full year after Connolly's death before the Bolshevik model of the party (which has nothing in common with the Stalinist travesty) was to be vindicated for revolutionary socialists world-wide. The traditions and movements in which he had to work out his politics led rather to a very eclectic view of how the class struggle should be consciously organised against capitalism. His legacy on this question nevertheless is distinctive.

The two things that stand out in the general popular picture of Connolly's achievements, besides the 1916 Rising, are his association with Jim Larkin in building the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union into a fighting union of general workers able to mount the heroic struggle of 1913, and secondly, his role in founding the Irish Labour Party. This picture is essentially correct. His most mature conception of 'party and class' was the relation of the One Big Union to the Labour Party. This chapter looks at his changing views on the relation of party and class, with particular reference to the trade unions.

What stands out most clearly from any study of his political and trade union activity is his involvement in essentially organisational tasks. Ransom's thesis, James Connolly and the Scottish Left, shows him in 1893 as secretary of the Scottish Socialist Federation, secretary of the Independent Labour Party District

Council in Edinburgh, and of the ILP Central Council, also based in Edinburgh. At the same time he was an active member of the Edinburgh Social Democratic Federation and of a general union of carters, a 'new union'. However, the central focus of his general political development was the SDF. He viewed the SDF as the nucleus out of which a British Marxist party like the German Social Democratic Party would grow. We must therefore briefly look at the conception of party and class held by the SDF leadership, and how it was regarded by Connolly and his closest comrades in Edinburgh.

Two important issues in which the party-class relationship was posed in Britain during Connolly's early period, were how socialists should relate to the trade unions, and the growing campaign for independent political representation of the working class. On both fronts the SDF leaders and their programme were doctrinaire and sectarian, while their practice was opportunist. They were unsparingly criticised as such by Engels and the forces around him in London, centred on Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling who were intervening in the struggles of the unions, especially the new unions, and striving to win them over in action, step by step, to communism.

There are two notable instances among many where Engels attacked the SDF for sectarianism towards the unions and the working class. The first is in the context of the epoch-making dock strike in the autumn of 1889 whose victory gave an enormous boost to the struggle for the new unions. Engels, inspired by the heroism of the lowest and most downtrodden stratum of London workers, wrote to Laura Marx on 22nd August, 1889:

> They are as you know the most miserable of the East End, the broken down ones of all trades, the lowest stratum above lumpen proletariat. That these poor famished broken down creatures who bodily fight amongst each other every morning for admission to work, should organise for resistance, turn out 40-50,000 strong, draw after them into the strike all and every trade of the East End in any way connected with shipping, hold out above a week and terrify the wealthy and powerful dock companies—this is a revival I am proud to have lived to see. And all this strike is worked and led by our people … the Hyndmanites are nowhere in it. (Kapp Y., *Eleanor Marx*, Vol. 2, pp 333-4).

A look back a few weeks to the SDF's annual conference of August 5th throws light on its sectarian absence from the struggle. Close after the victory of the gas workers and a few days before the dock strike the Birmingham SDF Conference revised its programme and rules, but the nine-point programme it adopted did not so much as mention trade unions. Only in an addendum of "measures called for to palliate the evils of our existing society" does it stop to mention in a single line that "eight hours or less be the normal working day in all trades". Of six SDF executive committees set up to deal with all party activities, none dealt with industry.

The second example is in the context of the massive May Day demonstration of 3rd May 1891 in which the new unions showed their drawing

power for the London working class in general. Afterwards, the SDF held their own private 'rally' at an uncontaminating distance from the main throng having, weeks before, withdrawn in a sectarian manner from the joint demonstration committee in which Engels was prominently represented. Engels' observation marked down the position of the SDF as 'that of a sect' in a letter to Laura Marx on May 4th 1891 in which he noted:

> It is very characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race and their peculiar development … that both here and in America the people who, more or less, have the correct theory as to the dogmatic side of it, become a mere sect because they cannot conceive that living theory of action, of working with the working class at every possible stage of its development, otherwise than as a collection of dogmas… recited like a conjurer's formula or a Catholic prayer. (Kapp, pp 474-5).

In fact, Engels had attacked a similar doctrinaire sectarianism on the part of the American Socialist Labour Party in its attitude to the Knights of Labor, a semi industrial-union which had three quarters of a million members as far back as 1886. (Brecher, Strike, New York, 1972, p.28). In the course of a political tour of America by Eleanor Marx and E. Aveling in 1886 at the invitation of the SLP, Engels wrote:

> Therefore I think also the Knights of Labor a most important factor in the movement which ought not to be pooh-poohed from without but to be revolutionised from within, and I consider that many of the Germans there made a grievous mistake when they tried, in the face of a mighty and glorious movement not of their creation, to make of their imported and not always understood theory a kind of all-saving Dogma, and to keep aloof from any movement which did not accept that dogma. Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process of evolution and that process involves successive phases. To expect that the American will start with the full consciousness of the theory worked out in older industrial countries is to expect the impossible. What the Germans ought to do is to act up to their own theory—if they understand it, as we did in 1845 and 1848—to go in for any real general working class movement, accept its actual starting point as such and work it gradually up to the theoretical level by pointing out how every mistake made, every reverse suffered, was a necessary consequence of mistaken theoretical views in the original programme: they ought, in the words of the *Kommunistischen Manifest*: represent the future of the movement in its present. But above all give the movement time to consolidate; do not make the inevitable confusion of the first start worse confounded by forcing down people's throats things which, at present, they cannot properly understand, but they will soon learn. (*Marx & Engels Selected Correspondence*, pp 376-377).

The second front on which the party-class issue was posed was around the efforts to get an independent mass political party for workers as a class. Engels had faced this issue also in advising the American communists who looked to him for a lead in the 1880s. Writing in 1886to Sorge, one such emigré communist active in the US labour movement, Engels made the following general observation on the struggle for a mass workers' party:

> The first great step, of importance for every country newly entering into the movement, is always the constitution of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how,

> so long as it is a distinct workers' party. And this step had been taken, much more rapidly than we had a right to expect, and that is the main thing. That the first programme of this party is still confused and extremely deficient and that it has raised the banner of Henry George are unavoidable evils but also merely transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop, and they can have the opportunity only when they have a movement of their own—no matter in what form so long as it is their own movement—in which they are driven further by their own mistakes and learn to profit by them. (*Selected Correspondence*, pp 373-376).

Engels' view on this had two basic premises. First it was vital for communists to cut positively with the desire of the worker masses to form a distinct and separate class party of their own encompassing millions of proletarians by supporting and where possible leading it. Second, it was necessary to do this "without giving up or hiding our own distinct position" On the contrary, Engels argued (in the letter cited above) that the best method of arguing the communist programme in struggles by workers for their own party was to help the workers to learn from their own mistakes: "There is no better road to theoretical clearness of comprehension than to learn by one's own mistakes, to learn from bitter experience. And for a whole class there is no other road …".

In thus re-elaborating the Marxist attitude in the context of new unions and the fight for a distinct mass workers' party, Engels' views were models of concreteness and realism, with no trace of either sectarianism or opportunism. In the last years of his life he applied these ideas in the British context through Eleanor Marx, Aveling and the communist and working class forces gathered around them.

As in its attitude to the unions, so in its attitude to the workers' party, the SDF took an attitude that was both sectarian and doctrinaire. Thus, the SDF in autumn 1892 defeated a resolution to support the new Independent Labour Party, amending it to preserve an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards the ILP. This sectarian attitude was to be continued more or less towards the Labour Representation Committee of 1900 and eventually the Labour Party which it created in 1906. The outcome was that, at a key turning point in the history of labour in the British state, the thousands of 'Marxists' in the SDF had no tactical orientation towards the growing consciousness of the workers. By default they allowed the reformists and centrists of the ILP to take all the laurels for fighting for an independent class party.

Engels and his circle repeatedly stressed the need to bridge the gap between the real movement of the day and the goals of communism. This is what he meant when he underlined the themes of the Communist Manifesto concerning the role of communists, who "represent the future of the movement in its present". This was aimed against those in the SDF who either held aloof from unanticipated developments in the class struggle or, equally, those who opportunistically situated themselves in the slipstream of the real movement.

The SDF, with its programme of "maximum" objectives (for the vague and distant future) orientated to here-and-now events on the basis of a "minimum" list of reformist demands. Their failure to seek a bridge between minimum and maximum programmes deprived them of any cutting edge against ILPers for whom reformism was a principle.

Kapp's biography of Eleanor Marx draws out the contrast between her Marxism and that of the Hyndmanites:

> Eleanor... did not consider shorter hours, higher wages or any other amelioration of workers' conditions under capitalism either trivial or ends in themselves: for her they had precisely that degree of importance the workers attached to them. In that lay her distinctive contribution. She was zealous to work for any and every practical reform without for a moment losing sight of the revolutionary aim; to agitate for the total overthrow of the system without brushing aside a single immediate demand for which the working class was prepared to fight. This was her interpretation of Marxism. It was unlike that of the SDF whose policy and propaganda were Marxist but whose practice was not. Indeed, the two were divorced; hence, perhaps, the turnover of membership so ironically mocked by Engels. People came in and went out of the SDF as through a revolving door. (Vol II, p.665).

It is not difficult to appreciate that Connolly was not able, alone or with his Edinburgh comrades to mount a theoretical analysis and exposure of the SDF's sectarianism and to bring this to fruition in an opposition programme. One important reason why Engels' perspective was hardly accessible to such as Connolly was that Eleanor Marx and Aveling had left the SDF in 1884 as part of the Socialist League, a split regretted by Engels as premature, and these two were the main fighters for the ideas of the aged Engels. Eleanor did not rejoin it until late in 1896, by which time Connolly had left for Ireland. Deprived of their scientific critique of the SDF 'orthodoxy', his subsequent political development was to be considerably impoverished, and ultimately would never achieve a genuinely Marxist conception of the relationship of party and class.

He returned to Ireland in May 1896 and by the end of that month he had founded his first political group, the Irish Socialist Republican Party. The ISRP was also characterised by the retention of the basic division between minimum and maximum programmes—its immediate goals were not linked as steps to its 'final' goals.

As we have seen, however, he identified or merged social with national revolution. He was putting the national-democratic question in the realm of the maximum programme in this period, thus breaking with the Marxist orthodoxy of the Second International. He overlooked the potential of the national struggle to build a bridge between what was possible under capitalism (the minimum programme) and the destruction of capitalism (the maximum programme). The ISRP's practice was thus confined largely within the electoralist perspectives of a series of minimum demands for legislative reform, while on the national question nothing more could be done than to passively make propaganda.

Connolly did, however, seek to break with certain of the worst aspects of the SDF leaders. It is important to acknowledge his own record in Scotland of active trade union struggle in the early 1890s. This might have helped him to break out of a purely propagandist role had not his period with the ISRP (1896-1903) fallen between two waves of 'new unionism' in Ireland, the first having been effectively wiped out by 1896 and the second taking off while he was in the USA (1903-1910).

Before he was established in Dublin as leader of the ISRP, he had already been casting an eye around for allies and co-thinkers as an alternative to continued dependence on the SDF. In Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labour Party in the USA he found what he thought he was looking for. The American SLP which ultimately inspired a split in the SDF and the formation of the British SLP in 1902. Connolly had been drawn to it for a number of reasons, most notably the weaknesses of the SDF which came to the surface on the Irish national question, the Boer War and the principle of no coalition with bourgeois parties. The SDF interpreted in the most limited way their obligation to support Ireland's right to 'legislative independence'. Hyndman's response to the Boer War was to use reactionary anti-semitic rhetoric to divert attention from the responsibility of the British imperialist ruling class. In 1900 the SDF angered Connolly by voting against independent representation for the Irish delegation at the international socialist Congress in Paris. The Hyndmanite SDF also supported the opportunist resolution of Karl Kautsky on the issue of socialist participation in coalitions with the capitalist parties—exemplified in the case of the 'socialist' Millerand in France. There are signs too that Connolly may have been conscious of the sectarianism of the SDF's aloofness from the trade unions.

On many of these issues the SLP(US) appeared to be healthier. It hammered away in its press at the SDF, not without effect. Connolly was a regular recipient of DeLeon's *Weekly People* from about 1898. Not only did he help in the formation of the SLP in England but, after bringing the debate into the ISRP, he effectively liquidated his own paper into a joint publication *The Socialist*, along with the British SLP from August 1902. Following tours of the USA and Scotland during 1902, Connolly proclaimed the ISRP the Irish section of the Socialist Labour Party in 1903. Most significantly of all was the influence of DeLeon on Connolly's decision to leave for the USA where his conception of party and class was to go through its most significant development.

The Syndicalist Influence

At this time DeLeon's SLP was not syndicalist, but it did have some roots in the industrial organisation of the American working class, through the Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance (STLA). There is every reason to believe that Connolly would have seen this as worthy of emulation, whatever about any subsequent differences. A healthy orientation to trade unions appeared to

separate the SLP qualitatively from the SDF tradition. The STLA was reported to have had 30,000 members in 1898 (Seretan, L.G., *Daniel DeLeon, The Odyssey of an American Marxist*, p.168).

Apart from this, the SLP was modelled after "orthodox" European social democracy. We have seen from Engels' remarks, however, that it, too, tended towards doctrinaire sectarianism. Connolly became attracted to it on the grounds that it appeared to be a healthier version of the SDF, not something radically different from it.

Whatever the superficial attractions of the SLP compared with the SDF, it was in fact even more sectarian and doctrinaire than the SDF. Similarly it committed itself exclusively to legalistic methods, within the framework of a minimum-maximum programme without any bridging perspective.

The American SLP had originated in the 1880s and was dominated by DeLeon soon after he joined in 1890 and for the next 20 years. Its doctrinaire rigidity, observed by Engels, had led to serious splits, one in 1899 whose forces soon joined with those of the Mid-West based Social Democratic Party of America to form the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in 1901.

DeLeon was never to succeed in developing any tactical, concrete and critical relationship with the SPA though the latter grew in strength as the SLP contracted. The SPA ran candidates in presidential elections and won 402,283 votes in 1904, 420,713 in 1908 and 893,000 in 1913 (J.P.Cannon, The First Ten Years of American Communism).

In the period following Connolly's admission to the SLP which saw the emergence of the International Workers of the World (IWW, the Wobblies), the SLP was tottering in a seriously demoralised state. This was primarily the product of its own sectarian politics, in particular its radically false conception of the relation of party and class manifest in its theory of *dual unionism*. This theory repudiated work within the reformist-dominated trade unions and transposed against this the work of the STLA, a 'union' creature of the SLP itself, to which Connolly later justly described as merely 'a ward-heeling club of the SLP'.

At this stage the SLP had not yet adapted to the emergent industrial unionism of the 1900s. Moreover, the SLP maintained an ultra-left disdain for trade union struggles for better wages and conditions, counterposing the idea of a pre-existent politically conscious trade union, the Socialist Trades and Labour Alliance.

The SLP, already outdone by the successes of the SPA, was soon suffering erosion on its trade union flank from the forces of revolutionary syndicalism which were now on the ascent and were to crystalize into the IWW in 1905. It

was the latter development which forced the SLP to change tactics. By seeking to gain influence in the IWW, DeLeon was to temporarily relieve the dilemma of the doctrinaire SLP—a dilemma eloquently expressed in the plummeting of the membership of its trade union creature from 30,000 in 1898 to 1,450 in 1905.

We have no evidence that Connolly had any disagreements with the SLP's sectarian dual unionism prior to the emergence of the IWW in 1905. In 1904 he did fire his first shots against the SLP's 'iron law of wages', correctly advocating instead Marx's *Wages, Prices and Profits* which acknowledged the validity of the wages struggle by demonstrating that wage rises need not be inevitably neutralised by price rises. But he did not draw out the connections between this revisionism of the SLP and its sectarian dual unionism. Indeed, he was quite taken aback by the implicit rejection of Marx's views on this question in the SLP.

Prior to the SLP's encounter with the IWW it looked on the party as the primary instrument of working class emancipation. The party was a political instrument which, in the tradition of the Kautsky-dominated and centrist Second International, would win power, peaceably, through elections. Prior to this the STLA's role would be to act as a specialist aid in gathering the votes of the US proletariat. It was from this position that the SLP was now to reverse the roles of party and union under IWW pressure. Here is how the new position is described by one recent non-Marxist scholar:

> But the purity of the political movement was not expected to be self-generating. The Union, besides having become the determining variable in the industrial formulation, was also seen to be the repository of virtue, the party being merely the light the union cast into the political realm. Turning the central assumption of the new trade unionism upside down the union would have to provide the compass that would hold the political body on course. It would have to be the disciplinary body of the party, for only through its vigilance could there be any assurance that the political movement would remain true to its purpose. (Seretan, p.168).

In effect, then, DeLeon and the SLP ended up with a syndicalist position on party and class in which the industrial unions, co-ordinated into one big industrial union (OBU), were assigned the leading role in proletarian emancipation from capitalism and of building the socialist order which in DeLeon's scheme would directly replace it. DeLeon continued to share common ground with Kautsky in his implicit rejection of Marx's and Engels' understanding of the *dictatorship of the proletariat* as the essential coercive instrument over the bourgeoisie during the transition from capitalism to socialism:

> Industrial unionism is the Socialist Republic in the making; and the goal once reached, the industrial union is the Socialist Republic in operation. Accordingly, the industrial union is at once the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of capitalism and the successor to the capitalist social structure itself. (Seretan, p.191).

DeLeon further theorised the reversed roles of party and union as follows:

> The very nature of the [syndicalist] organisation preserves it from the danger of 'resting satisfied', of accepting 'improvement' for its 'goal', inasmuch as it is forced by economic laws to realise it can preserve no 'improvement' unless it marches onward to emancipation. (Seretan, p. 203).

Central to this faith in an automatic economic process pushing the OBU to final confrontation was the theoretical error of the 'iron law of wages' which saw wage increases as illusory, always being canceled out by capitalism. The syndicalist version of how the state was to be taken over, and what stamped it as revisionist in the context of the Second International, was the repudiation of insurrection and the belief that the OBU would be able to crowd out the bourgeois state without smashing it, by relying on the effects of industrial action:

> The weapon of the social revolution is not the General Strike but the general Lockout of the capitalist usurping class (DeLeon, quoted in Seretan, p.186).

and:

> The element of 'force' consists not in the military or other organisation implying violence but in the structure of the economic organisation, a structure of such nature that it parries violence against itself, shatters it, and thereby renders the exercise of violence in return unnecessary, at least secondary or only incidental (DeLeon, quoted in Seretan, p.190).

Connolly took aboard several of the principles of DeLeon's syndicalism. Indeed, in becoming a committed organiser of the IWW he soon came to the point where he felt compelled to break with the sectarian SLP itself. He wrongly assigned to the "OBU" the same place in working class revolution as did DeLeon, a place of overwhelming primacy which reduced the role of the party to that of a passive echo of the syndicalist organisation. By 1908 he was writing:

> The finished expression of the natural law of our evolution into class consciousness … is … the appearance of our class upon the political battle ground with all the economic power behind to enforce its mandates … and as political parties are the reflex of economic conditions, it follows that the industrial unions once established will create the political unity of the working class" (Industrial and Political Unity, in *The Harp*, Dec. 1908).

Putting it even more bluntly he wrote:

> Let the great truth be firmly fixed in your mind, that the struggle for the conquest of the political state of the capitalist is not the battle, it is only the echo of the battle. The real battle is being fought out and will be fought out in the industrial field. (*The Harp*, April 1908, *Socialism and Nationalism* collection, p.61).

The 'inevitability' of socialism arising out of the logic of economic developments, *economism*, is another premise which, despite his rejection of

the Iron Law, Connolly shares with DeLeon. It is a theme throughout his writings:

> On the other hand, that very development also teaches us that until the workers have perfected their economic power sufficiently to control the economic forces, the class actually in control will most relentlessly and scientifically use their political powers to hamper, penalise and, if possible destroy, the workers' organisations, and thus create a force sufficient for their suppression.
>
> My reading of history tells me that in all great social changes the revolutionary class always fails of success until it is able to do the work of the class it seeks to destroy and to do it more efficiently. And when it has so perfected itself that it is able to perform this work, neither gods nor men can stop its onward march to victory (*Forward*, 1914, in *Workers Republic* collection, p. 161).

And finally, in his Dock Ward Election Address in 1913 he wrote:

> I desire to see capitalism abolished, and a democratic system of common public ownership erected in its stead. This democratic system, which is called socialism, will, I believe, come as a result of the continuous increase of power of the working class. (*Workers Republic* collection, p.101).

He also shared DeLeon's perspective of the working class movement neutralising rather than smashing the capitalist state and thus coming to power. In October, 1909, he wrote an article in the *International Socialist Review* called "Ballots, Bullets or … ", in which, referring to the Zeppelin Balloon, he says:

> In facing such a weapon in the hands of our remorseless and unscrupulous masters the gun of comrade Berger will be as ineffective as the ballot paper in the hands of the reformer. Is the outlook then hopeless? No! We still have the opportunity to forge a weapon capable of winning the fight for us against political usurpation and all the military powers of earth, sea or air. That weapon is to be forged in the furnaces of the struggle in the workshop, mine, factory or railroad, and its name is industrial unionism. …. A Supreme Court decision declaring invalid a socialist victory in a certain district could be met by a general strike of all the workers in that district, supported by the organisation all over the country, and by a relentless boycott extending into the private life of all who supported the fraudulently elected officials. Such a union would revive and apply to the class war of the workers the methods and principles so successfully applied by the peasants of Germany … and by those of the Land League in the land war in Ireland in the eighties. …
> Finally, after having thus demonstrated the helplessness of capitalist officialdom in the face of united action by the producers (by attacking said officialdom with economic paralysis instead of rifle bullets) the industrially organised working class could proceed to take possession of the industries of the country after informing the military and other coercive forces of capitalism that they could procure the necessities of life by surrendering themselves to the lawfully elected government and renouncing the usurpers at Washington. In the face of such organisation the airships would be as helpless as pirates without a port of call, and military power a broken reed. The discipline of the military forces, before which comrade Berger's rifles would break like glass, would dissolve and the authority of officers would be non-effectual if the soldiery were required to turn into uniformed banditti scouring the country for provisions. (*Workers Republic* collection, pp 66-8).

Of course, neither Connolly nor DeLeon were ever pure syndicalists like the IWW. Eclectically, they combined syndicalist practice in the unions with political parties devoted to making propaganda including electoral propaganda. By the time he had parted company with the SLP in 1907, Connolly had established the Irish Socialist Federation and *The Harp* newspaper for this purpose. However, it was Connolly who proceeded to draw out in practice one inevitable conclusion, the belief that a broad-church party such as the Socialist Party of America, was superior to a doctrinally 'pure' one because:

> ... since the political party was not to accomplish the revolution, but only to lead the attack upon the political citadel of capitalism, there no longer existed the same danger in the uncleanness of its membership nor compelling necessity for insisting upon its purification ... it is our belief there will evolve ... one socialist party embracing all shades and conceptions of socialist political thought; one socialist industrial organisation drilling the working class for the supreme mission of their class, the establishment of the Workers' Republic. Finally, we give it as our opinion that until the economic organisation of the workers has attained a power in control of the workshop and, therefore, in the nation equal to that attained by the capitalist class before they raised the revolutionary standard in England, America and France, working class politics are but preliminary skirmishing and that therefore the broadest, most tolerant political party of socialism may be made useful as a teacher as long as it is kept distinct from the industrial organisation and therefore unable to hamper the movements of the latter when, as the regular army of organised labour, it forms its line of battle for the final attack. (*The Harp*, 1908, in Ransom and Edwards, p.289).

He left the American SLP in 1907 but remained in the IWW. Although the majority of the Wobblies wanted all 'politics' to go with DeLeon, he pursued the goal of wedding it to the electorally successful Socialist Party of America as a 'broad church' party. In the same period, according to Ransom, his attitude towards Keir Hardie, whose Independent Labour Party had fought for the establishment of a mass Labour Party in Britain, was considerably mollified.

In the same period, and unknown to Connolly, Lenin's Bolshevik faction among the Russian Social Democrats was struggling to create a revolutionary party which would win into its ranks the most advanced sections of the working class. Lenin would succeed in overcoming the false roads of both the passive propagandist and the broad-church models. He did so by struggling to unite the best militants around a nucleus of professional cadre, based on a scientific and concrete programme, as the heart of the future mass party.

The Labour Party

When Connolly returned to Ireland in 1910 he held the view that the OBU was the primary weapon of proletarian revolution. A broad-church party of the one big union, the political echo of the OBU, was needed. This formula was to guide his work in Ireland until shattered by the events of 1913-4 and World War.

It was to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU), founded

by Jim Larkin in 1908-9 after a split from the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), that Connolly orientated on his return. Here was the likeliest candidate for the role of one big union spreading its wing over all semi and unskilled workers with the goal of gripping every industrial sector.

Working within the ITGWU, he also pursued the "political industrial unionism", in the tradition of DeLeon. He was to become involved with two existing parties in Ireland, the tiny Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) and the Irish branches of the Independent Labour Party, while actively pursuing the task of building a broad-church Labour Party. In all of these involvements it will be seen that he worked with all the programmatic deficiencies of his unique blend of political action and industrial unionism, applied to Irish conditions.

The SPI had existed since 1904. When he returned in 1910 he wrote its manifesto as part of an attempt to develop it into an effective propaganda party. By this time Connolly had resigned himself to the view that the national question would be solved from above by the British ruling class through the Third Home Rule Bill, thus clearly undermining a central tenet of his theory that capitalism in Ireland would be an impossibility. He saw the SPI as a group which would "seek to organise the workers of this country irrespective of creed or race into one great party of Labour". (*Manifesto of the SPI*). The underlying perspective was:

> Political organisation at the ballot box to secure the election of representatives of socialist principles to all the elective governing public bodies of this country, and thus to gradually transfer the political power of the state into the hands of those who will use it to further and extend the principle of common or public ownership. (*Socialism and Nationalism* collection, p.190).

The Independent Labour Party of Ireland ILP(I) was set up at Easter 1912 as a bigger propaganda organisation and a unification of Irish socialists north and south. It was successful in absorbing all Ulster branches of the Independent Labour Party, save for William Walker's branch in Belfast. Its programme was eclectic—a combination of syndicalism, electoral activity—first local and, after the prospective Home Rule, national. The pivots of its programme were:

> 1. Organisation of the forces of Labour in Ireland to take political action on independent lines for securing the control of all public elective bodies and for the mastery of all public powers of the state, in order that such bodies should be used for the attainment of [the industrial commonwealth and:]
>
> 2. Furtherance of the industrial organisation of wage earners, with a view to securing unity of action in the industrial field as a means to the conquest of industrial power, the necessary preliminary to industrial freedom. (*Socialism and Nationalism* Collection, p..190.)

In neither the SPI nor the re-organised ILP(I) could Connolly be said to have in any way paralleled Lenin's endeavour to create the professional cadre

nucleus of a conscious revolutionary party, not to mention the programmatic method of Bolshevism. He clearly lacked any conception of the party taking a leading role in in the national independence struggle. In both the SPI and ILP(I) the false hope was cherished that the Home Rule Bill would pass so that their duties were to prepare themselves a party of the unions which take up the working class struggle in the parliament of a Home Rule Ireland.

Even his propaganda for the formation of a mass trade union labour party was deeply flawed. He did not see any necessity to fight to define it as a consciously socialist party. His failure to define and fight for a programme for the envisaged mass party was in stark contradiction to the method advanced by Engels with respect to the US in the 1880s and Britain in the 1890s. Not only had Engels warned against sectarianism but he equally cut against opportunism. The duty of the Marxist was to fight alongside the workers, but for the communist programme. Thus the call for the mass party to be built by the trade unions was supportable as long as the programmatic battle was consistently pursued:

> All our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages without giving up or hiding our own distinct position and even organisation. (*Marx & Engels Selected Correspondence*, pp 376-377).

There was already a substantial sentiment within the organised trade union movement in Ireland in favour of independent political representation. Prior to the explosive wave of militancy ushered in by Larkin in the National Union of Dock Labourers in Ireland and then the new ITGWU, socialists had been arguing in the Irish Trades Union Congress for political representation—within the London Parliament. The ITUC was divided between craft union interests tied to northern Unionism on the one hand and to southern Home Rule nationalism on the other. The nationalist majority, content to be represented in Westminister by the Irish Home Rule Party, blocked any affiliation to the Labour Representation Committee. The logjam was broken when the new wave of unskilled militancy propelled Larkin and Connolly into the ITUC as prominent representatives of a powerful new rank-and-file force which threatened to shatter the cosy traditions of class-collaboration maintained by the craft-union leaderships.

However, when Connolly and Larkin, at the Irish TUC conference in Clonmel in 1912, proposed the successful resolution to create a Labour Party, Home Rule seemed a certain prospect. Pro-nationalist trade unionists were no longer being called on to directly challenge the Irish Nationalist Party's seats in the London Parliament, while the hope of the pro-Union socialists for Irish labour representation in London were undermined. It was accepted that a parliament would soon be restored to Dublin after 112 years of the Union. Nothing in his perspective envisaged the party as other than an electoral front which would only find its full development in the new parliament. Certainly, nothing in the actual resolution gave hope for more:

> That the independent representation of Labour upon all public boards be, and is hereby included among the objects of this Congress. (See *Trade Unions in Ireland, 1894-1960*, McCarthy, p. 22)

It was this resolution which allowed the ITUC to restyle itself as the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party (ITUC&LP. A few local seats were contested with trade union support in the name of Labour but no party organs were built. Limited attempts by Connolly and the often unreliable Larkin never developed into a fight to build a party in terms of branches or committed membership or a programme.

The attempt to interest local trade union organs in standing or supporting candidates appears to have been the limited horizon of party work until the post-1916 period. ITUC leaders were increasingly to be heard uttering political pronouncements in the turbulent period after 1916, but not with any revolutionary intent. When the transformed Sinn Féin established its hegemony over the southern masses, the majority in the re-styled ILP & TUC found it more convenient to abstain from the 1918 general elections rather than to take an independent stand on a class programme and in defence of the right of Irish self-determination.

Sadly, even those within the ITUC who did fight in 1918 to independently contest the elections equally failed to offer any alternative programme or strategy that might have opened up class-conscious revolutionary struggle. The general election was intended to fill seats at Westminster but the victory of Sinn Féin enabled them to constitute a revolutionary nationalist assembly of their elected deputies in Dublin and thus open the nationalist guerrilla war that was only ended by the imperialist imposition of the Treaty and Partition. Labour's fate as a party was to become a loyal opposition in creating and stabilising capitalist parliamentary rule in a semi-colonial southern state.

Despite his overwhelming involvement in trade union organisation since his return from the US, Connolly clearly saw the need for political action. Thus in the period in which the ITUC was at last won to commit itself to political representation, he fought to build the Socialist Party of Ireland, to create socialist activists in it and to educate it in socialist doctrines. He did not operate, however, with any conception of an action programme which would enable the conscious socialists to give political direction to the organised masses of the ITGWU, or the ITUC&LP. Nor did he argue for formal affiliation of socialist groups to the ITUC&LP, though such socialists were in the main active trade unionists. He preferred not to have affiliation procedures which might dilute the movement with non-working-class influences from other quarters. This illuminates why Connolly's perspectives for socialist and labour movement political activity compartmentalized the conscious socialist minority and the political labour movement.

Again, this division between a propaganda socialist party on the one hand and a party for political action (itself only a reflex of the OBU) on the other was in marked contrast to Lenin's party building principles. Lenin sought to unify the whole class around a concrete programme of action, a programme hammered out by the most politically conscious militants and given detailed expression and direct application in the field of struggle. Connolly, under the successive influences of the SDF and SLP, compounded by his own confusion of the national and socialist struggles, came nowhere near this method.

Syndicalism led him to rely on the OBU to ensure that the electoral wing of the labour movement would remain faithful to the revolutionary outlook of the minority of propagandists. The OBU would be the ever present sharpening stone generating class consciousness and guiding the political wing. This fatally ignored the inherent limitations of the spontaneously organised trade union movement. Lenin, in contrast, insisted that the party, as a conscious vanguard trained in programme and theory, was required to intervene and direct the spontaneous movement of trade unionism, raising it to the level of a conscious class struggle for workers power.

Over-reliance on the spontaneous process of trade union organisation disarmed Connolly both in the context of the great industrial struggles of 1913-4 and in the more general political context of the Home Rule movement.

His general perspective in this period was marked by an accommodation to the Home Rule bourgeoisie who, he expected, would bring about a Dublin parliament. This was the arena in which the struggles of the Labour Party would take place.

This perspective was to be severely tested. With the outbreak of the Dublin strike and Lockout in 1913 the 'new unionism' among the labourers of Dublin was confronted with the employers' counter offensive, designed to break the back of its new-found strength and organisation. Such counter offensives were to follow the example set in Britain in the early 1890s and in Belfast in the battles of 1907. Prior to the Dublin lockout, there had also been skirmishes in towns such as Wexford and Cork in the intervening years.

These struggles had exhibited the classic "spontaneous" character of all economic (trade union) struggles of the self-organising unskilled and semi-skilled majority of the working class. Whether any such upsurge of militancy could provide the basis for a general mobilisation against capitalism or be isolated and repulsed by the full force of the capitalists with their police, courts and their sponsors in the pulpits, would not have been entirely predictable in advance. Revolutionaries do not merely support such surges forward in their press and leaflets: they intervene on the basis of their programme, ultimately to prepare the working class for the struggle for power. They draw to themselves, on the basis of rounded propaganda for this programme, the most energetic

workers thrown up by such struggles and train them in the politics of proletarian revolution. This was the elementary position of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Moreover, the sphere of active intervention could never be limited merely to the economic struggles. These had to be consciously raised to the level of the political tasks facing the workers as a whole, to which had to be linked the burning political questions of the day—such as the democratic aspirations aroused by the national-democratic movement. This message was at the heart of Lenin's detailed arguments in *What is to be done?* (1902).

> There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the Credo programme; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy. (p.41).

Again and again he insisted, after Engels and Marx, that the party of communism must intervene to transcend the limitations of pure trade union spontaneity and raise the independent banner of the proletarian revolution.

This applied to Ireland no less than Russia. As Lenin put it, the workers knew how to conduct economic struggle; they learned out of direct necessity. But of socialism they knew little and were open to the vast panoply of propaganda spewed out by the bourgeoisie through their press, politicians and priests. *Economism* was an error of socialists who contented themselves with telling the militant workers what they already knew, an error of those who did not reach beyond the spontaneous struggle and militancy of the new trade unionists, and who disguised this—as often to themselves as to the workers—as "lending the economic struggle a political character".

Lenin's polemic was aimed at intellectuals who were attempting to 'relate' to the struggles of workers but who ended up effectively trailing behind them. It is also relevant to any critical appreciation of Connolly's conception of the relation between economic struggles and the struggle for socialism. For Connolly was himself imbued with the spirit of 'new-unionism', from its initial days in Leith in Scotland in the 1890s, though more especially in his later involvement with the rising tide of the IWW and American syndicalism, and eventually, in the growth of the ITGWU in Ireland.

In the struggles of 1913 Connolly was a central leader among the workers, but only as a trade union figure, not as a political militant of the Leninist kind. Yet his was not an apolitical or merely syndicalist perspective, as we have seen. He had an explicit doctrine about the relation between 'political action' and the mass industrial organisations, the OBU being their highest expression. The

party was to echo the real struggles of the class, an inherently economistic perspective. As a result, the years of proletarian militancy from 1910 to 1914 were politically barren for the Irish working class, despite the gain of asserting the formal political independence of the unions through a Labour Party.

He expected that the Home Rule bourgeoisie would deal with the dominant political questions outside the industrial struggle, specifically the independence question. Yet this was the bourgeoisie against whom the great strike of 1913-4 was being waged. He held to the schema that the political organisation of the working class was to be created within a yet-to-be-realised Home Rule state. These expectations led to various types of political accommodation and blocked the development of the crucial layer of worker-leaders who might have striven politically on all fronts against exploitation and oppression, to contest the bourgeoisie for hegemony in the emerging nation-state and to take the lead in the struggle for the right to self-determination. He failed to forge an organisation of trained socialists capable of intervening in the class and national-revolutionary upsurges that lay ahead.

Defeat for the Dublin working class, the outbreak of war, the rise of Carsonism and the shelving of Home Rule by Britain in 1914, found Connolly woefully caught out. Connolly's formula for the gradual ascent of labour via the OBU was cruelly exposed as bankrupt. Increasingly he pursued a single-minded engagement with the conspiratorial nationalists of the IRB. Sadly, the forces that had emerged with him in the Lockout—ITGWU militants and the Irish Citizen Army—were not now to be trained as a conscious political nucleus capable of charting a course of independent class action. These precious forces were to be ideologically disarmed and politically liquidated into revolutionary nationalism.

Xxx

CHAPTER 9

THE 1916 INSURRECTION

On Easter Monday, 24th April 1916, James Connolly embarked on his last great struggle. As vice-president of the Provisional Government and Commandant General of the Dublin Division of the Army of the Irish Republic, he fused the Irish Citizen Army with the revolutionary wing of the Irish Volunteers, under the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), to strike a blow against British imperialism and proclaim an Irish Republic.

Exactly one week later the city centre of Dublin stood in ruins as the Rising was quelled by the relentless fire-power of the armed might of Britain. Its gunboats on the Liffey and its artillery pounded the walls of the half dozen points held by the rebels centred on the General Post Office. Outside Dublin City, in the few centres that rose—County Galway, Enniscorthy and County Dublin—the officers in command reluctantly accepted the order to surrender.

Twelve days later Connolly was executed, the last of the captured leaders to die. The surviving Citizen Army and Irish Volunteer troops were arrested and deported to jails in Britain, interned until an amnesty could be forced from Britain's hands.

The Easter Rising took the world by surprise. The bourgeois 'Home Rule' party of Redmond ranted against the rebels. The Irish Catholic (published by Dublin capitalist boss of the Irish Independent, William Martin Murphy, who unleashed the Dublin Lockout of 1913) wrote after Connolly's executions: "What was attempted was an act of brigandage pure and simple ... no reason to lament that its perpetrators have met the fate universally reserved for traitors".

They were soon forced to change their tune. As execution followed cold-blooded execution and internment and deportation mounted, this apparently isolated rebellion registered more and more deeply in the minds and hearts of a down-trodden people. The 'Home Rule' party was jettisoned in the 1918 Westminister elections as Sinn Fein, newly wedded to the Irish Republican Army, rose to express the sentiment of the working class and rural masses. Sinn Fein declared the first Dáil in Dublin's Mansion house in 1919, which was quickly followed by the War of Independence.

A protracted struggle followed in which modern 'guerrilla warfare' was born. It was to lead to limited independence, in a partitioned Ireland, by 1922. There followed a year of bloody Civil War in the 26-County Free State as the most conservative section of the Irish bourgeoisie, with English military backing,

quelled the revolutionary wing of the republicans who rejected Britain's Treaty. The outcome was a formally independent but deeply dependent semi-colony of Britain, presided over by a counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.

Ever since, the popular memory of Connolly has been that of a national revolutionary, albeit one who was also a dedicated union organiser. There was no fundamental discontinuity, however, in his apparent transformation from working class organiser to nationalist revolutionary.

~~The central element of Connolly's thought, dating back to the mid-1890s at least, was that in the unique conditions of Irish history the collective interests of communal labour were identified with those of the oppressed nation. This~~ His unique but populist conception of the national question persisted throughout his ~~involvement with the International which took him through~~ diverse political experiences from his early Scottish period up to his American period. ~~At times, his operational perspective was dominated by the "orthodoxy" practiced on either side of the Atlantic and,~~ On his return to Ireland in 1910 for his second Irish period, he worked within the framework of industrial unionism and "political action" which he had evolved for himself while in the USA.

However, his underlying schema of identifying the cause of Labour and the cause of Ireland was to partly reassert itself in the context of the major crisis that broke out—nationally and internationally—in 1914. In that year he witnessed: the rise of Carson in Ulster and the decamping of the Protestant working class to his anti-Home Rule crusade; the defeat of the Irish Transport and General Worker's Union in February 1914 after seven months of bitter class struggle; the betrayal of the British pledge of Home Rule by attempting to write 'temporary' Partition into the Home Rule deal, and the attempt of the Redmond leadership to win acceptance of it in the Irish Parliamentary Party. Most important of all, he witnessed the outbreak of the first World War in August with attendant betrayals in Ireland by Redmond and, internationally, by the reformist and chauvinist leaders of the Social Democratic parties in the major powers. In the context of these events, Connolly was to fall back upon the old schema which justified for him the eventual merging of revolutionary nationalism and the forces of socialism.

From 1910 to March 1914 he attempted to put into practice the 'syndicalist' ideas which he had developed in the US over seven years. The application of hid idea of an OBU with a broad party for its politica wing, however, was complicated by the sharply posed national question. During his previous Irish period 1896-1903, the Home Rule movement had been in crisis. By the time of his return in 1910, it had been rebuilt by John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) and was on the point of concluding a deal with Britain for Home Rule. This was a striking challenge to Connolly's previously central perspective and political premise. For, he had regarded the bourgeois pursuit of Home Rule as a 'dissolving view' and had assigned all effective agency against

British colonialism to the toiling classes and the socialist movement.

His failure to recognise that Redmondism was indeed a refutation of his earliest political assumptions was to leave him rudderless when Home Rule became a virtual certainty. Worse, after the political watershed of 1914, he would go on to seek confirmation of his previous faith in plebeian nationalism in the new growth of its extreme and revolutionary wing, the petty-bourgeois Irish Republican Brotherhood.

From his return in 1910, he attempted, firstly, to unite the fragments of socialist groups in Dublin and Belfast and elsewhere—i.e. the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI), the descendant of his old ISRP, and the Independent Labour Party branches in Belfast led by William Walker—into a single organisation. Secondly, after some time in Belfast, he became Larkin's appointee as district organiser of the ITGWU and set about building it with a will. Thirdly, he sought to implement the dual strategy of 'industrial unionism' and 'political action' by canvassing the Irish TUC to sponsor the formation of a political wing—an Irish Labour Party. Although unsuccessful in winning this resolution in the 1911 Congress, changed circumstances won over the delegates to his position at Clonmel in 1912.

His perspective was entirely governed by the assumption that Home Rule was *inevitable*. This led him into a debate with Walker in 1911 on the issue of the organisational separation of the Irish socialist movement from its British allies. Home Rule, argued Connolly, was "almost a certainty of the future", implicitly guaranteed by the combined forces of Redmond's Irish Parliamentary Party in Westminster and the Liberal government of Asquith. On this basis, he continued, the task of socialists was to prepare for taking political action in a newly established Irish parliament by equipping the industrial struggle with a political wing.

At the same time he assumed that the existing configuration of political forces was enough to ensure that the tide of militant Carsonism in the north would soon recede—the last flicker which blazes up before totally expiring.

As late as the summer of 1913 the wind was still in Connolly's sails. He had succeeded, at least formally, on the Labour Party question. However, he raised no suggestion that it should challenge the Irish Parliamentary Party in the U.K. parliamentary elections. Of course, the weight of Home Rulers within the ITUC itself must have set severe limits to how far that body could have been moved in 1912, and it should be remembered that he did openly attack the IPP for opposing the application in Ireland of progressive British social legislation which would have put a tax on Irish capitalists.

At the May 1913 Trades Union Congress he confined his remarks on the Home Rule Bill to its lack of provision for deputies' salaries, the absence of a vote for women and of annual parliaments; and its undemocratic upper house.

These were important concerns but they did not address the problem of how to guarantee that democratic self-determination would be fully carried through. Less still did Connolly spell out any strategy for the working class of Britain and Ireland to go beyond the limits of combined Home Rule nationalism and British Lib-Labism.

The class substance of the Home Rule nationalists was perceptively summarised by Lenin during the 1913 Lockout:

> At the present moment the Irish Nationalists (i.e. the Irish bourgeoisie) are the victors. They are buying up the lands of the English landlords; they are getting national self-government (the famous Home Rule for which a long and stubborn struggle has been going on between Ireland and England); they will freely govern "their own" country jointly with "their own" priests. Well, this Irish Nationalist bourgeoisie is celebrating its "National" victory, its maturity in the "affairs of state" by declaring war to the death on the Irish labour movement (Class War in Dublin, in *Lenin on Britain*, p.153).

Lenin identified two key hopes that the strike gave rise to—firstly the extension of class struggle trade unionism throughout Britain following the lead of the Dublin workers, and secondly the shedding of nationalist illusions by the Irish working class through defiance of the capitalists and their Catholic clerical allies. The initial hopes of the struggle depended on the mobilisation of the forces behind the British TUC in supportive strike action, particularly the National Union of Railwaymen and the National Union of Dock Labourers. Even a general strike throughout Britain and Ireland was not impossible. That these failed to materialise was due both to the bureaucratic conservatism of the trade union leadership and the inability of syndicalism to effectively challenge it.

Connolly and Larkin's own ability to fight for the solidarity of British workers, against the bureaucracy, was greatly weakened since the major links between Ireland and Britain and between north and south had been sundered in the wake of the 1907 Belfast strike and the formation of the breakaway nationalist ITGWU. The 1913 struggle found Connolly, at a time of urgent need for British and all-Ireland solidarity, building separate national organisations of trade unions and labour. While building these organisations in the mould of an expected nation state of the future, he failed to provide a strategy for guaranteeing either that future or the best defence of present gains.

Throughout the Dublin strike the Ulster Volunteers had drilled and marched without interference from the British government. In December 1913 the Liberals introduced a ban on importing arms into Ireland—not because of the UVF but just ten days after the formation of the Irish National Volunteers. In March, following Carson's threat of open sedition, the Liberals responded to pressure from British Labour ranks and attempted to put British troops in the Curragh Camp on alert for duty in Ulster. The immediate response of some 57 aristocratic officers was to tender their resignations. The government, more fearful than ever of the pro-Unionist Tory forces in Britain's ruling class,

capitulated in what Lenin described as:

> an epoch-making turning point—the day when the noble landlords of Britain smashed the British Constitution and British law to bits and gave an excellent lesson in the class struggle ... Real class rule lay and still lies outside of Parliament. (*Lenin on Ireland*, pp. 16-17).

The ban on importing arms was not enforced when Carson's followers smuggled 30,000 rifles into Larne for the UVF in April. Thus bolstered, Carson immediately demanded the right of exclusion of any Ulster county that opted out of the Home Rule proposals. It was in this context that the Liberals proposed Partition. Connolly made a desperate appeal to the Labour Party MPs to vote against this exclusion clause. So disillusioned did he become with the Labour leaders that he turned down, uncharacteristically, an invitation to address a May Day rally of workers in Glasgow which would have given him a last chance to appeal to the most class conscious sections to force their leaders to resist partition; for, the third and final reading of the Home Rule Bill was due in May, requiring only royal assent thereafter.

The Irish Volunteers smuggled 1,000 rifles into Dublin on the yacht Asgard—an event which led to British troops firing on civilians in the city centre, killing three and maiming thirty. But before a response could be mustered, news arrived of the outbreak of war in Europe between the 'great powers'. Redmond eagerly rushed to commit the Irish Volunteers to the war effort—initially intending that they would act as custodians of the Empire in Ireland in order to free British troops for action on the continent. Not surprisingly, this did not wash with the Liberals, but, undaunted, and confident in the mood of the period, he willingly acted as recruiting sergeant for Asquith.

For Redmond, the future of a bourgeois Ireland depended on the survival of the empire, so he did not resist the shelving of Home Rule until the war should be won, although it had already been enacted in September. At Woodenbridge, Redmond called on all "young Irishmen not to confine 'their effort to remaining at home to defend the shores of Ireland from an unlikely invasion' but to prove their gallantry 'wherever the firing line extends, in defence of right, of freedom and religion in this war'." (Levenson, James Connolly - A Biography, London, 1973, p.259). In fact, a quarter of a million were to leave the poverty and unemployment of Ireland, nationalist and unionist, to fight for the Empire and 30,000 of them died.

Redmond's recruitment drive led to a split in the Irish Volunteers in September. There emerged the 200,000 member National Volunteers under Redmond and the Irish Volunteers with 12,000 supporting the republican call to repudiate the pledges made by Redmond to Britain. This was a severe blow to Connolly, not least because thousands of demoralised workers who had been in the ITGWU during the lockout were now enlisting in the war drive as cannon

fodder of the Home Rule bourgeoisie and of the British Empire, in the vain belief that they were defending the democratic rights of small nations. Connolly could clearly see that a British victory would not, however, vindicate Ireland's democratic national rights.

Back in Belfast since the end of the Dublin lockout, Connolly got a taste of the crisis that was ripping through the social-democratic Second International and dividing it finally into its chauvinist and revolutionary internationalist wings. Even within the Independent Labour Party (Ireland) branch in Belfast, the first instinct of his ill-prepared comrades was to run for cover. He was outvoted on a proposal to continue outdoor propaganda against the war. He was additionally disorientated by the failure of the "bugles of war" to become the "tocsin of revolution" throughout Europe. He responded by having an anti-war manifesto distributed in Belfast under the name of a fictional Belfast branch of the Irish Citizen Army.

Soon, on returning to Dublin to take up his position as acting general secretary of the ITGWU, as Larkin had left for the USA in October, he set about reconstructing the ailing union with an inspiring will. However, his attention focussed on continuing politics by other means. The Citizen Army was to be re-organised into a drilled, uniformed and armed battalion of workers.

Yet his deepening conviction that the road to national insurrection was the only course open to revolutionary socialists in Ireland was not a simple matter of flipping over from syndicalism into nationalism.

The strengths and weaknesses of his politics rest in the fact that he oscillated between militant syndicalism and revolutionary nationalism, but never succeeded in transcending the limits of either. Even though the last two years of his life involve political subordination to revolutionary nationalist forces, culminating in the insurrection, he never abandoned syndicalism. He consciously believed that the Rising would create the conditions in an independent Ireland for the re-emergence of the syndicalist fight for socialism.

The Proletariat and Militarism

In general terms there is no doubt that Connolly belonged to the anti-militarist, anti-imperial chauvinist wing of the International. At its congresses in Stuttgart (1907), Copenhagen (1910), and Basle (1912), the parties of the International debated resolutions on what to do in the event of the outbreak of war. Although Connolly was not a party of these debates directly, he did develop a position that coincided with one of the lines put forward there. Unfortunately, it was *not* the position argued by Lenin or Luxembourg.

Connolly's stance was closest to that argued by Keir Hardie, co-founder of the British labour Party and a pacifist, and the French delegate Vaillant who was

influenced by the anarcho-syndicalist CGT. They proposed:

> Among the means to be used in order to prevent and hinder war the Congress considers as particularly efficacious a general strike especially in the industries that supply war with its implements (arms, ammunition, transport etc.) as well as agitation and popular action in their most active forms. (Motion at Copenhagen, 1910, Haupt, *Socialism and the Great War*, p.27).

A similar position had been put by Gustav Herve in Stuttgart three years earlier, of which Lenin wrote:

> The last day of the congress was devoted to the question of militarism in which everyone took the greatest interest. The notorious Herve tried to defend a very untenable position. He was unable to link war with the capitalist regime in general, and anti-militarist agitation with the entire work of socialism. Herve's plan of "answering" any war by strike action or an uprising betrayed a complete failure to understand that the employment of one or other means of struggle depends on the objective conditions of the particular crisis, economic or political, precipitated by the war, and not on any previous decision that revolutionaries may have made.

Herve's one spark of truth, which the revolutionary wing put to the centre of their arguments, noted Lenin, was:

> the appeal not to prize only parliamentary methods of struggle, the appeal to act in accordance with the new conditions of a future war and future crises, that was stressed by the Social Democrats, especially by Rosa Luxemburg in her speech. (*Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol 13, p.91).

The arguments of Luxemburg succeeded and the original "dogmatically one-sided dead resolution" drafted by Bebel was amended. In its amended form, wrote Clara Zetkin:

> the resolution puts forward as a principle that proletarian tactics should be flexible, capable of developing, and sharpening in proportion as conditions ripen for that purpose. (*Socialism and the Great War*, p.92).

This 1907 approach as well as that adopted by the Lenin/Luxemburg wing in 1910, was diametrically opposed to the criticism made of Herve, Hardie and Valliant by the opportunist wing of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). For them the call for general strikes was to risk incurring illegality or semi-illegality at the hands of the Kaiser. What the Marxists argued was that a general strike was not a special method of fighting war. On its own a general strike would not be sufficient, nor could it be started up at will. The circumstances existing at the time of an outbreak of war—fear of attack, mobilisation and martial law in some instances, war hysteria trumped up by the chauvinist press—all added up to very adverse conditions for fighting for a general strike; except if circumstances were already on the verge of a general strike for reasons connected to the more general class struggle. Such situations could not be expected to be typical. Moreover, war could not be stopped by a

general strike alone. An armed insurrection was indispensable, a civil war to defeat one's "own" bourgeoisie, hardly likely to be on the cards at the opening shots of a war.

In 1915, Connolly expressed the failure of his own wishful view to materialise:

> As the reader will gather from my opening remarks, I believe that the Socialist proletariat of Europe in all belligerent countries ought to have refused to march against our brothers across the frontiers and that such refusal would have prevented the war and all its horrors even though it might have led to civil war. (*Labour and Easter Week* collection, Dublin, 1966, p.54).

It was the view of the revolutionary Marxists on how to fight the impending war, and the Bolsheviks' further refinements of it, which were borne out by experience. Disorientation and war hysteria made a general strike impossible even in Russia where mass strikes had been taking place in the pre-war months and where many of the Russian workers' leaders fought resolutely against the war. With the exception of the Russians, Serbs and Bulgarians, official socialist leaderships everywhere succumbed to chauvinism and supported it. Lenin set out to make use of the violent economic and political crisis brought about by the war to rouse the toiling masses and especially the workers, to hasten the abolition of capitalist rule.

By February 1915 he had outlined slogans and tactics to begin to convert the inter-imperialist war into a civil war, including:

> 1. Absolute refusal to vote war credits and resignation from bourgeois governments
> 2. A complete break with the policy of class truce (bloc national, Burgfrieden)
> 3. Formation of an underground organisation wherever the bourgeoisie abolish constitutional liberties by introducing martial law
> 4. Support for every kind of mass action by the proletariat in general. (*Lenin: Collected Works*, Vol. 21, p.161).

While ultimately the Bolsheviks led the Russian proletariat to revolution after three years of war, Connolly looked back in confusion on the failure of the International, fought to minimise the attacks on the working class and, in particular, opposed the threat of conscription.

When the government announced taxes to fund the war Connolly replied with a public meeting in September and then with a rash of strikes for wage increases, making some gains. He wrote in the following month:

> Some of our class have fought at Flanders and the Dardanelles; the greatest achievement of them combined will weigh but a feather in the balance for good compared with the achievements of those who stayed at home and fought to secure the rights of the working class against invasion. The carnival of murder on the continent will be remembered as a nightmare in the future, will not have the slightest effect in deciding

> for good the fate of our homes, our wages, our hours, our conditions. But the victories of labour in Ireland will be as footholds, secure and firm, in the upward claim of our class to the fullness and enjoyment of all that labour creates and organised society can provide. Truly labour alone in these days is fighting the real war of civilisation. (*Labour & Easter Week* Collection, p.90).

Connolly shared a nationalist platform which addressed a mass rally against conscription in November 1915. But employers took the cue of the Lord Lieutenant to 'facilitate enlistment' by dismissing selected employees who would then have no option but to join up. Two weeks later he wrote:

> We know they can force us to fight whether we wish to or not, but we know also that no force in their possession can decide for us where we will fight. That remains for us to decide; and we have no intention of shedding our blood abroad for our masters: rather will we elect to shed it if need be for the conquest of our freedom at home. (*Levenson* p.279).

Unhappily this rhetoric was no guide to action for the labour movement, less still for anyone among the hundreds of thousands of Irish who did enlist into the British army. By contrast, the Bolsheviks organised and agitated in the navy and army. Connolly had no conception of such tactic, a fact not unconnected with his failure to discover what kind of party was needed to fight for socialism.

Blanquist Insurrection

Lenin had argued that the war was one of rival imperialisms in which the lesser evil for socialists in all the major belligerent powers was the defeat of "their own" bourgeoisie. He showed in *Imperialism—The Highest Stage of Capitalism* how a new epoch had opened in which world capitalism would be incapable of systematic progress except through war, barbarism and the reactionary destruction of historic gains. Connolly, on the other hand, while he certainly hoped for the defeat of imperial Britain, took a different view of Germany. He saw the latter as a developing capitalism which was obstructed along with all other countries by British imperial control of world trade through its command of the seas. He wrote:

> I believe that the war could have been prevented by the Socialists; as it was not and the issues are knit I want to see England beaten so thoroughly that the commerce of the seas will be free to all nations, the smallest equally with the greatest. (March *1915*, *Labour and Easter Week* collection, pp. 57-8).

In other words, the military defeat of Britain would open the road to a new period of peace in which, with the further development of capitalism, the as yet undeveloped forces of industrial unionism could grow apace and open the road for the socialist struggle. It was a wrong view, possible only because Connolly didn't share Lenin's insight, published only in the same year, into the reactionary character of the new epoch. Believing in the possibility, after a

British defeat, of a new period of peaceful world and Irish economic development, it was all the more difficult for Connolly to wage his anti-imperialist struggle in a perspective of class war against capitalism and the defeat of all of the competing imperialist powers in the war.

Such a method would have sought to take advantage of every opportunity created by the savagery and disillusion of the war among Irish soldiers and workers. But it needed to do more. It needed to take up tactical goals that would make the labour movement the most consistent and radical champions of national-democratic rights against Britain. Instead, however, of fighting among the mass of organised labour for an action programme around which labour would be mobilised step by step to assert its leadership in the democratic struggle, While outwardly guiding the One Big Union in its day-to-day activity, he prepared an insurrectionary conspiracy unaccompanied by any guidance to what action the mass of workers should take. And he used the paper of the movement to repeatedly call upon the revolutionary nationalists to support such a course.

He was driven by the fear that any further delay in organising insurrection would only work to the advantage of Britain. The failure of a general strike to emerge anywhere in Europe, the betrayals of Social Democracy—all this was bad enough; but in Ireland the impending betrayal of Home Rule through Partition, the massive enlistment in the war, and the erosion of democratic liberties, left him believing that if the insurrection was not immediately organised it might never happen and Britain would win the war.

Internationally, in the crisis-torn social-democracy, the 1916 Rising became in Lenin's words "the touchstone of our revolutionary views". Far from being the pointless project of a bunch of romantic dreamers cut off from the external world, the Easter Rising was fully a part of the 'epoch of crisis' of inter-imperialist war and a striking testament to the role that oppressed nations played as 'bacilli' in the decay of imperialism. Dublin's was one among many nationally-inspired revolts such as the suppressed Indian troops' mutiny in Singapore, the rebellions in French Annam and the German Cameroons and the bloody suppression of the defiant Czechs by the Austrian imperial government.

The war had shaken the socialist Second International to its foundations, polarising it into revolutionary and chauvinist wings. For Germany's Kautsky and Russia's Plekhanov such national struggles were not only pointless but downright reactionary. But behind this condemnation of the rebellion of small nations was the sickening chauvinism and patriotism of the great imperialist powers.

For the left, and leftward moving elements who remained uncertain of their ground in the transition of capitalism into its imperialist epoch, the Easter events of 1916 were also a bone of bitter contention. Lenin had, throughout the

war and increasingly in 1916 prior to the Rising, been re-working his analysis of the national question—and seeing the new epoch of capitalist imperialism itself as the foundation stone of the socialist attitude. The Rising was a factual verification of the substance of his criticisms of the left around Luxembourg, Radek and others, because of the concessions they unwittingly made to the Kautskyan renegades.

Karl Radek, the exiled Polish Communist, claimed that because the Irish agrarian question was effectively solved from above by Britain the national uprising remained a "purely urban, petty-bourgeois movement, which, notwithstanding the sensation it caused, had not much backing". He not only ascribed the 1916 Rising exclusively to urban petty-bourgeois nationalists, but said that it "amounted only to a *putsch* that the British government easily disposed of". Lenin wrote a fierce reply to Radek in July 1916 in which he said:

> The term '*putsch'* in the scientific sense of the term may be employed when the attempt at insurrection has revealed nothing but a circle of conspirators or stupid maniacs and has aroused no sympathy among the masses. The centuries old Irish national movement, having passed through various stages and combinations of class interests, manifested itself, in particular, in a mass Irish National Congress in America which called for Irish independence; it also manifested itself in street fighting conducted by a section of the urban petty bourgeoisie *and a section of workers* after a long period of mass agitation, demonstrations, suppression of newspapers, etc. Whoever calls *such* a rebellion a 'putsch' is either a hardened reactionary, or a doctrinaire hopelessly incapable of envisaging a social revolution as a living phenomenon. (*Lenin on Ireland*, p.32).

Yet Lenin's arguments have, through the warp and weft of subsequent history, been treated as an uncritical celebration of the substance and form of the 1916 Rising. Stalinists who have turned against the whole method of Lenin in order to justify popular front subordination to 'progressive' bourgeois forces, and Irish 'left republicans' who in the final analysis always insist that 'labour must wait' in the interests of the anti-imperialist struggle of oppressed nations, are guilty of such a reading of Lenin. In fact, Lenin's analysis of 1916 was by no means uncritical. He wrote:

> The dialectics of history are such that small nations powerless as an independent factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the *real* anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene … It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the revolt of the European proletariat had time to mature. (*Lenin: Collected Works,* Vol. 22, *pp 357-358).*

Taken as a whole, Lenin's defence of the Easter Rising had, as its immediate focus, the fight against imperialist chauvinism which had poisoned the right wing of social-democracy—from Britain's Hyndman to Russia's Plekhanov—and the fight to clarify the lefts who had not yet adopted an unequivocal position on the right of nations to self-determination, for they lacked a concrete understanding of the imperialist epoch. As such, Lenin's

criticisms of the Rising are all the more notable since he was not concentrating on the role and tasks of socialists in an oppressed nation, but on the duty, as internationalists, of those in oppressor nations.

Was Lenin here stating that 1916 represented a "social revolution" as some have wished to imply? The Rising is no way aimed at putting an end to capitalism. It did not even pose any agrarian social overturn on behalf of landless farmers, for the land question had for the most part been defused. Lenin analysed it, therefore, entirely as an expression of a national struggle, i.e the political struggle for a seceded nation state.

We stand four-square with Lenin in rejecting Radek's "putsch" allegation. The Rising, however, did not at all correspond to the methods of proletarian revolution. In fact, it reduced the task of revolution to mere insurrection, a mistake which Marx and Engels had critically exposed in detail in their writings. When contrasted with such events as the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia, the 1916 Rising is seen to have been an undertaking initiated by a minority behind the backs of the masses, instead of being the peak of an open mobilisation of the masses by the revolutionary minority. Consistent with the Marxist tradition expressed in the analysis of the revolutions of 1848, we believe that Connolly's role in the 1916 Rising may legitimately be characterised, and faulted, as Blanquist. August Blanqui coined the term 'dictatorship of the proletariat'—later transformed by Marx—and was the inspiration of the June 1848 challenge to bourgeois class rule. However, Marx rejected his abstract conspiratorial tactics. Trotsky wrote:

> Conspiracy does not take the place of insurrection. An active minority of the proletariat, no matter how well organised, cannot seize the power regardless of the general conditions of the country. In this point history has condemned Blanquism. But only in this. His affirmative theorem retains all its force. In order to conquer the power, the proletariat needs more than a spontaneous insurrection. It needs a suitable organisation, it needs a plan; it needs a conspiracy. Such is the Leninist view of this question. (The Art of Insurrection, in *History of the Russian Revolution*, p.1020)

Trotsky, writing at the same time as Lenin about the Dublin events, did *not* share Radek's dismissal of it as a putsch. He attacked Plekhanov's article as "shameless" for describing the Rising as "harmful" and praised the heroism and courage of the fighters. His article contained a perceptive grasp of the class relations of Irish society at the time but his general prognosis for the Irish revolution was proven to be plainly wrong by history—*on one side*. He argued after the defeat—"The historical basis for the national revolution had disappeared even in backward Ireland."

Clearly he was wrong inasmuch as the subsequent years saw a renewed national struggle in the form of guerrilla warfare. That it ultimately compromised with imperialism on the basis of partitioning the country into two states, both profoundly stunted from the standpoint of democracy and social development,

lends a broader validity, however, to Trotsky's prognosis. His original insight into the prospects for bourgeois democratic revolution in the new historical epoch (verified in his prognosis and programme for the Russian revolution) saw that modern imperialism made it virtually impossible for a bourgeoisie in a backward society to free itself from imperialism and carry through the social tasks of the classical bourgeoisie—independent industrialisation.

What he did not foresee then, perhaps, was that even where the colonised bourgeoisie was weak and deeply compromised with imperialism, a revolutionary-democratic struggle might yet emerge under petty-bourgeois leadership and succeed in wresting formal political independence from the old colonial power. Indeed Ireland's struggle was one of the earliest of this kind, one of many more right through this century up to Zimbabwe, in which a colony is transformed into an economic semi-colony, out of a struggle led by petty-bourgeois and weak bourgeois forces.

Trotsky's prognosis was valid for Ireland, therefore, in that there was no material basis for a bourgeoisie capable and willing to carry through the historic social tasks of the bourgeois revolution. It would have been of little use, however, as an immediate political perspective to guide revolutionary Irish workers immediately after 1916, but then he could only observe the situation from a distance.

No-one had yet clearly theorised the possibility of formal independence being wrested from imperialism by popular struggle under petty-bourgeois leadership. Such an outcome meant that the major political tasks of the national revolution (formal independence, democratic parliament) might be carried out but that the social and economic mission of the independent bourgeois nation state would be aborted by continued imperialist domination.

The strength of Trotsky's article lies in identifying the significant role of the working class forces and his prognosis that the future was theirs:

> The young Irish working class, taking shape in an atmosphere saturated with the heroic recollections of national rebellions, and clashing with the egoistic, narrow-minded imperial arrogance of British trade unionism, naturally swing between nationalism and syndicalism, ever ready to unite these two concepts in their revolutionary consciousness ... The experience (of an Irish national rebellion) in which Casement's undoubted personal courage represented the hopes and methods of the past, is over. But the historical role of the Irish proletariat is only beginning. Already it has injected its class resentment against militarism and imperialism, under an outdated banner, into this uprising. That resentment from now on will not subside. (L. Trotsky, Writings on Britain, Vol 3, pp. 167-169).

Lowering the Red to the Green

The larger force in the 1916 Rising was a section of the Irish Volunteers under

the lead of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. The IRB was built in Ireland after 1907 by returned US emigrant Tom Clarke, himself born in 1850. It was a secret conspiratorial organisation which continued the revolutionary republicanism of the Fenian movement arising among the dispossessed and emigrants in the post-famine period. The Fenians created the Irish Revolutionary Brotherhood in Ireland in 1858 and won a large organised following in the USA where a Fenian Brotherhood convened in 1863. Against a background of rising agrarian agitation, the Fenians planned an insurrection which was aborted in 1867. British spies broke the conspiracy.

Some elements of the Fenians had close connections with the First International through which Marx and Engels fought for solidarity with their anti-imperialist cause, while recording their sharp criticisms of Fenian methods, but the Fenian philosophy had no place for the creation of any consciously socialist or working class organisation. Their political perspectives were revolutionary, republican, and thoroughly marked by the outlook of the petty-bourgeois classes.

The Republican Brotherhood of 1907 had even fewer connections with the dispossessed and the proletariat than its Fenian predecessors, either in social origins or political sympathies. In the course of the 1913 Lockout and subsequent labour struggles, the most that Connolly could say in their favour was that some elements among them were beginning to show a sympathy with the cause of Labour.

Indeed the IRB advanced no social programme. Insurrection with the aim of national sovereignty was the sole point of their programme. The shibboleths of the 1916 Proclamation which aimed to “cherish all the children of the nation equally” were no more radical than similar rhetoric used time and again by the developing bourgeois classes for whom it served solely to muster popular sympathy against feudal or colonial obstacles to bourgeois class rule.

Tragically, Connolly’s overarching focus on the need for insurrection profoundly altered his own operative programme during the war years. In the *Workers Republic* in January 1916 immediately after joining the IRB conspiracy, he answered at length the question—“What is Our Programme?”. There we find nothing whatever with which the IRB could disagree, nothing at all of a fighting socialist character:

> Mark well then our programme. While the war lasts and Ireland still is a subject nation we shall continue to urge her to fight for her freedom. We shall continue, in season and out of season, to teach that the “far-flung battle line” of England is weakest at the point nearest its heart, that Ireland is in that position of tactical advantage ... But the moment peace is once admitted by the British Government as being a subject ripe for discussion, that moment our policy will be peace and in direct opposition to all talk or preparation for armed revolution. We will be no party to leading out Irish patriots to meet the might of an England at peace. The moment peace is in the air we shall strictly confine ourselves, and

> lend all our influence to the work of turning the thought of Labour in Ireland to the work of peaceful reconstruction. (*Labour & Easter Week* collection, p.139).

In the middle of January 1916, fearful of precipitate action by Connolly, the IRB reputedly 'kidnapped' him for a few days during which Pearse told Connolly of the plan for an Easter rebellion, that Casement was in Germany recruiting a brigade of Irish prisoners of war and that Germany would supply arms and ammunition. Connolly from that moment became co-leader of the rebellion.

The basis of Connolly's alliance with the IRB and the whole of his public propaganda in the lead-up to 1916 show that Connolly did not consciously seek to independently assert, let alone fight for at that time, a socialist programme. It was the abandonment of a principle long established since Marx, in 1850, referring to the working class, wrote:

> But they themselves must contribute to their final victory, by informing themselves of their own class interest, by taking up their independent political position as soon as possible, not by allowing themselves to be misled by the democratic phrase of the democratic petty bourgeoisie into doubting for one minute the necessity of an independently organised party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Permanent Revolution. (*The Revolutions of 1848*, p.330).

Connolly's orientation in the year before the Rising was certainly not consistent with this principle, repeatedly asserted by the revolutionary socialist movement. Politically he dissolved the ICA into the Volunteer rebellion. He wrote in the Workers Republic in June 1915:

> In this battle, the lines of which are now being traced, it will be the duty of every lover of the country and the race to forget all minor dividing lines and issues and in contemplating the work before us to seek earnestly after the unity of progressive forces.

Later he wrote, referring back to 1913:

> Out of that experience is growing the feeling of identity of interests between the forces of real nationalism and labour which we have long worked and hoped for in Ireland. Labour recognises daily more clearly that its real well being is linked and bound up with the hope of growth of Irish resources within Ireland; and nationalists realise that the real progress of a nation towards freedom must be measured by the progress of its most subject class. (*Labour & Easter Week* collection, p.124).

The whole weight of his propaganda in the period was of this tenor. And if evidence be needed from the Rising itself, there is the sacred tablet of the subsequent bourgeois republic, the 1916 Proclamation, written jointly with Connolly and stating the aims of the rebellion. It has not a single feature to rescue it from the category of radical democratic proclamations in general. It is certainly in no way a proletarian socialist document. Nor did Connolly independently state any other programme for his forces in the Rising.

He was in fact the most resolute leader in carrying out the insurrection, but

the IRB were in unchallenged control, politically and militarily throughout. Despite his articles on revolutionary warfare in Workers Republic in 1916, Connolly seems not to have applied in Easter week the important lessons spelt out there. The articles had drawn the lessons of Russia in 1905, Lexington 1775, Paris 1830 and Alamo 1821. In 'Moscow Insurrection 1905' and 'Street fighting—summary' the stress is on the importance of involving the city masses:

> Every difficulty that exists for the operation of regular troops in mountains is multiplied a hundredfold in a city. And the difficulty of the commissariat which is likely to be insuperable to an irregular or popular force taking to the mountains, is solved for them by the sympathies of the populace when they take to the streets. (P. Beresford Ellis, Selected Writings of James Connolly, Penguin, London, 1973, p.230).

An example of this failure to mobilise popular support arose on the third day of the Rising when British troops arrived at Amiens Street station. Connolly consulted Pearse about blocking access through North Earl Street and had an Irish Volunteer sent in charge of ten from Connolly's ICA to build and defend a barricade. Onlookers offered to assist in building it and to join the insurgents, but the Volunteer 'had to refuse because the orders were strict: only Irish Volunteers and Citizen Army soldiers were eligible'. (James Connolly - A Biography, p.303).

Conclusion

Any rounded analysis of Connolly's struggle to found a fighting socialist movement of the working class must weigh up the central events of his political career. Among those who aspire to socialism in Ireland, the ambiguities of his final heroic enterprise are easily bent to support competing and confused perspectives on how socialists should regard the still unresolved aspects of the historic national struggle.

For these reasons, we have aimed to present a critical analysis which would throw light on the programmatic issues inherent in Connolly's legacy, criteria on which the tradition of revolutionary socialism would enable us to weigh up and evaluate his role. It only remains to state where this analysis leads us to stand on the 'touchstone' of the Easter Rising.

Firstly, we say that Connolly was wrong to lower the red flag to the green, to subordinate the working class programme to that of the revolutionary democratic petty bourgeoisie. The legacy of that error is still visited on the Irish working class in the appropriation by Sinn Fein of the mantle of Connolly in the name of an anti-imperialist programme that, even if fully carried out, would never bring the working class to power.

Secondly, we hold that, even had Connolly been determined to conduct the Rising on the principled basis of making independent fighting propaganda for the most concrete necessary action by the working class, he still would have

been wrong to call for or organise an insurrection against British rule in the conditions of 1916 where, by no stretch of the imagination, were any significant working class forces prepared for revolutionary struggle.

And what of the Rising itself as a historic reality? Lenin and Trotsky, from an internationalist standpoint, and from outside Ireland, were powerless to intervene as a political factor in the Dublin of 1916. We too, many decades later, are equally powerless to determine a different course on the part of the working class leaders in Dublin as the revolutionary ferment was maturing throughout the capitalist world. Though powerless to intervene our understanding of the questions of programme is enriched by the struggles of Bolshevism, the Comintern and Fourth International in their revolutionary periods, and the struggles of millions of workers since 1916. But like Lenin and Trotsky, however vital our criticisms, we stand by the Rising and defend it as objectively a heroic and historically progressive blow directed at the heart of imperialism, a blow, therefore, for the proletariat and oppressed everywhere.

The tragedy of Connolly and the Easter Rising is that the founder of the Irish socialist movement, a heroic figure of renown to every Irish worker, confused rather than clarified, in the most testing moment, a crucial task that faced and still faces our class.

EPILOGUE

Seventy years since the Treaty have seen a radical transformation of the Irish economy which has placed even more centrally the tasks of socialist class struggle. The bourgeoisie has been unable to complete its historic mission in a nation divided by partition, in a country where economic development has been dominated by modern capitalist imperialism. Thus the wellsprings of radical nationalism, far from running out, have been sustained by the experience of national oppression in the northern state and underdevelopment and emigration in the south.

Although the working class is powerfully organised and potentially dominant it remains politically paralysed and divided. Instead the inheritors of the IRB carry the torch of political radicalism in Ireland but are manifestly incapable of addressing the tasks of socialism or the needs of the working class, women and the oppressed. Whatever their pretensions to social radicalism, twenty years of struggle in the North have confirmed today's Republican Movement as essentially that described by Connolly:

> a physical force party—a party, that is to say, whose members are united upon no one point, and agree upon no single principle, except upon the use of physical force as the sole means of settling the dispute between the people of this country and the governing power of Great Britain. (*Socialism and Nationalism* collection, p. 52)

Episodically since 1916, significant sections of workers have bee drawn into struggle under republican leaderships. In those conditions, socialist currents have sought to link the syndicalist militancy of the workers to the progressive elements of Irish revolutionary nationalism under the banner of 'republican socialism'. The most notable example was the failed Republican Congress convened by O'Donnell and Gilmore who explicitly adopted as their principle Connolly's slogan "The Cause of Ireland is the Cause of Labour…"(See *Class Struggle* No. 5, March '88*).*

Likewise, among socialist elements within today's Republican Movement, and those sections within the socialist and labour movements who stand by the struggle of the nationalist minority in the north against their oppression, 'republican socialism' remains an *ideological* rallying point. It also represents an *obstacle* however to real political advance. It derives its legitimacy from the real ambiguities of Connolly's ideas and especially the confusion of programmes embodied in his final struggle.

Today, this outlook finds expression in organisations and programmes which fail to challenge the inherent limits of "anti-imperialism" as an answer to the historic tasks of the working class. It offers as models of "socialism" radical anti-imperialist regimes such as the Nicaraguan Sandinistas which, however heroic and progressive against US imperialism, clearly never mobilised the

working class as the leading force in its revolution nor set out to end the predominance within Nicaragua of capitalist private property. This preserved intact the necessary base for bringing back into power the open agents of US interests.

It is an outlook which argues for programmes of economic nationalism and 'revolutionary' governments defending a 'common' interest of indigenous property-holder and the working class against 'foreign' capitalism. Ever willing to strike a compromise with national capitalism, it is blind to the overwhelming objective conditions of *world economy* which make a utopian and reactionary nonsense of autarchic programmes for "economic self-determination" in any single country. The historical abortion of Stalinism confirms the utter impossibility of building socialism in a single country, cut off indefinitely from the enormous productive advantages of economic organisation on the world scale. The goal of a *workers' state* must be the decisive one for all socialist strategy in each country—as the key task on the road to an international socialist order.

None of these false programmes in themselves can claim any support in the revolutionary working-class outlook of James Connolly, but time and again they draw legitimacy from the confusions embodied in his politics—sustaining the belief that the advanced militants of the working class must pursue a common programme with the revolutionary nationalists. By contrast, whatever the scope of tactical united fronts with Republicans in action against imperialism, the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky allows no political support for, or confusion of programmes with, nationalist forces however radical. At all times the workers must be mobilised under their own independent banner, even when it is necessary—as it often is— to struggle alongside Republicans against a common enemy.

In confronting these ideologies on the Irish left, the rigorous critique of Connolly's legacy from the Marxist standpoint is *indispensable*. Not only can it illuminate debate and discussion on the left on the future of socialism in Ireland, it can educate militants in key elements of the revolutionary tradition which Connolly did not, could not, in his circumstances, discover and apply in Ireland.

Every left, labour, trade union and republican current in Ireland claims the mantle of Connolly. As we have argued, the real ambiguities of his positions explain in part how this is possible. But it is only part of the explanation. There are those who crudely misrepresent him; who define him narrowly in terms of the trade union struggles of 1913, ignoring his struggle against British imperialism in Ireland; or distort him to find support for 'progressive' alliances with the national bourgeoisie which betray internationalism and class independence. His name is ritually invoked by leaders of trade unions and parties who can have no conceivable sympathy with this great revolutionary, or with his dedicated hostility to the capitalist class. He opposed those 'socialists'l

who join in bourgeois governments. He raged against privileged trade union bureaucrats whose priority is class peace rather than defence of workers' livelihoods; and he stood against working class 'representatives' who equivocate in their opposition to national oppression. Against thos elements in Ireland, Connolly stands as a permanent rebuke.

This has been a book, in the first place, about Connolly's *ideas.* By our refusal to dismiss his *distinctive* positions as well-intentioned 'exaggerations' or clever 'pedagogy', by taking his ideas seriously as the key to understanding the political activist, by measuring them against the developed theory and practice of the Second and Third Internationals, we have hoped to understand the mistakes and flaws in his positions and the paradoxes of his career which remain at the centre of living Irish revolutionary traditions.

His achievements demand the respect of such serious critical treatment. They are to be measured by the impact of the 1916 insurrection, the creation of a general union of workers in bitter class war against Irish capitalists, and not least, the gain of formal political independence from the bourgeoisie in a Labour Party. Above all, he is to be measured by his inspiring quality as a revolutionary individual, attested to by his renown internationally wherever men and women fight to apply the international working class experience to the struggle for a truly human world social order.

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Connolly: A Marxist Analysis

James Connolly, Marxist and revolutionary, remains a significant figure internationally among socialists. His legacy has moulded the Irish Left throughout the century since he arrived in Dublin to organise the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896.

Yet there has been no systematic Marxist analysis of his politics free of the distortions of Stalinism, nationalism and hagiography.

This book presents such an analysis. It reveals the innovative qualities, but also the ambiguities, of Connolly's thought. It challenges the confusions in his legacy which remain at the heart of Irish revolutionary traditions.

Andy Johnston (Regional College, Galway) Edward McWillians (Magee College, Derry) and James Larragy have collaborated in this work under the auspices of the Irish Workers Group.

Cover illustration of Connolly, Marx and Tone, from *Class Struggle*, Journal of the IWG, March 1985.

Published and Distributed by IWG

ISBN 0 9508133 4 6

£3.90 Ireland
£3.75 UK

Title: Connolly: A Marxist Analysis
Organisation: Irish Workers' Group [1976]
Author: Andy Johnston, James Larragy, Edward McWilliams
Date: 1990