

# THE IRISH COMMUNIST

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## C O N T E N T S

*"Without a revolution-  
ary theory, there can  
be no revolutionary  
movement"*

(Lenin).

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JACK LANE

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# THE ULSTER LIBERALS, THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST HOME RULE .

The purpose of this article is twofold: First, to show that Ulster Liberal opposition to the Home Rule policy, adopted by a section of the British bourgeoisie in 1886, was both democratic and progressive. Second, to show that the Unionism of the Ulster Protestant working class was based not on any "slavish worship" of the "Orange aristocracy", as Connolly believed (Forward, 9.8.1913), but on a thorough and substantially correct understanding of the implications of Home Rule.

Ulster Liberal opposition to the separation of Ireland from Britain, which they regarded as the inevitable outcome of the establishment of a Home Rule Parliament, was based on three main planks:

1. That it would be disastrous for the Ulster economy. (This point has been dealt with fully in the B. & I.C.O. pamphlets 'The Economics of Partition' and the 'Birth of Ulster Unionism' and need not be discussed in this article.)
2. That it would lead, not to any democratic advance in Irish society but to the creation of a "Catholic Ascendancy".
3. That it would intensify the antagonism and conflict between the two nations in Ireland and would altogether prevent the evolution of national unity in Ireland.

Finally, the Liberals conceded that the Union should not and could not be maintained by coercion. Their fall back, "last ditch" demand was that, in the event of it becoming necessary for the forces of progress and democracy to retreat and permit the establishment of a Catholic state in Ireland, Ulster should itself be free from the threat of coercion and should be allowed to remain within the U.K.

These points were made and argued at two Ulster Liberal Conventions held in 1886, the first (29.3.86) being a delegate conference called to formulate party policy, the second (30.4.86) being a public demonstration in the Ulster Hall against the Home Rule Bill.

## THE ULSTER LIBERALS, UNIONISM, AND DEMOCRACY.

The Ulster Liberals considered themselves radicals and they considered their radicalism to be perfectly compatible with, indeed inseparable from, their Unionism. They also considered themselves to be the heirs of the United Irish-



men. One Liberal speaker at the Ulster Hall demonstration, a Miss Tod, asked rhetorically:

"Where are the descendants of the Volunteers, who broke the penal laws off the necks of the Catholics, who forced the opening of Dublin University, who created free trade between England and Ireland and opened up trade between Ireland the colonies? Not with Mr. Parnell, but with us." (Northern Whig, 1.5.1886).

But, said the Ulster Liberals, the objectives of the United Irishmen had by now been realised within the Union and their dream of national unity in Ireland had been objectively unrealizable, due to the political backwardness of the Irish masses. William Currie, an Ulster liberal trades unionist (about whom, more later), told a "meeting of workmen" at Newcastle on Tyne: "If you read the papers of the United Irishmen, who wished to establish a republic, you will find that they did not mention a single positive grievance which English legislation has not removed....In 1798 a common persecution of Catholics and Dissenters seemed to have fused races and religions, but at the critical moment the unfortunate massacres in Wexford put an end once and for all to all mere theories on the question; and as the plant of religious toleration in Ireland is still a sickly one...I would regret the severance of the present legislative connection." (Northern Whig, 5.6.1886) Currie and the Liberals argued that the British influence was a necessary democratic and progressive force in Irish society and that it would, in time, break down the political backwardness of the Catholics and the Orangemen. Currie asked British workers: "Why should you subject us to the demination of ideas which are 100 years behind your own." (Northern Whig 5.6.1886)

The Ulster Liberals held that the level of democratic consciousness prevailing in Ireland, particularly within the Catholic nation, was so low as to preclude any possibility of society functioning democratically in an Ireland separated from Britain. Commenting on an article in the "Edinburgh Review", a Northern Whig editorial said: "The writer shows that the (Catholic) Irish have a very faint conception of individual liberty. The community is everything; the individual is nothing. This social solidarity is a sign of weakness rather than strength, and shows itself in their readiness to 'seek the strong guidance of men like Mr. Parnell' and 'to organise into secret societies....'" (1.5.1886) In other words, Catholic Ireland was subject to demagoguery rather than to conscious political activity. The editorial could have illustrated its point even more clearly by pointing to the fact that the conscious political debate and conflict which took place within the Protestant nation (between Conservatives, Liberals and even an emerging Labour party) found no parallel in Catholic Ireland. The point was developed by William Currie at the Ulster Hall rally. Ireland, he said, had suffered from tyranny in the past but: "The proposals now before the country seem to us the probable occasion of a new and infinitely worse tyranny than Ireland ever yet saw." Giving an illustration of what he meant, he said: "Sir, as I saw columns of Nationalists last November marching to the poll to vote against their convictions for Cobbain or for Johnston in obedience to the orders of Mr. Parnell, I asked myself, as I ask you now, how are we out of men of that kind to extract that free spirit which is presupposed in all representative government, and wanting which a sovereign people become earth's worst tyrant."



(Cobain and Johnston were independent Orange Conservative candidates. They were elected for East and South Belfast in 1885 against both Liberal and Conservative opposition. Parnell had instructed his supporters to vote for them as part of his general campaign to weaken the Liberals and place himself in a commanding "balance of power" situation in the House of Commons.)

An Irish Government, said a working class colleague of Currie's in an interview quoted later, "will be a Government of Papal ascendancy and social despotism." (Northern Whig 13.5.1886) If any reader doubts the accuracy of this prediction he should refer to the B. & C.O. pamphlet 'Catholic Political Culture and the Constitution of Ireland'. The Ulster Liberals resolved that having supported the struggle against the Protestant Ascendancy, they were not prepared to sit back and "suffer the creation of a new and possibly a worse ascendancy than that we have happily been freed from." (Northern Whig 21.5.1886)

### THE ULSTER LIBERALS AND THE TWO IRISH NATIONS.

Rev. R.J. Lynd - speaking at the Ulster Hall demonstration (Northern Whig 1.5.1886) "One grand objection to this Government Bill...was that the minority in the Parliament in Dublin would be a fixed minority; it would be there in an utterly helpless and impotent position."...."there would be no arbiter between them - between men who differed in race and creed (i.e. the two nations) - and when the loyal power is stricken down and when priestly power comes to the front what would become of the Unionists"? Thomas Andrews: ".....the Loyalists will become rebels."

The democratic opponents of Home Rule declared (like the democratic opponents of the re-establishment of a Home Rule Parliament in Northern Ireland today) that any system of government which gave one Irish nation the right to dominate the other (or a section of the other) would inevitably lead to the intensification of the national conflict and the breakdown of democratic politics.

The democratic adherents of the 'Two Nations Theory' in 1886 (as today) did not stand for any system of apartheid. They stood for the integration of the two Irish nations and they opposed Home Rule because it would prevent this progressive development from taking place. Thomas Sinclair has this to say on the question at the Ulster Hall demonstration (N.W. 1.5.1886). He referred to Gladstone's statement that British law came to Ireland "in a foreign garb" and went on to say:

"The law which we in Ulster claim to be our own domestic law, springing from our needs, and sanctioned by our consent, is declared by Mr. Gladstone, amidst Parnellite cheers, to be foreign law to other parts of Ireland. That is to say, we Ulstermen who consent to the law of England, that it is good, are held by England's premier to be strangers and foreigners in the land of our birth and affection...No sadder statement or none more far reaching in its evil tendencies has been ever made by a responsible English statesman - and to us Ulster Liberals, who have ever discountenanced and denounced the policy and practices of ascendancy, who have ever humbly endeavoured to be at the front in the weary struggle for civil and religious freedom, and who have been enabled



for the popular cause to bear sacrifices of social reward, loss of personal friendship, misrepresentation of motives in all quarters, by cherishing the fond belief that, as the outcome of all, religious rancour and suspicion would cease, social jealousies disappear, and the two nations in Ireland become one great people - to us, I say, The statement from the author of the greatest of Irish reforms, and our leader in securing them, that his and our work has been in vain., that Ulster and anti-Ulster must remain Ulster and anti-Ulster still, is the most melancholy utterance of the century."

Robert McGeogh added: "The reactionary policy is the policy which Mr. Gladstone, in premature despair of the efficacy of the great remedial measures he has himself carried, now proposes to adopt."

The Ulster Liberals did not merely oppose Home Rule. They put forward a coherent alternative policy. At their March Convention they passed resolutions demanding the final settlement of the land question, and the democratisation of the Dublin Castle administration and of Irish local government. On the first issue they called for "the compulsory extinction of dual ownership by purchase from the landlords upon such terms as will secure substantial reductions of the present rents, leasehold, judicial or otherwise." On the second question they demanded "the abolition of the Viceroyalty, appointment of an Irish Secretary, a thorough reform of the departments of Irish Government, and the establishment of an extended system of representative local government...treating Ireland in all respects as an integral part of the United Kingdom".

With the land question finally settled and the undemocratic, colonial state machine dismantled, no substantial democratic issues would have remained to lend weight to a reactionary Catholic Nationalist movement. It is interesting to speculate what might have been the fate of Catholic Nationalism had these reforms been carried through in 1886.

#### THE ULSTER LIBERALS AND SELF DETERMINATION

While opposing Home Rule, the Ulster Liberals were not prepared to countenance coercion as a means of enforcing the Union on Catholic Ireland. The first resolution passed at the March Convention stated: "we disapprove of any exceptional coercive legislation for this country, believing that Ireland should not be asked to submit to any restraints on liberty other than may from time to time be adopted for the whole of the United Kingdom". The Liberals recognised that the coercion of one Irish nation at the behest of the other would defeat their main object in seeking to keep Catholic Ireland within the Union. They recognised that it would obstruct the integration of the two nations.

The Ulster Liberal position could be stated as follows - though it was not, of course, expressed as bluntly as this by the Liberals themselves; that they were not prepared to accept the mere election of a Parnellite majority as sufficient grounds for granting Home Rule to Catholic Ireland. Indeed, they regarded the Parnellite majority as a perversion of democracy, as a result of clerical interference in politics. If, however, the Catholic nation was



sufficiently serious in its national demands to make Catholic Ireland un-governable by means other than "coercion", then the Liberals were prepared, reluctantly, to bow to the inevitable. Miss Tod summed up her position thus: "I for one feel that, if there are so many people in other provinces who have accepted this dreadful scheme of government as to countenance Mr. Gladstone in creating it, then we in Ulster must demand a separate jurisdiction so as to keep our own lives in our own hands." (Northern Whig 1.5.1886)

While the Ulster Liberal position on this issue was, perhaps, in breach of the formal requirements of abstract democratic principle, it nevertheless involved, essentially, no denial of the right of Catholic Ireland to self-determination.

#### THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS AND THE FIRST HOME RULE BILL

The more conscious and active workers in Belfast (e.g. the leading members of the United Trades Council) took their politics in the main from the Ulster Liberal Party. They were conscious of having an interest in politics but believed that interest to be only "to some extent antagonistic" (to use Alexander Bowman's phrase) to that of the bourgeoisie. Exactly what this meant was made clear in 1885 when Bowman contested the North Belfast parliamentary seat as the first labour candidate in Ireland. Bowman claimed to be standing "in the interests of the working classes apart entirely from political considerations." (N.W. 19.11.86) However, he was distinguished from the Liberal candidates only by his advocacy of a series of reforms in labour and employers liability laws. He expressed his support for the Union in standard Liberal terms: "He was convinced that our true strength and interest lay in hearty and honourable union with Great Britain, but as we could only have satisfactory and abiding union on the basis of justice, he should oppose every movement in the direction of injustice or wrong." (Belfast News Letter, 19.1.85). On other issues (e.g. free trade) Bowman held to the principles of the Liberal bourgeoisie.

In this respect, the Belfast working class was not untypical of the British working class as a whole. Socialism had not yet made a mass impact on the class.

When the Home Rule crisis broke, the bulk of the organised working class in Belfast remained Unionist and followed the lead of the Ulster Liberal Party. A large number of trades unionists took part in the Liberal demonstration in the Ulster Hall, including a contingent who marched from the Sirocco engineering works. At the meeting, a deputation of trades unionists was elected to lobby Lib.-Lab. M.P.'s and to address meetings in the industrial districts of Britain. The deputation was composed of 3 workers from Belfast and 2 from Derry, all non-conformist Protestants and Liberals, and was led by William Currie, a Belfast linen lapper. Shortly after arriving in London they gave a lengthy interview to the 'Pall Mall Gazette' in which they argued a coherent and democratic case against Home Rule. The interview was reprinted in the Northern Whig (13.5.86) and large extracts from it are reproduced below as they give a considerable insight into the consciousness of the Belfast working class and should finally lay to rest the fading myth that Protestant workers were fooled into opposing Home Rule by appeals to religious bigotry, landlord plots, imperialist intrigues, or other supernatural forces.



Before this, however, a few comments are needed to establish the credentials of the deputation as representative of the organised working class.

While Currie and his colleagues were at the House of Commons, a telegram arrived from Alexander Bowman, secretary of the Belfast United Trades Council, addressed to Broadhurst, leader of the Lib.-Lab. M.P.'s, stating that the deputation did not represent the Trades Council and adding that he "personally" was in favour of Home Rule. (It is not clear why Bowman changed his mind on this issue. He spoke at the Liberal Convention on March 19th, 1886, but together with other opponents of the majority resolutions, he was unable to argue any coherent case. His support for Home Rule seems to have depended on personal loyalty to Gladstone and on a vague 'guilt by association' feeling that there was something morally wrong in agreeing with the Tories and the landlords on this issue.)

Bowman's telegram to Broadhurst drew a sharp retort from Joseph Mitchell, the President of the United Trades Council, who wrote in a letter to the press (Northern Whig 18.5.86) that, "Mr. Currie (sic) has just cause for complaint against Mr. Bowman for having in any way identified the 'Council' with opposition to the views which are now being laid before the English working men with so much honesty and ability." Mitchell proceeded to draw attention to the fact that he had nominated Bowman as parliamentary candidate for North Belfast and said: "Had I known Mr. Bowman's views were such as he has expressed in his letter to Mr. Broadhurst I would not have <sup>been</sup> connected with his candidature in any way whatever. While differing politically from Mr. Ewart (Tory M.P. for North Belfast) I am glad to see that through him North Belfast will be found in opposition to a measure which, I am quite convinced, would be injurious not only to the best interests of Belfast but to those of Ireland."

A special meeting of the United Trades Council was called for June 12th to discuss Bowman's conduct and consider a motion calling for his resignation. Bowman resigned before the motion was put. There can be no doubt, therefore, that Currie and Mitchell, rather than Bowman, represented the views of the most conscious section of the Belfast working class on the Home Rule question.

Another point which could be raised to question the working class credentials of Currie's deputation is that the views they expressed on the Home Rule issue were broadly similar to those of the Ulster Liberal bourgeoisie. As has been explained above, however, working class consciousness of its position in society was sufficient for the class to take up an independent political position on purely labour issues alone. On other issues, the class was forced to decide which of the bourgeois political alternatives offered to it served its interests best. Workers thus tended to argue their case in terms of bourgeois politics and the working class interest was not made explicit. However, their arguments were generally based on some underlying working class interest, and this was very obviously the case on the Home Rule question. Conscious workers recognised that they had an interest in resolving national conflicts within the British Isles in order to remove barriers to the unity of the workers of the British Isles.



It was this underlying class interest which moved the majority of conscious British workers to support Home Rule. "Mr. Gladstone's plan would produce the true union, a union of hearts between the English and Irish people as against the union of anarchy, distrust and hate, maintained by bayonets and coercion for the last eighty-six years." ('Labour Manifesto' issued in June 1886 by Joseph Arch M.P. and Joseph Leicester M.P. on behalf of the Lib.-Lab. M.P.'s)

Similarly, as the quotations following make clear, the Ulster workers who supported the Ulster Liberal case against Home Rule were motivated by the progressive aim, based on working class interest, of seeking to bring about the integration of nations and peoples. The split between the British working class and the Ulster Protestant working class on this issue is accounted for not by any difference in overall class consciousness or in subjective desire; it is accounted for by the fact that the Ulster workers had a superior understanding of the facts of the matter.

One final point should be made with regard to the deputation's defence of the "rights of property". This cannot be considered a defence of order against reactionary disorder - i.e. disorder out of which no progress could be made. Socialism was not a practical possibility at the time.

#### INTERVIEW IN THE 'PALL MALL GAZETTE'.

Currie:- "We are not Orangemen...and we are separate as wide as the poles from the party of ascendancy; we are for justice all round - justice and redress of all grievances; but we are against the loss of our birth-right as British citizens. We are against being cut off from the county to which we are proud to belong, and of being disinherited of the empire which we and our fathers have helped to build up. But we are Liberals - Radicals if you like - who have, until now, like most Presbyterians of Ulster, given a hearty, even enthusiastic support to the legislation by which Mr. Gladstone has sought to knit the two countries more closely into one. We were against the Irish Church, and we were against the tyrannous abuse by Irish landlords which the Land Acts were passed to prevent. We are now asking for no privileges, we are seeking to restore no ascendancy: we merely ask that we may not be subjected to an ascendancy more cruel than anything which we aided the Liberals of England in overthrowing, and that we may not be placed under the domination of a set of men whose every act since they came before the world as a political party has been such as to stamp them as destitute of the elementary principles of liberty, justice and right.

Question: That is all very well: but how can you, professing Liberal principles which in every other country in the world are held to justify the claim of the majority to run the government pretty much as it likes, insist that these Liberal principles cannot be applied in Ireland.

Answer: "We are entirely in favour of the rule of the majority within a sufficiently extended area, when it is restricted by limits of personal rights and individual liberty. The only difference between us is, that we recognise the majority of a larger area than that which



you seek to impose upon us as sovereign. Our voting area is the three kingdoms. We did not create it, we were born within it. It is the area which until the last election we have been trained to recognise as the natural and normal area within which the ebb and flow of majorities should be decisive. We ask for nothing more than that the area within which the oscillation of majorities and minorities has hitherto been final should continue to be regarded as the area of the sovereign vote. To the majority in that area we pay and ever have paid the most loyal obedience; but we refuse to recognise the sovereign pretensions of a local voting majority within the limits of one of the British Isles; more especially as every one knows that that local voting majority is in deadly hostility to all the principles of property, liberty and progress which have been recognised for generations by both the parties who in the larger area have divided between them the sovereignty of the empire."

Question: Then you object altogether to Home Rule in any shape or form?

Answer: "In every shape or form that implies the subjection of Ulster to the other three provinces."

Question: What then are you prepared to accept?

Answer: "The status quo", said one from Derry, "pure and simple". "The status quo plus county boards", said one from Belfast, "And, speaking for myself", said another of the Belfast delegates, "I am prepared to give in addition to county boards provincial assemblies in each of the four provinces."

"And as for me", said the third delegate from Belfast, "although in this I admit that I speak only for myself, I am prepared to assent not merely to the substitution of elective county boards for the grand juries throughout the country, but I would assent to a provincial assembly at Dublin to represent the county boards, provided that the Executive remains in the hands of the Imperial Government and the full representation of Ireland is maintained at Westminster."

(There is an obvious similarity between the system of government suggested by the "third delegate from Belfast" above and the system presently being implemented in Northern Ireland.)

Question: But Ulster is not a nationality.

Answer: "Neither is Ireland. 'Ireland a nation' is but the opinion of one half of the Roman Catholics, who altogether only constitute two thirds of the population of Ireland. Ireland is not a nation. Ireland is an island inhabited by two races, between whom there is no unity, between whom hitherto you have tried to hold the balance even. Now you are proposing to place one of the races under the heel of the other, and that other race which has been and is animated by animosity not only to England but to the principles of civilisation which made England great.."

Question: But what will this Dublin Parliament do, that you should be



so bitter against it even before it has come into existence?

Answer: The Dublin Parliament will do, it is not unreasonable to suppose, much the same as the men who compose two-thirds of it have been doing and are doing at this moment all over Ireland outside Ulster. They will establish a tyranny which will pay as little regard to the rights of property as to the liberty of individual action. It will be a government of Papal ascendancy and social despotism. You ask us to submit to that? Never!.....though all your ironclads that you talk of lay outside Belfast ready to lay the most flourishing city in Ireland in ruins."

"But",...said another delegate, "we are no Orangemen, and we have not contemplated a resort to arms. We do not believe that if we put our case fairly before the English there is any need to fear that they will thrust us ruthlessly under the heel of the men who, only five years ago, you had yourself to put into gaol for complicity in crimes which made our country a byword throughout the world. If the South and West have a right to be separate because they ask to go, surely you will not deny to us, who are not less unanimous and equally determined, the simple right to stay where we are."

Question: The answer to that question depends upon this: Are you prepared to fight rather than submit to a Dublin Parliament.

Answer: "The question of fighting.....has never been practically looked at by the Liberals of Belfast. The Orangemen, no doubt, are arming, and if they should be driven to draw the sword they will find a practically unanimous people behind them; but to talk of drawing the sword is so serious and the crime of civil war so enormous, that we refuse to mention the matter even in our talk at this present stage. When we do speak of it, it will be when the chance of saving ourselves from a Parnellite tyranny by any other means has become clearly impossible....."

Currie at Newcastle-on-Tyne (Northern Whig 5.6.86)

".....we wish in being granted perfect justice along with England and Scotland that in the growth of generations the present antagonisms of race, the hatred and antagonism of religion, should die out in the presence of nobler plants".

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## LENIN ON NATIONALISM

"The working class is opposed to all privileges; that is why it upholds the right of nations to self determination. The class conscious workers do not advocate secession. They know the advantages of large states and the amalgamation of large masses of workers." (Lenin's emphasis)  
(More about 'Nationalism' - Collected Works, Vol. 20, p.110)

"Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most



just', 'purest', most refined and civilised brand."

".....the Marxist fully recognises the historical legitimacy of national movements. But to prevent that recognition from becoming an apologia of nationalism, it must be strictly limited to what is progressive in such movements."

"To throw off the feudal yoke, all national oppression, and all privileges enjoyed by any particular nation or language, is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force, and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian class struggle, which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go beyond these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie. There is a border line here, which is often very slight and which the Bundists and the Ukrainian nationalist-socialists completely lose sight of" (The sight of Irish Catholic "nationalist-socialists" was equally defective.)

The proletariat "stands for the fullest freedom of capitalist intercourse and welcomes every kind of assimilation of nations except that which is founded on force or privilege."

(Critical Remarks on the National Question, C.W., Vol. 20, P. 34-35)

#### THE ULSTER LIBERALS, THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS, AND NATIONALISM

The Ulster Liberal bourgeoisie, in their desire to create conditions of political stability and national peace in Ireland and in their desire to impede the growth of reactionary pre-capitalist ideology, pursued a policy which was remarkably in line with the above. The Ulster Protestant working class, in supporting the Liberal bourgeoisie on this issue, were undoubtedly supporting a progressive and democratic alternative to the reactionary Home Rule policy - a policy inevitably involving:-

1. The triumph of "Catholic Ascendancy" and the obstruction of democratic advance in Southern Ireland.
2. The partition not only of the British Isles but also of Ireland, the perpetuation and intensification of the national conflict, and the consequent obstruction of working class unity.

The eventual realisation of the above can be attributed, in part, at least, to the failure of the working class in Ireland to hold to and move forward from the position accepted by the Ulster Protestant working class in 1886, and to take the lead, as the most consistently democratic force in society, in struggling for the democratic alternative to Home Rule.

Alan Carr.



# THE LENIN-TROTSKY CONTROVERSY ON TRADE UNIONS 1920-1921 Part 1 : The Debate

In the midst of the Russian Civil War and the War of Intervention against the Bolshevik Republic, the Russian transport system came perilously close to complete destruction. In March 1920 Trotsky had been entrusted with getting the system back into operation again. He succeeded - and in fact the railways were rehabilitated well ahead of schedule. Trotsky's success, however, was based on a ruthless implementation of his policies favouring the militarisation of labour. The railway workers and the personnel of the repair workshops were placed under martial law, and when the railwaymen's trade union objected to such actions, its leaders were dismissed by Trotsky and replaced by others who would accept his orders. In September 1920 Trotsky established Tsektran - or the Central Committee of the Joint Trade Union of Rail and Water Transport Workers - which was primarily responsible for the successful restoration of the transport system, but which was a body totally devoid of inner democracy, and with positions in it being filled by mere appointment. Whatever about the unavoidability of such measures in the thick of a war situation, they were totally inappropriate, to say the least, in a normal socialist society, and being in contradiction with the principles of proletarian democracy they could, if persisted with, ultimately end only in self-defeat for the revolution.

Trotsky, however, thought differently. These drastic measures were regarded by him as principles of socialist construction in which a defensive role by trade unions on behalf of workers was unthinkable. In his 1920 book "Terrorism and Communism", Trotsky wrote:-

".....We can have no way to Socialism except by the authoritative regulation of the economic forces and resources of the country, and the centralized distribution of labour-power in harmony with the general State plan. The Labour State considers itself empowered to send every worker to the place where his work is necessary. And not one serious Socialist will begin to deny to the Labour State the right to lay its hand upon the worker who refused to execute his labour duty....."

".....Without general labour service, without the right to order and demand fulfilment of orders, the trade unions will be transformed into a mere form without reality, for the Young Socialist State requires trade unions, not for a struggle for better conditions of labour - that is the



task of the social and State organizations as a whole - but to organise the working class for the ends of production, to educate, discipline, distribute, group, retain certain categories and certain workers at their posts for fixed periods - in a word, hand in hand with the State to exercise their authority in order to lead the workers into the framework of a single economic plan. To defend under such conditions, the 'freedom' of labour, means to defend fruitless, helpless, absolutely unregulated searches for better conditions, unsystematic, chaotic changes from factory to factory, in a hungry country, in conditions of terrible dis-organization of the transport and food apparatus. - What, except the complete collapse of the working-class and complete economic anarchy could be the result of the stupid attempt to reconcile bourgeois freedom of labour with proletarian socialization of the means of production?

As we pointed out in Part I, the obvious shortcomings and hardships of the system of War Communism were beginning to turn not alone the peasantry but, by 1920, what remained of the working class as well, against the Bolshevik state and there was a growing pattern of factory absenteeism, strikes and protests. In this situation it was bad enough for Trotsky to give effect within the transport system to his cavalier attitude in dismissing any defensive role undertaken by the trade unions for their members, as contemptible bourgeois freedom of labour. This, however, did not satisfy Trotsky. Instead of abolishing his militarisation of labour on the railways as soon as the close of the war could permit a return to normality, he in fact wanted these measures to be extended throughout the Soviet economy as essential principles of socialist construction in the conditions of peace which had now emerged. Such measures would, of course, have irretrievably widened the division between the Russian working class and the Soviet State and would have made a hellish mockery of all that socialism stood for.

Isaac Deutscher describes the outcome of these moves by Trotsky:-

"But no sooner had the Polish war been concluded than the grievances and dissensions exploded anew and with greater force than before. He himself (Trotsky) provoked the explosion. Flushed with success, he threatened to 'shake up' various trade unions as he had 'shaken up' those of the transport workers. He threatened, that is, to dismiss the elected leaders of the unions and to replace them with nominees who would place the nation's economic interest above the sectional interests of the workers. He grossly overstepped the mark. Lenin now bluntly dissociated himself from Trotsky and persuaded the Central Committee to do likewise. The Committee openly called the party to resist energetically 'militarised and bureaucratic forms of work': and it castigated that 'degenerated centralism' which rode roughshod over the workers' elected representatives. It called on the party to re-establish proletarian democracy in the trade unions and to subordinate all other considerations to this task. A special commission was formed to watch that these decisions were carried out. Zinoviev presided over it, and although Trotsky sat on it, nearly all its members were his opponents. As a finishing stroke, the Central Committee forbade Trotsky to speak in public on the relationship between the trade unions and the state."



At the fifth All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions held in November 1920, the Party posed the question of abandoning military methods of work in the trade unions, and the reintroduction of democratic practices. It was proposed that positions on union bodies should now be filled by election instead of by the previous practice of appointment and co-optation; that there should be a return to regular general meetings of union members which had practically ceased during the war, and that it should be a practice for elected bodies of trade unions to report back to their membership. Trotsky came into headlong collision with the trade union leader Borsky on this issue. He recognised only one way of enlivening the trade unions - an administrative 'shaking up' of all their officials from top to bottom - and he opposed the above proposals. Trotsky's policy was instead to form the trade unions into brigades of a labour army, with their officers subject to appointment and removal from above by the State itself.

It was at a meeting of the Communist group of the Trade Union Conference that Trotsky had directly come out against the proposals for a democratic re-organisation of the trade unions. He spoke "fine words", as Lenin put it, about "shaking up" the unions, "tightening the screws", and immediate "governmentalisation of the trade unions". Trotsky's position, however, was defeated, and on November 8th 1920, the Party trade union group adopted a resolution drafted by Lenin, which in particular sought to deal with the monstrous bureaucratic growth of Tsektran which had been brought about by Trotsky:-

"A gradual but steady transition must be effected from urgency procedures to a more even distribution of forces, particularly in the secondment of the individual unions' best organisers to the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions with a view to consolidating that body as a whole, improving the functioning of its apparatus, achieving greater system in the work of all trade unions, and thereby strengthening the entire trade union movement."

"This measure should be applied in particular to the Central Committee of the General Transport Workers' Union (Tsektran), an end must be put to its disproportionate growth as compared with the other unions, and the best elements thus released should extend to the entire trade union movement those methods of the broader application of democracy, the promotion of initiative, participation in the management of industry, the development of emulation, and so forth, which have yielded the best practical results."

During the course of December 1920 the disagreement on the trade union question was discussed at several meetings of the Party's Central Committee, which finally voted 10 to 4 against Trotsky's position and issued a statement condemning the "degeneration of centralism and militarised forms of work into bureaucracy, petty tyranny and red tape".

This, however, did not put an end to the matter. Isaac Deutscher has described how all the time Trotsky kept up his opposition which was finally to result in the publication at the end of December of his policy statement as a pamphlet entitled "The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions", thereby making



public the differences in the Central Committee:-

"Trotsky, unrepentent, sulked. At the beginning of December, at a closed session of the Tsektran, he returned to the attack on trade unionists, who, as he said, had been good at conducting strikes in the old days but showed little understanding of the needs of a socialist economy. He defended his practice of overruling them, made light of the demands for elections in the trade unions, and castigated those who cried out that a new bureaucracy was reviving Tsarist methods of government.

'Bureaucracy.....,' he replied, 'was not a discovery of Tsardom. It has represented a whole epoch in the development of mankind', an epoch by no means closed. A competent, hierarchically organized civil service had its merits, and Russia suffered not from the excess but from the lack of an efficient bureaucracy. He made this point repeatedly, arguing that for the sake of efficiency it was necessary to grant certain limited privileges to the bureaucracy. He thus made himself the spokesman of the managerial groups, and this later enabled Stalin to taunt him plausibly with being the 'patriarch of bureaucrats'. He was confident, Trotsky said, that he could win popular support for his policy, but the economic and social breakdown left no time for the application of the democratic process, which worked with unbearable slowness, because of the low cultural and political level of the Russian masses. 'What you call bossing and working through nominees is in inverse proportion to the enlightenment of the masses, to their cultural standards, political consciousness, and the strength of our administrative machinery.'"

So goes Isaac Deutscher's account in part one of his biographical trilogy entitled "The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921". And it must indeed be noted that Deutscher stands out as the only Trotskyist who has seen fit to shed any light on Trotsky's attitude to the trade unions. The Trotskyist movement in general has embarrassedly seen fit to keep suppressed Trotsky's pamphlet "The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions". This is indeed a pity as it means we have to primarily rely on Lenin's account of it. We hope that we are not thereby giving an unfair account of Trotsky's position, but if we are, then, it is Lenin who must be blamed. Judging from the account given by the Trotskyist Deutscher, however, we doubt if any reader will consider that to be the case. If, however, any Trotskyist group now sees fit to redress the balance by rescuing "The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions" from whatever archives it may be rotting in, nobody would be more delighted than ourselves to see this pamphlet of Trotsky's republished, as it certainly deserves the closest scrutiny.

In this pamphlet Trotsky charged the existing trade unions with "craft conservatism" and with "cultivating in their midst the spirit of corporate exclusiveness", and he again called for a radical "shaking-up" of the existing trade unions and for the harnessing of them more closely to the management of industry. The fact that Trotsky was now making a public issue of these disagreements against a background of growing working class discontent with existing hardships (which would only have been intensified further if it was thought that Trotsky's policies might have their way), now necessitated



that he should be openly and unequivocally rebuffed in order to avert the danger of the Bolsheviks coming into headlong collision with what remained of the Russian working class.

This was what Lenin set out to do on December 30th 1920 in his speech entitled "The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes". In this speech Lenin expounded the proper relationships that must exist between Party, government, trade unions and the working class as a whole, in the construction of socialism in Russia, and the delicate balance that would have to be struck in such relationships. He began by defining the role trade unions would have to play:-

"Trade unions are not just historically necessary; they are historically inevitable as an organisation of the industrial proletariat, and, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, embrace nearly the whole of it. This is basic, but Comrade Trotsky keeps forgetting it, he neither appreciates nor makes it his point of departure, all this while dealing with 'The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions', a subject of infinite compass".

"It follows from what I have said that the trade unions have an extremely important part to play at every step of the dictatorship of the proletariat....On the one hand, the trade unions, which take in all industrial workers, are an organisation of the ruling, dominant, governing class, which has now set up a dictatorship and is exercising coercion through the state. But it is not a state organisation; nor is it one designed for coercion, but for education. It is an organisation designed to draw in and to train, it is, in fact, a school:- a school of administration, a school of economic management, a school of communism....."

Having established this argument against Trotsky's position of state stultification of the trade unions, it was now necessary for Lenin to follow it up with an argument against trade union control of state functions which was emerging either as a syndicalist reaction against Trotsky's position a la Shlyapnikov's "Workers Opposition", or as a particular variation on Trotsky's theme a la Bukharin. Lenin continued:

"Within the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the trade unions stand, if I may say so, between the Party and the Government. In the transition to socialism the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable, but it is not exercised by an organisation which takes in all industrial workers.....What happens is that the Party, shall we say, absorbs the vanguard of the proletariat, and this vanguard exercises the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship cannot be exercised or the functions of government performed without a foundation such as the trade unions. These functions, however, have to be performed through the medium of special institutions which are also of a new type, namely, the Soviets. What are the practical conclusions to be drawn from this peculiar situation? They are, on the one hand, that the trade unions are a link between the vanguard and the masses, and by their daily work bring conviction to the masses, the masses of the class which alone is



capable of taking us from Capitalism to Communism. On the other hand, the trade unions are a 'resevoir' of the state power. This is what the trade unions are in the period of transition from capitalism to communism. In general, this transition cannot be achieved without the leadership of that class which is the only class capitalist has trained for large-scale production and which alone is divorced from the interests of the petty proprietor. But the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of that class, because in all capitalist countries, (and not only over here, in one of the most backward), the proletariat is still so divided, so degraded, and so corrupted in parts (by imperialism in some countries) that an organisation taking in the whole proletariat cannot directly exercise proletarian dictatorship".

Lenin then returned to the defensive role of trade unions which Trotsky had tried to dismiss with the catchcry of "bourgeois freedom of labour":-

"He (Trotsky) seems to say that in a workers' state it is not the business of the trade unions to stand up for the material and spiritual interests of the working class. That is a mistake. Comrade Trotsky speaks of a 'workers' state'. May I say that this is an abstraction. It was natural for us to write about a workers' state in 1917, but it is now a patent error to say:- 'Since this is a workers' state without any bourgeoisie, against whom then is the working class to be protected, and for what purpose?' The whole point is that it is not quite a workers' state. That is where Comrade Trotsky makes one of his main mistakes....Our Party Programme.... shows that ours is a workers' state with a bureaucratic twist to it. We have had to mark it with this dismal, shall I say, tag. There you have the reality of the transition. Well, is it right to say that in a state that has taken this shape in practice the trade unions have nothing to protect, or that we can do without them in protecting the material and spiritual interests of the massively organised proletariat? No, this reasoning is theoretically quite wrong. It takes us into the sphere of abstraction or an ideal we shall achieve in 15 or 20 years' time, and I am not so sure that we shall have achieved it even by then. What we actually have before us is a reality of which we have a good deal of knowledge, provided, that is, we keep our heads, and do not let ourselves be carried away by intellectualist talk or abstract reasoning, or by what may appear to be 'theory' but is in fact error and misapprehension of the peculiarities of transition. We now have a state under which it is the business of the massively organised proletariat to protect itself, while we, for our part, must use these workers' organisations to protect the workers from their state, and to get them to protect our state. Both forms of protection are achieved through the peculiar interweaving of our state measures and our agreeing or 'coalescing' with our trade unions."

It was in this context that Lenin went on to place Tsektran's activities in perspective and to criticise Trotsky's policies for this body, pointing out that measures inevitable in a war situation had by no means universal validity:



"Where did Glavpolitput and Tsektran err? Certainly not in their use of coercion; that goes to their credit. Their mistake was that they failed to switch to normal trade union work at the right time and without conflict, as the Ninth Congress of the Russian Communist Party required; they failed to adapt themselves to the trade unions and help them by meeting them on an equal footing. Heroism, zeal, etc. are the positive side of military experience; red tape and arrogance are the negative side of the experience of the worst military types. Trotsky's theses, whatever his intentions, do not tend to play up the best, but the worst in military experience."

It was at this stage that Lenin criticised himself for not having previously paid sufficient attention to Rudzutak's theses entitled "The Tasks of the Trade Unions in Production", which had in fact been adopted in November 1920 at the All-Russia Trade Union Conference. Rudzutak's theses had included the following:-

"(5): While the Supreme Economic Council's point of departure in drawing up an overall production programme is the availability of the material elements of production, (raw materials, fuel, the state of machinery, etc.) the trade unions must look at it from the standpoint of organising labour for the tasks of production and its best use. Therefore, the overall production programme, in whole and in part, must be drawn up with the participation of the trade unions in order to combine the use of the material resources of production and manpower in the best possible way."

"(6): Only if the whole mass of those engaged in production consciously take a hand in establishing real labour discipline, fighting deserters from the labour front, etc., can these tasks be fulfilled. Bureaucratic methods and orders will not do; it must be brought home to each participant in production that his production tasks are appropriate and important; that each must take a hand, not only in fulfilling his assignments, but also play an intelligent part in correcting any technical and organisational defects in the sphere of production."

Lenin proceeded to contrast Rudzutak's approach with that of Trotsky's:

"I make a comparison between Rudzutak's theses and those submitted by Trotsky to the Central Committee. At the end of thesis 5 (by Trotsky), I read:-

'.....a reorganisation of the unions must be started right away, that is, a selection of functionaries must be above all made from precisely that angle.....'

There you have an example of the real bureaucratic approach:- Trotsky and Krestinsky selecting the trade union 'functionaries'!"

Lenin concluded this speech at the December 30th meeting of Communist delegates to the Eight Congress of Soviets by saying:-

"Comrade Trotsky's 'theses' are politically harmful. The sum and substance of his policy is bureaucratic harassment of the trade unions.



Our Party Congress will, I am sure, condemn and reject it."

In the meantime, the Party Central Committee had set up a trade union commission and elected Trotsky to it. On January 19th Lenin was to comment on Trotsky's response to this:- "He refuses to work on the commission, magnifying by this step alone his original mistake, which subsequently leads to factionalism."

At the beginning of 1921 this trade union commission concluded its work and on January 14th issued a platform (a pamphlet entitled "Draft Decisions of the Tenth Congress of the R.C.P. on the Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions") which was to become popularly known as the "Platform Of The Ten" and was signed by Lenin, Ruzzutak, Stalin, Zinoviev and others.

But the direct Lenin-Trotsky confrontation by no means exhausted the issues involved. During December Bukharin had posed as a "buffer" between Lenin and Trotsky but as Lenin was to say of his behaviour during the December 30th meeting:- "Bukharin wants to play the 'buffer', but speaks only against Lenin and Zinoviev and not a word against Trotsky". Bukharin's platform was published on January 16th, but he was subsequently to abandon this 'buffer' role and throw his support behind Trotsky's theses during the March Party Congress.

At the December 30th meeting a syndicalist platform had also been advanced by Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollantai on behalf of the 'Workers' Opposition' faction in the Party. This platform was to be published on January 18th.

A number of minor factions also brought forth their own platforms, which, however, were to vanish in the subsequent debate. Accordingly, it was essentially the following positions which the Party had to start discussing at the beginning of 1921:-

(1) Trotsky's position was that the unions be immediately 'governmentalised'. He demanded that the unions be fused with the State and that as organs of the state they be vested with the functions of managing production. Trotsky's position meant taking away from the trade unions their function of protecting workers, and meant substituting methods of sheer compulsion for those of persuasion. If this platform had been adopted, the trade unions would, in effect, have been abolished, and the dictatorship of the proletariat would have been undermined.

(2) The 'buffer' platform, initially advocated by Bukharin, borrowed some formulations from Lenin and some from Trotsky. Bukharin went on to demand that the trade unions should nominate their candidates for posts in the economic administration bodies, and that their nominees should be obligatory for the leading bodies of the Soviets, which position Lenin was to attack as a deviation towards syndicalism.

(3) The principal syndicalist deviation was the platform of the 'Workers Opposition' faction led by Shlyapnikov and Kollantai. They demanded that the administration of production be completely transferred to the trade unions in the form of an "all-Russian producers' congress", with each union controlling its own industry. This meant subordinating the State to the trade unions and



reducing it to nought, thus denying the leading role of the proletarian state in the national economy.

(4) Lenin and the official 'Platform of the Ten' opposed these various factions and dealt with the distinct role of the trade unions as transmission belts from the Party to the masses, and as schools of communism.

While the Workers Opposition platform initially developed as an over-reaction to Trotsky's position, in reality they were two sides of the same coin, the difference being that Trotsky wanted to governmentalise the unions, while they wanted to "unionise" the State. In her 1921 pamphlet on the "Workers Opposition" Alexandra Kollantai was to give their version as follows:-

"Organisation of control over the social economy is a prerogative of the All-Russian Congress of Producers, who are united in the trade and industrial unions which elect the central body directing the whole economic life of the republic....."

".....The cardinal point of controversy that is taking place between the Party leaders and the Workers' Opposition is this:- In whom will our party place the trust of building up the communist economy - in the Supreme Council of National Economy with all its bureaucratic branches or in the Industrial Unions? Comrade Trotsky wants 'to join' the trade unions to the Supreme Council of National Economy so that with the assistance of the latter it might be possible to swallow the first. Comrades Lenin and Zinoviev, on the other hand, want to 'bring up' the masses to such a level of communist understanding that they could be painlessly absorbed into the same soviet institutions. Bukharin and the rest of the factions express essentially the same view, and the variation consists only in the way they put it, the essence is the same. Only the Workers' Opposition expresses something entirely different, defends the class proletarian viewpoint in the very process of creation and realization of its tasks".

"The administrative economic body in the labour republic during the present transitory period must be a body directly elected by the producers themselves. All the rest of the administrative economic soviet institutions shall serve only as executive centres of the economic policy of that all-important economic body of the labour republic."

At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921, Trotsky was to reply as follows to the Workers' Opposition's criticisms of his own position:-

"The Workers' Opposition has come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the party, as it were, as if the party was not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy.....It is necessary to create among us the awareness of the revolutionary historical birthright of the party. The party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship, regardless of temporary wavering in the spontaneous moods of the masses, regardless of the temporary vacillations even in the working class. This awareness is for



us the indispensable unifying element. The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy, although the workers' democracy is, of course, the only method by which the masses can be drawn more and more into political life."

Trotsky's approach represented a completely one-sided pre-occupation with the vanguard role of the Party which, (despite the purely verbal concession to some concept of workers' democracy) displayed in practice such contempt for any autonomous activity whatsoever by the workers it could only lead to the undermining of that vanguard role by completely detaching the Party from the class it was supposed to lead. The Workers' Opposition went to the opposite extreme of having a completely one-sided preoccupation with the workers' democracy aspect of the problem so as to drown any leading role at all by the Party in a sea of "pure" democratic spontaneity. The correct approach was to give concrete expression to the type of Party leadership described by Stalin in "Foundations of Leninism", namely, that of exercising a decidedly vanguard role but maintaining at all times close links with, and the support of, the working class whose leadership it formed. Lenin avoided the pitfalls of Trotsky at one extreme and the Workers' Opposition at the other, by concretely analysing the situation as a dialectical materialist, and striking the correct balance demanded by the situation for the distinct but necessarily co-ordinated roles of Party, Government, and Unions.

This was arrived at precisely by concrete analysis and that alone, and not by taking the easy way out and borrowing a bit from Trotsky and a bit from the Workers' Opposition in order to achieve some bureaucratic compromise solution. It was otherwise with Bukharin. In his attempt to act the "buffer" between Trotsky and Lenin, he ended up with a hotch-potch of a position which was more like a Trotsky solution superimposed on the Workers' Opposition platform! On January 25th 1921 Lenin was to describe Bukharin's approach as follows:-

"Why is Bukharin's reasoning no more than inert and empty eclecticism? It is because he does not even try to make an independent analysis, from his own standpoint, either of the whole cause of the current controversy, (As Marxism, that is, dialectical logic, unconditionally demands) or of the present time and in these concrete circumstances.....His approach is one of pure abstraction....."

In the course of his speech of January 19th 1921 entitled "The Party Crisis", Lenin had proceeded from his attacks on Trotsky to refer specifically to the then platform of Bukharin:

"Bukharin and Co's theses (are) an all-time low in ideological disintegration. We have here one of those 'turns' which in the old days Marxists used to call 'not so much historical as hysterical'. Thesis 17 says:- 'At the present time, these nominations must be made mandatory' (that is, the trade unions' nominations to the respective 'Chief Administrations and Central Boards')".

"This is a complete break with communism and a transition to syndi-



calism. It is, in essence, a repetition of Shlyapnikov's 'unionise the state' slogan, and means transferring the Supreme Economic Council apparatus piecemeal to the respective trade unions. To say, 'I propose mandatory nominations' is exactly the same as saying, 'I appoint'."

"Communism says:- The Communist Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, leads the non-Party workers' masses, educating, preparing, teaching and training the masses ('school( of communism) - first the workers and then the peasants - to enable them eventually to concentrate in their hands the administration of the whole national economy."

"Syndicalism hands over to the mass of non-Party workers, who are compartmentalised in the industries, the management of their industries ('the chief administrations and central boards'), thereby making the Party superfluous, and failing to carry on a sustained campaign either in training the masses or in actually concentrating in their hands the management of the whole national economy....."

".....Why have a Party, if industrial management is to be appointed ('mandatory nominations') by the trade unions, nine-tenths of those members are non-Party workers? Bukharin has talked himself into a logical, theoretical and practical implication of a split in the Party, or, rather, a break-away of the syndicalists from the Party."

"Trotsky, who had been 'chief' in the struggle, has now been 'outstripped' and entirely 'eclipsed' by Bukharin, who has thrown the struggle into an altogether new balance by talking himself into a mistake that is much more serious than all of Trotsky's put together..."

".....While we are slowly absorbing what was sound in the 'democratic' Workers' Opposition, Bukharin has to cling to what is unsound. On January 17th, Comrade Bumazhny, a prominent Tsektranite, or Trotskyite, expressed his readiness to accept Bukharin's syndicalist proposals."

Thus Bukharin's attempt to act the "buffer" had resulted in an eclectic combination of the most erroneous elements of various other platforms.

In his Report on "The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions", which he delivered on January 23rd 1921 to the Communist Group of the Second All-Russia Congress of Miners, Lenin returned to the attack on Trotsky as follows:-

"Let me read you the chief of Trotsky's theses. In his pamphlet towards the end of thesis 12, he writes:-

'We observe the fact that as economic tasks move into the foreground, many trade unionists take an ever more aggressive and uncompromising stand against the prospect of 'coalescence' and the practical conclusions that follow from it. Among them we find Comrades Tomsy and Lozovsky. What is more, many trade unionists, balking at the new tasks and methods, tend to cultivate in their midst a spirit of corporative exclusiveness and



hostility for the new men who are being introduced into the leading branch of the economy, thereby actually fostering the survival of craft-unionism among the unorganised workers.

Lenin went on to comment on this Trotskyite thesis:-

"To start a factional struggle and accuse Tomsky of cultivating among the masses a spirit of hostility for the Tsaktranites is utterly to distort the facts, absolutely to spoil all the work, and entirely to damage all relations with the trade unions. But the trade unions embrace the whole proletariat. If this thing is persisted in and voted on by platforms, it will lead to the downfall of Soviet power."

"If the Party falls out with the trade unions, the fault lies with the Party, and this spells certain doom for the Soviet power. We have no other mainstay but the millions of proletarians, who may not be class conscious, are often ignorant, backward and illiterate, but who, being proletarians, follow their own Party. .... Nothing can ruin us but our own mistakes. This 'but' is the whole point. If we cause a split, for which we are to blame, everything will collapse because the trade unions are not only an official institution, but also the source of all our power. They are the class which the economics of capitalism has converted into the economic amalgamator, and which its industry brings together millions of scattered peasants. That is why one proletarian has more strength than 200 peasants."

"....Trotsky says Lozovsky and Tomsky are balking at the new tasks.... What are the new tasks?"

"Here we are told: 'production atmosphere', 'industrial democracy' and 'role in production'. I said, at the very outset, in the December 30th discussion, that that was nothing but words, which the worker did not understand, that it was all part of the task of production propaganda. We are not renouncing the dictatorship, or one-man management; these remain, I will support them, but I refuse to defend excesses and stupidity. 'Production atmosphere' is a funny phrase that will make workers laugh. Saying it more simply and clearly is all part of production propaganda. But a special institution has been set up for the purpose."

In this same speech Lenin again attacked Bukharin's hotch-potch programme:-

"In an effort to act the buffer, Bukharin clutched at Shlyapnikov (of the Workers' Opposition), but it would have been better for him to clutch at a straw. He promises the unions mandatory nominations, which means they are to have the final say in appointments. But that is exactly what Shlyapnikov is saying. Marxists have been combating syndicalism all over the world.....(The Party) does not deceive the workers. It never makes promises that cannot be kept. And if you skip the trade unions you will make a hash of everything we have achieved over the past three years....."



"I take mandatory nominations to mean that they will be made under the direction of the Party's Central Committee. But in that case what are the rights we are giving them?.....Let us talk about vesting the rights in the trade unions when electricity has spread over the whole country - if we manage to achieve this in twenty years it will be incredibly quick work, for it cannot be done quickly. To talk about it then will be deceiving workers".

In his speech of January 25th 1921 entitled "Once Again On the Trade Unions, The Current Situation, And The Mistakes of Trotsky And Bukharin", Lenin concluded his attacks on Trotsky as follows:-

"Thesis 6 of Trotsky's platform quotes paragraph 5 of the economic section of the R.C.P. Programme, which deals with the trade unions. Two pages later, his thesis 8 says:-

'Having lost the old basis of their existence, the class economic struggle, the trade unions.....'

(that is wrong, and is a hasty exaggeration; the trade unions no longer have to face the class economic struggle but the non-class 'economic struggle', which means combatting bureaucratic distortions of the Soviet apparatus, safeguarding the working people's material and spiritual interests in ways and means inaccessible to this apparatus, etc. This is a struggle they will unfortunately have to face for many years to come). 'The trade unions', says Trotsky, 'have for various reasons, not yet succeeded in mustering the necessary forces and working out the necessary methods enabling them to solve the new task, that of organising production.' (Trotsky's italics) 'set before them by the proletarian revolutions and formulated in our Programme'. That is yet another hasty exaggeration which is pregnant with grave error".

Lenin then proceeds to read the actual Party Programme with his own comments interspersed:-

"'The trade unions, being on the strength of the laws of the Soviet Republic and established practice, participants' (note the cautious statement: participants only) 'in all the local and central organs of industrial management, should eventually arrive at a de facto concentration in their hands of the whole administration of the whole national economy, as a single economic entity' (note this: should arrive at a de facto concentration of management, not of branches of industry and not of industry as a whole, but of the whole national economy, and moreover, as an economic entity. In economic terms, this condition may be considered fulfilled only when the petty producers both in industry and agriculture account for less than one half of the population and the national economy).....'At the same time, the participation of the trade unions in economic management and their activity in drawing the broad masses into this work are the principal means of combating the bureaucratisation of the economic apparatus of the Soviet power and making possible the establishment of truly popular control over the results of production'":-



It is concluded:-

"It is obviously wrong to boil this down to the Party Programme 'formulating' the trade unions' task as 'organisation of production'. And if you insist on this error, and write it into your platform theses, you will get nothing but an anti-communist syndicalist deviation."

At the Tenth Party Congress in March 1921 Bukharin went over to Trotsky's side in the dispute. The overwhelming majority of delegates, however, decided in favour of Lenin's position on the trade unions by 336 votes to 50 for Trotsky and 18 for the Workers' Opposition. It was well that they did, for economic necessity led to the same Congress replacing the system of War Communism by the New Economic Policy. N.E.P. entailed the denationalisation of some four thousand small factories of all kinds (employing an average of 17 workers each) and their leasing to co-operatives, private individuals or companies, while state enterprises were deprived of any budget support and were made to operate on a profit-making basis. In such a situation the decision of the Party to explicitly recognise the defensive role of the trade unions was of the utmost importance.

At the end of December 1921 Lenin began to formulate his "Draft Theses on the Role and Functions of the Trade Unions under the New Economic Policy". He stated that under N.E.P. the Party was:-

"retreating in order to make better preparations for a new offensive against capitalism. In particular, a free market and capitalism, both subject to state control, are now being permitted and are developing; on the other hand, the state enterprises are being put on what is called a profit basis, i.e. they are being re-organised largely on commercial and capitalist lines."

With regard to the private sector the position of the unions would be as follows:

".....Even if this regulation (of private trade and private capitalism by the proletarian state) is completely successful, the antagonism of class interests between labour and capital will certainly remain. Consequently, one of the main tasks that will henceforth confront the trade unions is to protect in every way the class interests of the proletariat in its struggle against capital. This task should be openly put in the forefront, the machinery of the trade unions must be reorganised, changed or supplemented accordingly, and strike funds etc., should be formed, or rather, built up".

In the state sector the positions would be:-

"With the free market now permitted and developing, the state enterprises will to a large extent be put on a commercial and capitalist basis. In view of the urgent need to increase the productivity of labour and make every state enterprise pay its way and show a profit, and in view of the inevitable rise of narrow departmental interests and excessive departmental zeal, this circumstance is bound to create a certain conflict of interests between the masses of workers and



the directors and managers of the state enterprises, or the government departments in charge of them. Therefore, as regards the state enterprises, it is undoubtedly the duty of the trade unions to protect the class interests of the proletariat and the mass of the working people against their employers."

Lenin's theses further stated:-

"As long as classes exist, the class struggle is inevitable. In the period of transition from capitalism to socialism the existence of classes is inevitable, and the Programme of the Russian Communist Party definitely states that we are taking only the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism. Hence, the Communist Party, the Soviet government and the trade unions must frankly admit the existence of a class struggle and its inevitability until the electrification of industry and agriculture is completed - at least in the main - and until small productions and the supremacy of the market are thereby cut off at the roots. From this it follows that at present we must on no account reject strikes and cannot, as a matter of principle, agree to a law substituting obligatory state mediation for strikes."

"On the other hand.....the Communist Party, the Soviet government and the trade unions must never forget and must never conceal from the workers and the mass of the working people that strikes in a state where the proletariat holds political power can be explained and justified only by the bureaucratic of the proletarian state and by all sorts of survivals of the old capitalist system in the government offices on the one hand, and by the political immaturity and cultural backwardness of the mass of the working people on the other."

Strike action accordingly remained legal under Soviet and many legal strikes did in fact occur under N.E.P. conditions in the early and middle 20's - 538 strike in 1922-3 involving some 154,000 workers and 322,000 working days lost, and 463 strikes in 1924-5. Such a development would have been incomprehensible in terms of Trotsky's jackboot approach. Isaac Deutscher has referred as follows to Trotsky's position on the trade unions under N.E.P.:-

"In later years Trotsky argued that he had stood for militarisation of labour only in the context of war communism. At the tenth congress of the party, however, when N.E.P. was introduced, he insisted that his labour policies retained their validity and that they were not necessarily connected with war communism. "

Lenin, by defeating Trotsky's policy, prevented the Party from coming into headlong conflict with the class it was supposed to represent. Lenin devised a correct balance in the interrelationship and respective roles of Party, government and unions on the basis of a realistic assessment of the situation in which the Russian Revolution found itself. This also applied to the question of workers control which arose as one of the elements under debate. Lenin's views on this question will be examined in a further article in order to determine what aspects of them were historically relative as well as what retain a universal validity.

Manus O Riordan.

# THE RIGHTS OF NATIONS AND THE DUTIES OF COMMUNISTS.

Nationalism has been the curse of the labour movement in Southern Ireland. The conflict between the Catholic Nationality and Partition has always been taken as the starting point by the various left wing groups right down to the present day. This conflict was a very typical example of a struggle for self-determination on the part of a national bourgeoisie against the ruling class of the state in which a national movement arose. In writing the history of the labour movement in Southern Ireland it is necessary to establish the working class position on this question of self-determination, and it will then be possible to judge to what extent the working class in Southern Ireland were "taken in" by this conflict to the detriment of their class interests. (This is to leave aside, so to speak, the straightforward national oppression on the part of the Catholic nationalists.)

People who would agree with this view of Ulster may still regard the conflict with Britain on the part of the Catholic nationality as having been anti-imperialist in the progressive sense, and hold that the working class should have taken the leadership of this struggle, and that this was the way to socialism and communism in Ireland. This position has led to a permanent alliance and/or support between Irish "socialists" and Republicans. And this has resulted in a complete mental paralysis as far as an independent working class outlook is concerned in Southern Irish politics. It has been assumed that a national struggle for self-determination is automatically progressive and deserves the support of the working class, and in fact should be carried out by the working class if the national bourgeoisie are not up to the task. This view persists despite a host of great fighters against British imperialism who will go down in history as the most rabid reactionaries of the 20th century like General Grivas, General Amin, De Valera to name but three contemporary specimens.

There were plenty of nationalist forces in Czarist Russia that could have claimed to be fighting imperialism in that they were going to break up the Czarist state and set up independent states. But there is no hint in any of Lenin's writings that this justified any sympathy or support from the working classes' struggle to overthrow Czarism. His whole problem is to avoid at all costs any "contamination" of the workers' struggle for socialism with the efforts of the bourgeois nationalists to achieve their ends, secession and self-determination. They were two quite separate struggles expressing the bourgeois interest and the working class interest. There is no concept of the working class leadership in these national movements, and there is no doubt that he would consider it lunacy if anyone suggested that these movements could lead to, as he turned into, the struggle for socialism. Yet, to listen to the bourgeois left today, all kinds of marvellous things can be done with nationalists and national



movements including the building of socialism. It is enough to make the doctrine of transubstantiation look quite reasonable!

This article consists mainly of quotes from Lenin and Stalin on self-determination, because they are the "classical" Marxists' position on the question of self-determination and they were all written in the post 1913 period which was the critical period in Southern Ireland when the nationalist fervour that led to secession really got going.

It should also be remembered that even though there is a similarity between the situation in Britain and Ireland and in Russia at the time, insofar as the basic question was self-determination, there is a big contrast as well. Czar Nicholas had no truck with liberal nonsense like rights of nations to self-determination, Home Rule Bills etc. Nationalists there had plenty to moan about and Czarist Russia was known as the prison house of nations. The U.K. could be considered a luxury hotel compared to it.

### THE RIGHT TO SECESSION AND SECESSION

Lenin and Stalin always made it clear that there was a big difference between supporting the right to self-determination, which always meant the right to secession in Russia, and supporting secession.

"The right of nations to self-determination (i.e. the constitutional guarantee of an absolutely free and democratic method of deciding the question of secession) must under no circumstances be confused with the expediency of a given nation's secession. The S.D.P. must decide the latter question exclusively on its merits in each particular case in conformity with the interests of social development as a whole and with the interests of the proletarian class struggle for socialism" (Lenin Collected Works, V.19 p. 429)

"The right of nations freely to secede must not be confused with the advisability of secession by a given nation at a given moment. The party of the proletariat must decide the latter question quite independently in each particular case, having regard to the interests of social development as a whole and the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat for socialism". (Vol. 24 p.303-4).

"The right of self-determination means that a nation can arrange its life according to its own will. It has the right to arrange its life on the basis of autonomy. It has the right to enter into federal relations with other nations. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal. This, of course, does not mean that Social-Democrats will support every demand of a nation. A nation has the right even to return to the old order of things, but this does not mean that Social-Democracy will subscribe to such a decision if taken by any institution of the said nation. The obligations of Social-Democrats, who defend the interests of the proletariat and the rights of a nation, which consists of various classes, are two different things. In fighting for the right of nations to self-determination, the aim of the Social Democrats is to put an end



to the policy of national oppression, to render it impossible and thereby to remove its grounds of hostility between nations, to take the edge off that hostility and reduce it to a minimum. This is what essentially distinguishes the policy of the class-conscious proletariat from the policy of its bourgeoisie, which attempts to aggravate the national struggle and to prolong and sharpen the national movement. And this is why the class-conscious proletariat cannot rally under the "national" flag of the bourgeoisie." (Stalin 1913 p.19)

"The question of the right of nations freely to secede must not be confused with the question that a nation must necessarily secede at any given moment. This latter question must be settled by the party of the proletariat in each particular case independently, according to circumstances. When we recognise the right of oppressed peoples to secede the right to determine their political destiny, we do not thereby settle the question of whether particular nations should secede from the Russian State at the given moment. I may recognise the right of a nation to secede, but that does not mean that I compel it to secede. A people has a right to secede but it may or may not exercise that right, according to circumstances. Thus we are at liberty to agitate for or against secession, according to the interests of the proletariat, of the proletarian revolution. Hence, the question of secession must be determined in each particular case independently, in accordance with existing circumstances, and for this reason the question of the recognition of the right to secession must not be confused with the expediency of secession in any given circumstances. For instance, I personally would be opposed to the secession of Transcaucasia, bearing in mind the general level of development in Transcaucasia and in Russia, the condition of the struggle of the proletariat and so forth. But if, nevertheless the peoples of Transcaucasia were to demand secession, they would, of course, secede, and would not encounter opposition on our part." (Stalin April 29, 1917, p.64)

Lenin often compared his position of being for the right to self-determination to being for the right to divorce. But being for the right of divorce is not the same as being for divorce. The former is a method of sorting out problems in a family and establishing it on better basis, a democratic basis, whereas the latter would imply breaking up families or going around advocating that. The same goes for self-determination of nations. In the course of dealing with a Mr. Semkovsky Lenin says:

".....we are duty bound not "to vote for secession", as the wily Mr. Semkovsky assumes, but to vote for the right of the seceding region to decide the question itself. It would seem that even with Mr. Semkovsky's mental abilities it is not difficult to deduce that "the right to divorce" does not require that one should vote for divorce! But such is the fate of those who criticise clause 9 - they forget the ABC of logic..... The recognition of the right to self-determination is, Mr. Semkovsky assures us, "playing into the hands of the most thorough-faced bourgeois nationalism." This is childish nonsense since the recognition of the right does not exclude either propaganda and agitation against separation as the exposure of bourgeois nationalism. But it is



absolutely indisputable that the denial of the right to secede is "playing into the hands" of the most thorough-faced reactionary Great Russian nationalism. (Collected Works V.19 p.543-4)

Stalin, in the course of dealing with the conclusion reached by the Conference of the Liquidation held in Vienna in August 1912, made the following comparison. The main organiser of this conference was the redoubtable Mr. Trotsky and it reached the conclusion that "the right of every nationality to self-determination is not contrary to the precise meaning" of the programme of the S.D.P.

"The rights of nations and "the precise meaning" of the programme of the S.D.P. are not one and the same thing. Evidently, there are demands which, while they are not contrary to the rights of nations, may yet be contrary to "the precise meaning" of the programme. For example, the Programme of the Social Democrats contains a clause on freedom of religion. According to this clause any group of persons have the right to profess any religion they please: Catholicism, the religion of the Orthodox Church, and so forth. The Social Democrats will combat all forms of religious oppression, be it persecution of members of the Orthodox Church, Catholics, or Protestants. Does this mean that Catholicism, Protestantism, etc. "are not contrary to the precise meaning" of the programme? No, it does not. Social-Democrats will always protest against persecution of Catholics and Protestants, they will always defend the right of nations to profess any religion they please; but at the same time, on the basis of a correct understanding of the interests of the proletariat, they will carry an agitation against Catholicism, Protestantism and the religion of the Orthodox Church in order to secure the triumph of the socialist world conception. And they will do so just because there is no doubt that Protestantism, Catholicism, the religion of the Orthodox Church, etc. are "contrary to the precise meaning" of the programme, i.e. the correctly understood interests of the proletariat. The same must be said of self-determination. Nations have the right to arrange their affairs as they please; they have the right to preserve any of their national institutions whether beneficent or pernicious - nobody can (nobody has the right to!) forcibly interfere in the life of a nation. But that does not mean that Social Democrats will not combat and agitate against the pernicious institutions of nations and against the inexpedient demands of nations. On the contrary, it is the duty of Social Democrats to conduct such agitation and to endeavour to influence the will of nations so that the nations may arrange their affairs in the way that will best suit the interests of the proletariat. For this reason Social Democrats, while fighting for the right of nations to self-determination will at the same time agitate, for instance, against the secession of the Tatars, or against national cultural autonomy for the Caucasian nations, for both, while not contrary to the rights of these nations, are contrary "to the precise meaning" of the programme, i.e. to the interests of the Caucasian proletariat. Evidently, "the rights of nations" and the "precise meaning" of the programme are in two entirely different planes. Whereon the "precise meaning" of the programme expresses the interests of the proletariat, as scientifically formulated in the programme of the latter, the rights of nations may express the interests of any class - bourgeoisie, aristocracy, clergy, etc. - depending on the strength and influence of these classes.



The former set forth the duties of Marxists, the latter the rights of nations which are made up of various clauses. The rights of nations and the principles of Social Democracy may or may not be "contrary" to each other, just as, say, the pyramid of Cheops may or may not be contrary to the famous conference of the Liquidators. They are, simply, not comparable. But from this, it follows that the esteemed conference unpardonably muddled two entirely different things. The result obtained was not a solution of the national problem but an absurdity, according to which the rights of nations and the principles of Social Democracy "are not contrary" to each other, and, consequently, every demand of a nation may be made compatible with the interests of the proletariat, consequently no demand of a nation which is striving for self-determination will be "contrary to the precise meaning" of the programme. Logic is shown no mercy....." (Stalin 1913 p.52 - 4)

"It should be borne in mind that besides the right of nations to self-determination there is also the right of the working class to consolidate its power and to this latter right the right of self-determination is subordinate. There are occasions when the right of self-determination conflicts with the other, the higher right - the right of a working class that has assumed power to consolidate its power. In such cases - this must be said bluntly - the right to self-determination cannot and must not serve as an obstacle to the exercise by the working class of its right to dictatorship. The former must give way to the latter. That, for instance, was the case in 1920, when in order to defend the power of the working class we were obliged to march on Warsaw. It must therefore not be forgotten when handing out all sorts of promises to the nationalists when bowing and scraping before the representatives of nationalities, as certain comrades at the present congress did, it must be borne in mind that the sphere of action of the national question, its competence, so to speak, are in view of our external and internal situation, confined within the sphere of action and competence of the "labour question" as the fundamental question". (Stalin April 23, 1923 p. 168 - 9).

As was to be expected Lenin and the Bolsheviki were criticised for making this differentiation between being for the right to secession but not recommending secession. A certain P. Kievsky was to the fore in this.

"Mr. Kievsky has given no thought to the fact that a "socialist society" will wish to 'get out of the colonies' only in the sense of granting them the free right to secede, but definitely not in the sense of recommending secession. And for this differentiation between the right to secede, P. Kievsky condemns us as "jugglers" and to "scientifically substantiate" that verdict in the eyes of the workers, he writes:-

'What is a worker to think when he asks a propagandist how the proletariat should regard samostiinost (political independence for the Ukraine) and gets this answer: socialists are working for the right to secede, but their propaganda is against secession?'

I believe that I can give a fairly accurate reply to that question, namely; every sensible worker will think that Kievsky is not capable of thinking.



Every sensible worker will "think": here we have P. Kievsky telling us workers to shout 'get out of the colonies'. In other words, we Great Russian workers must demand from our government that it get out of Mongolia, Turkestan, Persia; English workers must demand that the English Government get out of Egypt, India, Persia, etc. But does that mean that we proletarians wish to separate ourselves from the Egyptian workers and fellahs, from the Mongolian, Turkestan or Indian workers and peasants? Does it mean that we advise the labouring masses of the colonies to 'separate' from the class-consciousness European proletariat? Nothing of the kind. Now, as always, we stand and continue to stand for the closest association and merging of the class-conscious workers of the advanced countries with the workers, peasants and slaves of all the oppressed countries. We have always advised and shall continue to advise all the oppressed classes in all the oppressed countries, the colonies included, not to separate from us, but to form the closest possible ties and merge with us. We demand from our government that they quit the colonies, or to put it in precise political terms rather than in agitational outcries - that they grant the colonies full freedom of secession, the genuine right to self-determination, and we ourselves are sure to implement this right, and grant this freedom as soon as we capture power. We demand this from existing governments, and will do this when we are the government not in order to 'recommend' secession but, on the contrary, in order to facilitate and accelerate the democratic association and merging of nations. We shall exert every effort to foster association and merger with the Mongolians, Persians, Indians, Egyptians. We believe that it is our duty and in our interest to do this, for otherwise socialism in Europe will not be secure. We shall endeavour to render these nations, more backward and oppressed than we are, 'disinterested cultural assistance', to borrow the happy expression of the Polish Social-Democrats. In other words we will help them pass to the use of machinery, to the lightening of labour, to democracy, to socialism. If we demand freedom of secession for the Mongolians, Persians, Egyptians and all other oppressed and unequal nations without exception, we do so not because we favour secession, but only because we stand for free, voluntary association and merging as distinct from forcible association. That is the only reason!" (Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 23, p.66-7)

### THE "DUAL" POLICY

It can be seen from the above that the Marxist attitude towards a case of secession is not a simple one of for or against. It all depends on the circumstances and how it effects the development of the working class in the nations concerned. When cases of secession arose as a result of the strength of the national movements, Lenin advocated what was called a "dual" policy, which was essentially that Communists and the working class in the oppressor nation should emphasise in their propaganda the oppressed nation's right to secede while communists and the working class in the oppressed nation should emphasise the benefits of remaining integrated with the oppressor nation.

"The way to the common goal - complete equality, the closest associa-



tion and the eventual amalgamation of all nations - obviously runs along different routes in each concrete case, as let us say, the way to a point in the centre of this page runs left from one edge and right from the opposite edge.....In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and their fighting for it. Without this, there can be no internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every social democrat of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as a scoundrel and an imperialist. This is an absolute demand, even where the chance of secession being possible and 'practicable' before the introduction of socialism is only one in a thousand. It is our duty to teach the workers to be 'indifferent' to national distinctions. There is no doubt about that. But it must not be the indifference of the annexationists. A member of an oppressor nation must be 'indifferent' to whether small nations belong to his state or to a neighbouring state, or to themselves, according to where their sympathies lie: without such 'indifference' he is not a Social Democrat. To be an international Social Democrat one must not think only of one's own nation, but place above it the interests of all nations, their common liberty and equality. Everyone accepts this in 'theory' but displays an annexationist indifference in practice. There is the root of the evil. On the other hand a Social Democrat from a small nation must emphasise in his agitation the second word of our general formula: "voluntary integration" of nations. He may, without failing in his duties as an internationalist, be in favour of both the political independence of his nation and its integration with the neighbouring state of X, Y, Z, etc. But in all cases, he must fight against small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation. Consider the whole and the general, subordinate the particular to the general interest. People who have not gone into the question thoroughly think that it is 'contradictory' for the Social Democrats of oppressor nations to insist on the 'freedom to secede', while Social Democrats of oppressed nations insist on the 'freedom to integrate', However, a little reflection will show that there is not and cannot be, any other road to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road from the given situation to this goal". (Collected Works, Vol 22, p.346-7)

"It is for that right (of self-determination - J.L.) and in a struggle to achieve sincere recognition for it, that the Social Democrats of the oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy. On the other hand, the Social Democrats of the oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations; otherwise these Social Democrats will involuntarily become the allies of their own national bourgeoisie, which always betrays the interests of the people and of democracy and is always ready, in its turn, to annex territory and oppress other nations." (Collected Works, Vo. 21, p.409)



"What you have to do is to stress, in Russia, the freedom of secession for oppressed nations and, in Poland, their freedom to unite. Freedom to unite implies freedom to secede. We Russians must emphasise freedom to secede, while the Poles must emphasise freedom to unite." (Collected Works Vol 24, p. 298)

The Polish Social Democrats had opposed the secession of Poland from Russia since the 1890's. Lenin had nothing but praise for them for taking this line which showed how independent they were of Polish nationalism, i.e. of their own bourgeoisie. Sometimes they erred in the sense that they almost ignored the existence of Russian nationalism but Lenin regarded that as erring on the side of right as far as they were concerned.

"The Polish Social Democrats have rendered a great historical service by creating the first really Marxist, proletarian party in Poland, a country imbued with nationalist aspirations and passions. Yet the service the Polish Social Democrats have rendered is a great one, not because Rosa Luxemburg has talked a lot of nonsense about clause 9 of the Russian Marxists Programme, but despite that sad circumstance. The question of the 'right to self-determination' is of course not so important to the Polish Social Democrats as it is to the Russian. It is quite understandable that in their zeal (sometimes a little excessive, perhaps) to combat the nationalistically blinded petty bourgeoisie of Poland the Polish Social Democrats should overdo things. No Russian Marxist has ever thought of blaming the Polish Social-Democrats for being opposed to the secession of Poland. These Social Democrats err only when, like Rosa Luxemburg, they try to deny the necessity of including the recognition of the right to self-determination in the Programme of the Russian Marxists." (C.W., V. 20, p.430)

It will be seen from the above, and from the rest of Lenin's writings on the national question, that the relationship between Poland and Russia is the most oft used example. This is very significant because it has a close parallel between Southern Ireland and Britain at the same period. In fact, in 1913 Lenin had described Ireland as "something of a British Poland". Therefore his position on Poland is a good guideline on what the correct Marxist position should have been in Southern Ireland at that time towards the question of secession from Britain.

Jack Lane.



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