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**COMMUNISM  
IN IRELAND**

**BRITISH & IRISH  
COMMUNIST  
ORGANISATION**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of Ireland has consistently placed itself in a rearguard position, fighting at every stage of the development of Irish society to prevent the society from abandoning ideals which it was outgrowing. The outgrowing of these ideals is regularly decried as *betrayal* and *sell-out*. The effect of this ideology has been to shackle the small section of the Irish working class that fell under communist influence to the reactionary and unrealisable ideals of national self-sufficiency, 'national' unification and defence of the small producer. Basically, however the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) has been powerless to retard social development. Realising its impotence the CPI has sought alliances in strange quarters. These have included the republican movement and the most reactionary sections of the Catholic Church.

Cornelius Lucey, bishop of Cork, was lavishly praised for his staunch defence of the small farmer as backbone of the country and the church. But Lucey felt no need of the CPI and ignored the delights of Christian-Marxist dialogue. Main stream republicanism remained equally oblivious to the prospects of communist support. Representative republicans were more likely than not to be actively hostile to communism.

But even Job was rewarded for his patience and eventually the CPI too received its reward. The disasters of the '56-'61 border campaign and the growing antipathy of Southern society found Republicanism in a weak enough state to be susceptible to CPI influence. Though this influence helped to tide republicanism over the difficult years of the '60s, it was unable to survive the re-emergence of republicanism as a real social and political force. The Provisional-Official split saw mainstream republicanism again go its own way leaving only a remnant under CPI influence - though a remnant far more substantial than any previously influenced by the CPI. Even this section is now in danger of defecting from the path marked out by the CPI and the CPI is fighting tooth and nail to prevent the defection.

Unlike the CPI, the British and Irish Communist Organisation (B&ICO) has never made any attempts to

infiltrate the republican movement and has always been politically hostile to republicans of every hue. However, its attempts at dealing realistically with contemporary politics and at outlining the real history of the Irish national conflict have had the effect of detaching many honest republicans from republicanism. It seems that they have also had an effect on a faction within the Official Sinn Fein leadership largely uncontaminated with political honesty. This faction has realised the untenability of traditional republican beliefs in present day Irish society, even with the 'left' veneer provided by the CPI. To give some semblance of political content to the organisational shell that they lead they have attempted in The Irish Industrial Revolution to graft on to their mystified republicanism a very flamboyant and very crude version of the view of Irish history first put forward by the B&ICO in 1969.

Not, mind you, that this leadership faction, who are largely a self-opinionated lot, would ever admit to such a thing; but the CPI from its vantage point in the legion of the rearguard can see clearly that the pass is being sold once again:

*"The document, marking as it does a radical break with republicanism, has been welcomed strongly in the two-nationist camp, particularly by the B&ICO."*  
(Which Way for Socialism, p.1.)

This, of course, is over-reaction, (readers can judge the extent of the "strong welcome" from the reviews in the Irish Communist), but one which is justified in the circumstances. Sim Fein's "Research Section" may well find that they have opened a Pandora's Box and could well find themselves without the bureaucratic capacity to keep the re-examination they have begun within the desired limits. It is to prevent such a possibility that the CPI has taken such a strong stand in opposition to the "new line". To date it appears to have been largely successful in its opposition. The "new-liners" have been unable to honestly answer the very relevant questions put to them by the CPI.

*"The Irish people have a right to know whether or not Sinn Fein favour EEC membership, whether or not they still*

"favour national reunification, whether or not we have meaningful independence in the South."

(Which Way for Socialism, p.6.)

While Sinn Fein appears to be retaining a very general commitment to their economic "plan", the economic "history" which led up to it has for all practical purposes been shelved. Whether this process is complete or not is impossible to say as any debate so far has been limited to various factions within the party hierarchy all of whom assume an inert rank-and-file incapable of comprehending the sort of public debate which the B&ICO, for instance, indulge in. The CPI, however, must be accorded at least a partial victory. In the past it has been singularly unsuccessful in stemming the pragmatism of southern society. That it has gained at least a moral victory against the new line Sinn Feiners is a measure of their political bankruptcy and of the extent to which their flirtation with political realism was a mere craving for a better electoral image. For the CPI, however, victory in this phoney war can be but poor recompense for their failure to prevent the growing rejection by southern society in general of republicanism with all its works, pomps and outmoded ideas.

Distasteful though it may be for CPI supporters experiencing what may well be their first political victory, it is necessary to present a broader historical view of communism in Ireland and of the overall failure of CPI strategy. This pamphlet, (first published as an article in the Irish Communist, May 1975), provides the necessary background against which to judge the CPI in its petty triumphs and its major defeats.

BRITISH AND IRISH  
COMMUNIST ORGANISATION

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COMMUNISM IN IRELAND

The Communist Party of Ireland has recently published an Outline History of itself. The communist movement has always felt that, whatever shortcomings it might have, its understanding of history was beyond compare: historical materialism was the core of Marxism, and only through Marxism was an objective and comprehensive understanding of the history of society possible. It is therefore curious that bourgeois democrats and many vaguely defined categories of socialism (of the kind that are so widely diffused in the British labour movement) make the contrary assumption - that the Communist movement, which is acknowledged to have many strong points, is inherently incapable of coping with real history; and that what it calls history is a constantly shifting mythology about the past which is designed to support the party line at any given moment. The CPI's Outline History certainly lends credence to the bourgeois view.

The B&ICO is ten years old this year. It emerged from a small but vigorous movement of Irish socialists of all sorts and descriptions that occurred in London in the early '60s. This movement had two immediate political sources: the fiasco of the IRA campaign against Ulster, which was launched in 1956 and petered out in 1961; and the shake-up which the Sino-Soviet dispute (1962) gave to a communist movement which had been disorientated by the Khrushchev leadership's attack on Stalin in 1956. And it had a general social base in the movement in Southern Irish society that set in with the bankruptcy of protectionism in the late '50s.

In this conglomeration from which the B&ICO developed, every conceivable variety of anti-capitalist politics was represented: ranging from anarchist to fascist, and including Stalinist, Khrushchevite, social-democrat and Trotskyist - with an eccentric police agent thrown in for good measure.

This strange grouping came about in the following manner: many who had rallied to the Republican cause in

1956 had become disillusioned with Republicanism, (largely because of its ineffectiveness to realise its aims, rather than because of its aims), and on the rebound looked towards communism, (the Republican leadership being in the vanguard of the campaign against communism).

Others had rebelled against Catholic social power in Ireland, (and against Republicanism because it was saturated with Catholicism), and looked to communism because the church had denounced it as atheistic. The people in this category could not have survived in Southern Ireland as it then was, and had therefore passed out through the national safety valve of emigration. In Britain they had encountered Irish workers of the previous generation who had got involved in the British Communist Party before the 20th Congress, and who had come into conflict with the Party over issues connected with Khrushchevism, and also in connection with the ballot-rigging organised the by CP leadership in the Electrical Trades Union (ETU). (They had tried to force the Party executive to curb the corrupt practices of party members on the union executive, and had thereby made themselves very unpopular with the Party leadership, which was intent on remaining formally ignorant of what was going on. The ballot<sup>rigging</sup> was eventually dealt with by the law courts and the Party influence in the union was destroyed.)

Militant atheism, abstract revolutionism and experience in industrial struggle were thus brought to interact with one another in this political grouping. In terms of organised political groups, particular organisations came and went, accompanied by fierce ideological disputes, (from which relief was often found by brawling), without breaking up the broader political conglomerate.

The stimulus to more positive political development was provided by the public dispute which broke out between the Russian and Chinese parties. It had been widely known for many years that there were great differences on fundamental questions, but a formal facade of unity had been maintained by means of ambiguous and obscurantist formulations. But when the dispute became public it was felt that it would

necessarily lead to a great clarification of basic issues, and would stir the communist movement out of the doldrums in which it was stagnating.

In 1963 some brandes of the British CP declared against the equivocation and opportunism of the party bureaucracy, and were expelled. They formed themselves into the *Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity*, (CDRCU), and called on all who supported revolutionary Communism to rally around. The aforementioned Irish grouping rallied around the CDRCU. The CDRCU was highly suspicious of this strange combination of elements that presented itself. It was attracted by the fact that it was infinitely more working class in composition than the CDRCU itself, but was repelled by the habit which these otherwise excellent proletarians had of speculating freely about all things under the sun. So, as a compromise, it shunted them into an Irish front organisation, which would operate under the hegemony of the CDRCU, and whose members could be called upon as the occasion arose to provide a militant proletarian aspect to the CDRCU, but for whose sayings the CDRCU did not have to take full responsibility.

While the CDRCU ran out of steam within a year, its Irish front organisation survived, and from it derive the B&ICO and various sects of Irish Trotskyism. It split on these lines in 1965.

It is a remarkable fact that an account of the development of the B&ICO and of the various trotskyist groups in Ireland could be written without one mention of the Communist Party of Ireland, (or of the two parties, divided by the partition, which wit was in those days: the Irish Workers' Party and the Communist Party of Northern Ireland). In Britain, the trotskyist and *New Left* groups all derive from conflicts within the CPGB, and all bear distinctive birthmarks signifying their origin. But the B&ICO does not derive at all from the CPI, and only very marginally from the "*Connolly Association*", (a front organisation of the CPGB). These bodies have sometimes dismissively referred to it as a "*splinter group*" from themselves. But their claim to parentage is totally groundless. It would be more accurate

to see the B&ICO as a wayward offspring of the wind and the sea than as a splinter group of the CPI. It was a new development out of Irish society, influenced in a purely cultural way, (that is, without organisational connection), by the dispute between the Russian and Chinese CPs, but uninfluenced by the remnant of the local Communist organisation set up in the thirties.

There is a line of social-democratic criticism of the Communist International which, while by-and-large supporting the Bolshevik revolution as an internal development in Russian society, holds that it distorted the development of working class politics in the more developed capitalist countries by forcing the development of Communist Parties in them through active organisational interference. (Such, in fact, was the basis of Rosa Luxembourg's opposition to the formation of the Comintern in 1918). The argument runs that the parties formed under the immediate impact of the Bolshevik revolution, and directly organised by the EC of the Comintern, were premature, were not viable political formations, and would always remain dependent for their politics on the Comintern Executive - which meant the Russian party, since it was the only party in the Comintern that was fully operational in a real political situation. And the Comintern Executive no matter how able it was, no matter how adequately its general line reflected general circumstances, could not give concrete political leadership to parties in a couple of dozen different societies. The local parties were therefore left repeating dogmas, and exercising fragmented agitational organisation skills, learned from Moscow, without being able to cope with the live politics of the societies in which they operated. The working class movement was therefore weakened by the forced division between social democrat and communist while the communist tendency was still incapable of effectively struggling for power.

That argument must be gone into more thoroughly another time. It is sufficient here to recognise that there is an element of truth in it, and that that element of truth is very relevant to the case in question - the CPI. Lenin forced the establishment of the Comintern in the expectation of an immediate and general revolutionary turmoil in

Europe which would reduce the political differences between the various national situations to matters of secondary importance in practical politics. The Comintern was conceived of as an international, or at least a European Communist Party to lead a general European revolutionary struggle. If the general European revolutionary situation had occurred the Comintern may or may not have been able to cope with it: there was, in any case, nothing else on the horizon which had the remotest possibility of coping with it. But the general breakdown of the capitalist order in Europe did not occur at the end of the war. Within a couple of years it became clear that capitalism was in for another innings - and there were more states in Europe than there had been in 1914, with a complex political situation in each of them. Stalin recognised that in such circumstances the Comintern could not operate as originally conceived, and that it would have to be a much looser federation of parties than was assumed at its foundation.

But the independence of a political party is not something that can be accorded to it from outside itself, or established by constitutional forms. Nor, for that matter, can political independence be withheld by constitutional forms. The Bolsheviks became an independent political body in fact almost ten years before they became so in form. And other political bodies have remained in conditions of dependence while being formally independent. This has been the case with the Communist parties in Britain and Ireland. They have always been dogmatic, sectarian, and dependent on Moscow: and the less adequate Moscow's politics became to their circumstances, the more pronounced these characteristics became.

The foregoing statement should be understood as an observation rather than as a denunciation. Dogmatism, sectarianism, and unquestioning dependence on Moscow may in certain circumstances be the only conditions in which a body of Communists can exist. In Russia a working class party took state power and governed a society through a period of spectacular industrial, cultural and military achievement. Under the direct and immediate influence of the

Russian revolution, and under the organising influence of the Bolshevik party, groups of workers in a great many countries declared themselves to be communists and organised communist parties. For such parties the Bolshevik revolution and the Soviet state were the only dependable realities.

### FOREIGN GOODS

James Connolly was very concerned to refute the suggestion that Marxism was in any sense a foreign import to Ireland, and the CPI has had the same concern. Hence the attempt to find Irish antecedents for Marxism in the Fenian movement, or Young Ireland, or the United Irishmen, or even in the resistance of Gaelic society to the development of civilisation since the time of the Roman Empire. These attempts to ground Marxism in Irish social history led to absurd ideological concoctions, and to a degrading of the essential conceptions of Marxism.

Why was it necessary to resort to such means to refute the suggestions that Marxism was a foreign import? Precisely because in a very real sense it was a foreign import.

Consider the predicament of Connolly. He was certainly among the most advanced Marxists in the British Isles, but in Ireland he was a very isolated figure. Extremes of freakish developments do occur. An individual can develop in response to social conditions existing in some other part of the earth, but which scarcely exist at all in the society in which he lives, with the result that he will be a completely isolated individual. But it is usually the case that individual development reflects a social movement in the society in which the individual lives, so that the complete isolation of the individual does not result.

Connolly did not in fact develop as an individual freak. He was born and bred in Britain, and his political development took place in a situation of advanced class conflict between capital and labour in Britain. On the basis of an attachment to Irish national sentiment he came to Ireland and attempted to operate his socialist politics there. In Britain he may have been more politically advanced than many of his associates but he was not different in kind from them.

In America, too, he could operate as an individual in a movement. But in Ireland there was no movement of the kind in which he developed in Britain and in which he functioned in America. In the Irish Socialist Republican Party (ISRP) he had a small handful of associates, not one of whom he could deal with as a political equal. His own political development did not reflect a development in the society in which he chose to operate.

Marxism, in the person of James Connolly, came to Ireland from overseas in a very literal sense, and as a result it encountered a very profound kind of political isolation. Connolly remained isolated politically until he merged into the Catholic nationalist movement after 1914. In his efforts to break down his isolation he developed what must strictly speaking be called a mythology about the antecedents of Marxism in Irish history. This mythology helped to retard the development of coherent class politics when his writings became an influence on the fringe of the nationalist movement after his death.

Connolly was an enterprising Marxist politician in a situation in which there was no Marxist movement. When a Marxist movement did develop it inherited the political confusion that Connolly had developed, but not his spirit of political enterprise, and its political conceptions were utterly dogmatic. The last thing that Connolly was, was a dogmatist. He was perhaps a right-wing opportunist - indicating that he had a strong bent towards functional politics.

### THE FIRST FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION OF THE CPI

The Communist Party was formed out of the defunct Socialist Party in 1921 and was dissolved by the Comintern in 1924 on the simple grounds that it was not capable of existing. Larkin, (whose development, like Connolly's resulted from the class struggle in Britain), returned to Ireland in 1923. He had been in America since 1914 and had taken part in the formation of the American CP. The Comintern suggested that the members of the dissolved CPI

should join Larkin's "*Irish Worker*" League. But Larkin allowed very little existence to the IWL. He regarded himself as the only real force in working class politics in Ireland, and treated the IWL as an instrument to serve him when he needed it and to stay quiet when he didn't. During the twenties Larkin was regarded by the Comintern as being representative of whatever potential for a Communist movement existed in Ireland, and he was given a place on the Comintern Executive. (His flamboyant statement that he had become one of the twenty five rulers of the earth is quoted, in a distinct tone of disapproval, in the CPI's Outline History. The statement, or course, was extravagantly unrealistic, but it was not completely out of joint with the spirit of the time, and it indicated a certain robust spirit of enterprise which has been entirely absent from the CPI for the last forty years.)

#### THE SECOND FORMATION AND DISSOLUTION OF THE CPI

In 1928 twelve members of the IWL were selected for a long course of political training at the Lenin School in Moscow. According to the Outline, only four of them completed the course. They returned in 1930 as the cadre force around which a new CP was to be built. The preparatory work for the formation of the party was done over two years, through the formation of Revolutionary Workers' Groups in many parts of the country, and the publication of a substantial weekly newspaper, the Irish Workers' Voice. These were years of political turmoil in the South. They were the years when Fianna Fail was bidding for power against the Cosgrave, or Free State, government.

The coming to power of Fianna Fail in 1932 was, in a certain sense, a revolutionary event. Though it did not involve a change in the social system it did bring a new class to power in that system. 1932 saw the coming to power of what Lenin referred to as "*the last capitalist class*" - though they are often quaintly referred to by nationalist socialists as "*the men of no property*" - the peasants who had evolved into farmers. When the Belfast cotton capitalist, Henry Joy McCracken, made his celebrated remark in 1798

about relying on the men of no property to carry through the revolution, the catholic peasantry were a rack-rented tenantry made socially helpless by their Gaelic heritage. In the course of the 19th century they overcame that heritage, developed into a cohesive class, made the landlords redundant, emerged in the 1920s as the predominant social power in the South and in 1932 assumed direct government control. The social evolution which McCracken and his associates tried to precipitate in the 1790s came to fruition a century and a half later. The earlier capitalist developments in the South had been based on the landlord class, or on the commercial/professional class. The final development of capitalism had a sounder basis among the "*men of no property*".

McCracken would have been profoundly satisfied by this development, (insofar as property relations were concerned). But what had it to do with socialism? It brought the pre-capitalist reserves of the countryside into the mainstream of capitalist development, and thereby created the conditions in which a capitalist/labour conflict would in the future emerge as the central social conflict. That is all that it had to do with socialism.

The CPI was launched at the moment when the bourgeois revolution was reaching its culmination: when the last, the most influential, and the most socially powerful form of bourgeois property was achieving political dominance. The cadre force of the party had been carefully trained in Moscow, and intelligent preparations had been made for the launching of the party. It was launched early in 1933. Eight years later it dissolved itself in the South. For a second time it proved to be incapable of mere survival. Its most prominent leaders had deserted it - James Larkin junior, (Larkin's son), the leading graduate of the Lenin school retreated to trade union affairs and gravitated towards social democracy (if the Irish Labour Party can be dignified by that title); Roddy Connolly, (Connolly's son), joined the Labour Party and is still active in it; Brian O'Neill, editor of the Irish Workers' Voice, went into the service of De Valera's press empire; Michael McInerney, the main



propagandist of the party, found rich pasture in the Irish Times - a would-be liberal remnant of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy.

### IS IT EASY TO CHANGE SIDES?

The Outline comments: "*The skill, training and education offered by the CPI for advancing the working class was and is an easy asset to divert into serving the ruling class, given, of course, a certain amount of time to allow for the elasticity of the troubled conscience.*" (p.3). That, in fact, is an accurate observation insofar as it concerns the CPI. But it is not the case that Communist political understanding and skill effectively developed within a concrete political situation is an easy asset to divert into the service of the bourgeoisie. The leaders of the CPI who went into the service of the bourgeoisie had learned various organising techniques, and very abstract political conceptions that never acquired flesh and blood, never became functional in real political conflict in Irish society.

Marx or Lenin might easily have carved out great careers for themselves in bourgeois politics *instead of* in Communist politics. A flirtation with Communism, or an acquaintance with it in abstract form, would have helped them in such careers. But after they had engaged in real and effective Communist politics it certainly would not have been easy for them to switch over and apply their skills in bourgeois politics.

It might be said that Kautsky sold out to bourgeois politics after a long and effective contribution to working class politics. But it would be more accurate to say that Kautsky failed to develop working class politics effectively during the crisis in German politics after 1914, and that his ineffective politics contributed to the survival of capitalism.

Brian O'Neill and Michael McInerney sold out in a much less complicated sense. They became leading journalists and editors in the press of a vigorous and self-confident

bourgeoisie which wanted no truck whatsoever with socialism of even the most accommodating opportunist variety.

The development of an effective and functional politics of any kind will tend to create among the individuals involved in it skills and reflexes that are quite specific to it, an inertia or momentum that is quite specific to it. Where leading individuals of a particular party find it easy to transfer to, and make successful careers in, the politics of an opposing class, the cause must lie in the character of the politics they are deserting as much as in their own personal characters. The mass desertion of the leaders of the CPI in the late '30s says as much about the nature of the politics in which they had been engaged for ten years as about their personal qualities.

Of the original leaders of the Party, only Sean Murray remained with it through thick and thin: and in the late '30s he left Dublin, which had been the political centre of the Party. The remnant of the Party in the South became a dogmatic sect of an esoteric kind. On the entry of the Soviet Union into the war it was formally dissolved as a party.

### A HEN SITTING ON GLUGGERS

To say that the CPI remnant became a dogmatic sect is not necessarily to condemn it. It may well be that, in certain circumstances, a particular world view may only be capable of being preserved in dogmatic form by a sect of initiates which does not attempt to engage in political activity. It is probable that communist politics was not viable in Southern Ireland in the situation immediately resulting from the rise to general social and political dominance of the former "*men of no property*". If that was so, then the germ of communist politics could only be preserved in dogmatic form by a fairly close sect of initiates. In time the general development of capitalism resulting from the success of the land war would give rise to a new class conflict between capital and labour, and then the sect could open out and forge its dogmas into politics.

The trouble was that this particular sect was preserving a false dogma. It did preserve the most abstract conceptions of Marxism in dogmatic form, but it also preserved

in dogmatic form an essentially false conception of the society in which it existed, and an essentially false political strategy.

The Outline quotes Sean Murray's speech introducing the Party Manifesto to the inaugural conference in 1933: "*The national struggle is the prime question with which we are faced in Ireland...The communists alone can really solve the partition question.*" And that idea is what doomed the sect to political sterility, when circumstances developed in which it might have exercised a very progressive and extensive political influence.

It had been made a sect by the successful accomplishment of a deeply rooted bourgeois revolution: and it castrated itself by including within its dogmas, as its guiding strategic principle, the idealistic conceptions of a fringe of the bourgeois revolution.

The substance of the bourgeois revolution of the "*men of no property*" was accomplished by the coming to power of Fianna Fail. The bulk of the society was content with the Fianna Fail achievement. A fringe group treasured the fantasy element in the movement, (and no revolutionary movement is without its fantasy element), above the substantial achievement of the movement; and the weak incipient communist movement identified itself with this fringe, and declared the fantasy of the bourgeois nationalist movement to be the starting point of the socialist movement. Therefore, when a state of affairs developed in which the Marxist sect could begin to broaden its activities and aspire to exercise a widespread political influence, what happened was that, through its combination of Marxist dogma with extreme nationalist fantasy, it became a conservative influence prolonging the after effects of the bourgeois nationalist revolution. Instead of being the cultural and political vanguard of the working class in developing comprehensive class conflict within the nation, it was a tail-end of nationalism inhibiting comprehensive class differentiation and helping to divert potential socialist militancy into the lost causes of nationalism.

## A CRUTCH FOR SINN FEIN

By 1960 the old nationalism had reached the end of its tether, and the situation was ripe for scotching the remnant of it, and developing a socialist movement as the focal point of all popular militancy. But what the CPI remnant in the South did, in an effort to break out of its sectarian isolation, was to offer a new lease of life to the discouraged remnant of Republicanism by combining nationalism and socialism. And so the new world was prostituted to the old. Decaying nationalist passions were kept alive by a flirtation with socialism. Republicanism survived through the sixties and made good use of the political crisis of 1968/9 to launch another war in the North.

Of course the CPI deplored the actions of the Provisionals. But on the basis of the old political passions which the CPI had helped to preserve, what other kind of action was possible? When the Republican movement was in the doldrums, the variant introduced by the CPI enabled it to survive; but when a political situation occurred in which something might be done to realise Republican aims that variant was discarded and basic Republicanism, (i.e., the physical force cult), reasserted itself.

The CPI helped to keep Republicanism alive to fight another day - and then condemned it for fighting. And while condemning it, it kept on working up those same old nationalist passions which can only find satisfactory practical expression in the use of physical force to demoralise the Protestant working class and make it amenable to anti-partitionist suggestion.

Having helped keep Republicanism alive when it should have died a natural death, the CPI could not offer it new tactics, which had any practical prospect of success, to give implementation to the new ideological variant which it introduced. The tactical variant introduced by the CPI chiefly involved the manipulation of unrepresentative trade union committees to create the illusion that the Protestant workers were becoming amenable to anti-British and anti-Partitionist ideas. One did not need to have great political

acumen to realise that this tactic offered no long term prospect of success. It would be successful only as long as it went on behind the backs of the mass of the workers and was not operative in the society at large. At a certain point it would inevitably come into collision with the mass of the workers and be negated.

As things actually happened, the CPI helped to cause a certain amount of confusion and civil commotion, which would have been resolved in 1970 by democratic reforms that would have strengthened the Union, if traditional Republicanism had not asserted itself at that point to launch a terrorist campaign. It has been the physical force campaign pure and simple that has kept nationalism alive since 1970. And the CPI, while deploring the terrorism, has in practice dovetailed its constitutional agitation into the physical force campaign in the traditional manner set by Parnell and openly recommended by Connolly.

#### THE CPI AND THE CHURCH

Nationalist anti-partitionism, Gaelic revivalism and economic protectionism - not only lost causes, but reactionary causes - those have been the means by which the CPI sought to ground itself in Irish life. Communism, as conceived of and practiced by Marx and Lenin, was a vanguard force in the splitting of the nation into classes, in developing the most advanced and democratic secular consciousness in the working class, in helping the working class to understand and overcome the social forces opposed to it, in forcing secular democratic reform in the working class interest, and finally in bringing the working class to general social dominance. The aim of communism as conceived by the CPI has been to preserve national unity, and has attempted to divert working class militancy against an external, a "foreign" enemy. And the CPI has aspired to do this in a situation in which nationalism has exhausted its progressive potential, and has achieved everything that was achievable in its programme.

In 1921 Southern Ireland threw off the shackles of a Crown that had been stripped by internal British developments of all executive power, and of British lords temporal who survived at the mercy of the Commons. Republicanism has been historically an expression of popular secular opposition to the monarchy and aristocracy, and there have always been a few hardworking ideologues in Irish "Republicanism" who tried to depict it as a struggle against aristocratic privilege. Well, "Republican" Ireland did cast off in 1921 the few formal remnants of the power of the lords temporal - and it immediately prostrated itself before a powerful caste of lords spiritual.

The Catholic Church has exercised a general hegemony over the development of Southern Ireland since its emergence from the Gaelic world in the early 19th century. Catholic social power has been the most substantial force behind the national separatist movement against Britain. The success of the national revolution brought that Church to absolute power in Southern society. The forward thrust of Catholic social power and nationalism was able to neutralise every other tendency in the society until the 1950s. Until the 1950s Catholic nationalist society was being constructed. Having been constructed, and being in fact a part of the modern European world - even though a strange part - it was inevitable that a tendency towards general social class differentiation would set in. Here and there, in the depths of Catholic nationalist society, the seeds of an alien ideology sprouted. Individuals began to grope towards the democratic secular conception of society which is the starting point of socialism. Now, the most immediate, and most powerful, obstacle that such people encountered was certainly not "British imperialism": it was the Catholic church.

British institutions had been rooted out of the society a generation before they were born. They had never known anything but rule in the native manner. And their impulses towards secular democratic ideas were checked by a thoroughly native spiritual police force, whose tentacles were more far-reaching than those of the RIC had ever been and which was not subject to any representative institution to which appeal could be made against its activities.

If the CPI remnant in the South, (which became known as the Irish Workers' League in the late forties), had around about 1960 launched a campaign for the secularisation of Irish social life, it would have made a major contribution to social progress. Secularist sprouts were springing up in the most unlikely places to challenge the clerical dictatorship, and for the most part were being crushed by that dictatorship, or being forced on to the ferry to England. They were crushed so easily because they were isolated and un-co-ordinated.

A few of the early shoots survived, and as time passed increasing numbers learned to survive. But this increasing survival rate owed nothing to the CPI, (or Irish Workers' League - IWL), which might have been a co-ordinating centre but chose not to be. As late as the mid-sixties the General Secretary of the Southern remnant of the old CPI (which was then calling itself the Irish Workers' Party), who is now the general secretary of the re-formed CPI, told the present writer that his "Party" was not even prepared to sell the Marx/Engels collection On Religion in its bookshop, not to mention campaigning against the social power of the church.

While the first shoots of secular democracy were being crushed by the internal clerical dictatorship, which was the dominant force in the nation, the CPI was sticking to its old programme of developing national unity against the foreigner - and national unity certainly could not be fostered without being very accommodating towards the most powerful institution in the nation: the Church.

(The extent of CPI accommodation to the Church can be gauged from the comment made in the Irish Socialist a year or two back by one of its leading lights, that it was a sign of the greater humanity of the Catholic church as compared with the Protestant churches that it continued to be a mass church. The contrary is the case. The Catholic Church is an institution for aweing and regimenting the masses and inhibiting their social development. It bases itself upon, and strives to perpetuate, social backwardness. Protestant Churches, by making individual judgement supreme, have

precipitated social development, have helped to make religion socially obsolete, and for that very reason could never be stable institutions made up of hierarchies and regimented masses.

The Catholic Church performed a progressive social function in early medieval Europe by aweing and regimenting the barbarians. It became a reactionary institution about the twelfth century when popular Protestant heresies began to develop against it. It might be said that it gained its base in Irish social life by performing the same function among the people emerging from Gaelic society as it did among the barbarians in medieval times: but it did so in conflict with advanced bourgeois democracy, which was unknown in medieval times.)

#### MORE IRISH THAN THE IRISH THEMSELVES

The CPI has always been anxious to declare how Irish it was. It has been very Irish indeed. It is, as the saying goes, more Irish than the Irish themselves. This is a very understandable thing. A handful of people in a society become attached to a worldview and a political movement which are quite extraneous to that society, and which represent no social force within it. They are forced to become a sect. In order to win tolerance as a sect they declare that certain ideals of the society are sacred to them. They seek to integrate themselves into the society by declaring their adhesion to its most impossible ideals. And they remain more faithful to these ideals than the society itself does. The society goes-a-whoring after strange gods, but this sect remains faithful to Jehovah.

What kept the remnant of the CPI going in the South during the desperate period between the final triumph of popular nationalism in the 1930s and the return of "imperialist" influence in the 1960s? Not its roots in Irish society. It had no roots in Irish society. This was not a case of champions of a popular cause being hounded by state oppression. The populace was indisputably hostile to them. One could argue for ideological purposes, in a

metaphysical sort of way, that the populace did not know its own mind. But the only mind which the populace actually knew was hostile to it.

So, what gave it the will to keep going through those dark ages? The answer is simple: Moscow. The isolated sect in Southern Ireland belonged to a political movement that was doing great things in Russia. The social transformations being brought about by the Communist Party in Russia gave to the Communist sect in Southern Ireland the will to survive. And where there's a will there's a way. It was the stubbornness of this will emanating from Russia, and not any success of the strategy of being more Irish than the Irish, that ensured the survival of the sect.

Because the sect drew its strength from a source external to the society, and because its mere existence was a remarkable act of defiance of the society, it did not experience the evolution of the society. Because it was not representative of any social force within the society it could remain constant to ideals which the society held at a particular moment in the past when the sect was being formed, but which began to be superseded by the actual evolution of the society. For these reasons the sect remained a sect longer than it need have done, and when it finally began to exercise social influence it was influence of a conservative kind. It joined the forces which were tying the society to its past and opposed those which were breaking new ground in social development.

The CPI in the South was, therefore, in many respects a remnant of the days before the national revolution, or before the last act of the national revolution in 1932. It was first formed during the War of Independence. It allied itself with the forces that were discontented with the Treaty. It went into liquidation on the military defeat of the anti-Treaty forces. And it was re-established when the anti-Treaty forces finally assumed power.

In the making of any real revolution there is an element of disorder which the revolutionary forces accept, and there is freedom for all sorts of marginal aspirations to be formed, for eccentricities to present themselves in

grand public proclamations, and for political fragments to fly off at tangents to the main thrust of development while conceiving of themselves as its vanguard. Then, when the revolution has been accomplished, the new order begins to be established: the substantial forces which made the revolution assert themselves against the marginal elements, and they mould the society in their own image.

De Valera, who was the only functional "*Republican*", (that is to say, Catholic-national separatist) politician among the anti-Treatyites, took all of the capable elements and most of the idealists with him in building the most representative political party that Southern Ireland has known: and he knew very well when to tolerate disorder and when to create the new order. (The pure idealists of the national revolution, who could maintain their ideals unsullied because they were politically incapable, might accuse him of betraying the national revolution because of certain things which he failed to achieve. But the wonder is that he achieved so much on such a slender basis. And it would be more appropriate for socialists to be thankful that he did not achieve even more than to attack him for it.)

The CPI, in retrospect, can only be seen as one of the marginal disorders or eccentricities of the national revolutionary period. The appearance of substance was given to it by the intervention of the Comintern. If circumstances had been very different it might have acquired extensive popular support: but circumstances were as they were, and it rapidly became a sect after the new class came to power.

The CPI strategy in the 1930s assumed a state of affairs that did not, in fact, exist in Ireland. It might have been successful if there had been a large class of oppressed and disorganised peasants in the countryside, which the nationalist leadership in the shape of Fianna Fail was afraid to precipitate into social action. In such circumstances it would have been appropriate to attack Fianna Fail for selling the national revolution short in the interests of the established urban middle class. If Young Ireland had turned to Marx for political guidance in the 1840s he might have recommended to them an attitude towards Daniel O'Connell

similar to that adopted by the CPI towards De Valera. But Ireland in the 1930s was a whole social epoch removed from Ireland of the 1840s. The peasants had become farmers, and Fianna Fail was very much their political party, in which they were actively represented from the grass roots to the corridors of power. (How much their party and their revolution it was, is shown by the fact that only now is it being tentatively suggested that the farmers ought to pay income tax like everyone else.)

In Russia after 1905 Lenin conceived the strategy of making the bourgeois revolution primarily a peasants' rebellion, (rather than the taking of political power by the urban bourgeoisie), thereby creating more room for manoeuvre by working class parties. In an effort to prevent such a thing the Tsarist minister Stolypin introduced a programme of economic reform designed to carry through a bourgeois development of agriculture within the existing state. Lenin acknowledged that such a thing was possible, and that if the Stolypin programme were ever substantially realised, then the conditions in which his strategy would be operative would no longer exist.

In Ireland the peasantry, in the sense of a rural community subject to landlordism and not enjoying bourgeois property rights, ceased to exist by the turn of the century. The peasants had become farmers with very definite property rights, and with a world outlook that followed from well defined property rights. The CPI aspired to apply to the bourgeois farmers of Ireland the strategy conceived by Lenin for the Russian peasantry. The result was a fiasco. The "*Workers and Farmers Republic*" was the shibboleth of a sect in Ireland, whereas the "*dictatorship of the peasantry and proletariat*" in Russia was descriptive of a real social movement. And if "*farmers*" in Ireland were changed to "*small farmers*", small farmers were still farmers: and insofar as they could actually be counterposed to the main body of farmers they had little social weight.

CPI strategy based itself on traces of a situation that had ceased to exist. Some small farmers might here

and there respond to echoes of the Land League, but they were not a social lever that could prevent the Fianna Fail revolution from stabilising itself. The "*permanent revolution*" prospect was quite illusory. The coming to power of Fianna Fail was a very substantial culmination of the bourgeois national revolution. It ushered in the rule of the "*last capitalist class*" in Ireland: the one with the deepest roots in the society. The party of this class, Fianna Fail, was the most popular, the most representative, and the most capable political party in the society. There was no real possibility of preventing it from stabilising its rule, (from enforcing the hegemony of its class, and initiating the most profound development of capitalism), by agitating the insubstantial and incapable idealistic fringe of the movement of which it was the substantial and capable core. Fianna Fail directed the idealism of the national movement into realistic politics which carried the mass of the society along with it. Against it, the Republican Congress and the CPI only stood for unrealistic nationalism, for nationalist pie in the sky.

The unrealistic fringe of a nationalist movement which has a substantial political core is the worst possible starting point for working class politics.

All of this is clear in retrospect. It should have been clear to capable Marxist politicians in the 1930s. It was not clear to the CPI in the '30s, and does not seem to have become any clearer to it in the forty years that have passed since then. A social epoch later, the CPI remains faithful to its miscalculations of 1933. The thorough capitalist evolution of the South, within the political stability and the economic protectionist measures ensured by the coming to power of Fianna Fail, led to a process of differentiation within the nation. The national revolution, from being a political programme on which general political unity could be developed (and *was* developed), progressed towards being an accomplished fact, a state of affairs which was taken for granted, and on the basis of which general political and social differentiation began to occur. Class slowly began to supersede nation in the generation of culture and politics. And the general outlook

of the nation as a whole began to undergo a very basic reorientation. In all of these developments the CPI, insofar as it exercised any influence, exercised a *retarding* influence.

Economic protectionism had a relatively slender basis in Ireland. Its full potential was realised in about ten years, but it was prolonged to twenty years by the effects of the world war. When its potential had been exhausted, economic stagnation set in. With its customary hard-headedness, Fianna Fail diagnosed the problem and began to dismantle the tariff wall. The Free Trade Agreement with Britain followed. The CPI denounced the Trade Agreement as national treason. C. Desmond Greaves, (who has been the most influential ideologist of the sect), in an Irish Democrat editorial declared Lemass (who signed the Agreement) to be the greatest traitor to the nation since Dermot MacMurrough, (who invited Henry the Second to be his ally in 1169).

All the stops were pulled out in an effort to use the past ideology of the nation to generate a popular resistance to free trade policies. But the nation refused to let its past be used against its present. For the nation, though not for the sects on the fringe of it, existence took precedence over ideology. Protection had served its purpose, and it was time for other things. Ghosts of the past held up by the CPI and Sinn Fein frightened nobody. And ten years later there came the massive referendum vote in favour of joining the Common Market.

The referendum showed up a very remarkable disconnection between the traditionalist ideologists of nationalism in Sinn Fein, the CPI, and some trotskyist groups, and the nation itself. The CPI showed its customary metaphysical attachment to the old nationalist ideals, while the living, breathing nation itself followed its economic nose into new ways. Over no issue of economic substance has the rattling of old nationalist bones, and the invoking of old taboos, been able to determine popular behaviour. Nevertheless, the CPI remains a conscientious rattler of old bones and invoker of

taboos.

The evolution of the nation gave rise to tendencies within it towards liberal democracy, towards secularism, towards atheism, towards class developments which strained against the whole nationalist ideology: towards all the social pre-requisites for a Marxist socialist movement. Since the CPI was still obsessed with the lost, or illusory, possibilities of 1921/22, or of 1932/33, and was still dreaming of "*another day*" on which those possibilities would be realised, (even though the entire social situation to which they referred had evolved out of existence), it could not function as a vanguard influence helping to develop these new tendencies into a social movement and into a coherent political programme. These new tendencies had to make their own way in the world. They had to discover for themselves the entire modern world. And in doing so they simply *bypassed* the CPI - a piece of the old world, of whose existence they were scarcely aware. The Irish Communist Organisation (ICO) grew directly out of these tendencies.

The ICO was formed in London. The CPI, which was so concerned to prove its Irish credentials, saw this as a fact which could do great damage to the ICO and tried to use it for that purpose. The ICO was never in the slightest bit concerned to prove its Irish credentials, precisely because it *was* a product of the movement of Irish society in a way that the CPI was not.

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