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West Awakes



INTRODUCTION

This short booklet has been produced by the West Belfast Branch of the Communist Party of Ireland. Its content is the result of a series of theoretical seminars in which branch members read papers on important political issues for the CPI. The intention in reproducing the papers is to provoke debate on topics which have been hotly discussed within the branch.

It should be said from the beginning that they do not represent an attempt to set out a political line.

Rather they are discursive critical pieces reflecting the wide ranging concerns of the branch. While they are diverse, they focus nevertheless on the politics of the present crisis in Ireland and on problems in the transition to socialism.

We hope they stimulate and provoke a multiplicity of responses within the Party.

M.Morrissey.

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SECTARIANISM AND CLASS POLITICS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

BY BRIAN ROE

In Ireland, religion is an inescapable factor in the political and social arena. Unlike many developed capitalist countries a significant majority of the Irish people appear to be practising believers. In this paper we are not concerned with religious beliefs as philosophical systems but the relationship between religion and the national question, and in particular how sectarianism came to be used with much effect as a divisive mechanism.

It is necessary then to approach the question historically, dealing especially with the North.

For these purposes the religious history of the country up to the Norman invasion is not particularly significant. Ireland was Christian, conforming more or less to the universal dogmas of the church, but with a unique system of only semi-territorial organisation which meshed with the Gaelic clan system. Before and during the period of Norman influence, the Irish church shifted to the normal territorial 'Roman' organisation characteristic of most of Europe. This corresponded to the process of feudalisation of the class system.

For three centuries after the first Anglo-Norman incursion into Irish affairs in 1169, the traditional semi-feudal Gaelic clan system was unsubdued. Outside the Anglicised area called the Pale, centred on Dublin, those Norman feudal adventurers who had tried to move into the interior, became Gaelicised, spoke Irish and not infrequently married with their English cousins. In spite of many attempts, Ireland did not become a subdued fief of the English Crown, though the feudal character became more marked.

During the period of Absolutist Monarchy during the 16th. Century, however, the power of the Gaelicised lords and the great clan chiefs was challenged and broken by a

by a process of bribe, blackmail, war and execution. Not infrequently the land was ravaged and the people massacred because of the revolt of their lords. But this was not enough. It was desired to bring Ireland into the system of English landlordism and to break once and for all the power of the clan chiefs and the potential for an independent nation that they represented. Areas of land, usually forfeited by rebellious aristocrats, were cleared of their native population, sold to English landlords and settled by some English middle level tenants. But in the South of the country, local harassment drove off the settlers and the old Irish inhabitants of the areas replaced them as tenants to the English landlords. Though Protestantism was now dominant in England, there was no attempt to convert Ireland at this time, although the lands of the Church as in England were confiscated. Indeed the first "Plantations" of settlers took place under the English Catholic Queen Mary.

And there was no popular Protestant Reformation in Ireland. As TA Jackson comments (Ireland Her Own): "All that Ireland saw of the Protestant Reformation was this aspect — of

an excuse for robbing the Church of its treasures and its lands. There was literally nothing in Ireland to correspond to the popular ideological - political movement which on the Continent and in England made the Reformation 'the first general uprising of the European bourgeoisie.' " This is why, for most of Ireland, for most of its history, one could crudely simplify and say that Catholicism was the religion of the people, Protestantism that of their masters.

It is important to realise that over much of Europe the reverse was the case. Roman Catholicism was an ideological system, stressing authority, obedience and hierarchy, which corresponded to the class interests of the feudal aristocracy.

The northerly Province of Ulster had been relatively untouched by plantation. Here the clan system put up its most redoubtable resistance. In 1603 the clan chiefs led by O'Neill were beaten and fled into exile. In 1609 a new sort of plantation was undertaken. Great tracts of land in the North West were cleared and the responsibility of "planting" them given to the great bourgeois Guilds and Companies of London. Hence the renaming of Derry "London-derry." English and Scottish settlers, who were largely Protestant, took up residence as tenants, the first major element of a Protestant population was established. The Cromwellian "Settlement" added more, as did the attractions of commerce in the North East. By 1688 there were 5 Protestant to every 2 Catholics in the province of Ulster.

The Cromwellian subjugation of Ireland, which included an enforced migration of hundreds of thousands of Catholics "to Hell or Connaught", as well as the usual ravaging and massacre, demonstrated the reactionary side of bourgeois revolution.

The English Revolution, the first successful bourgeois one, was historically progressive at home. Once involved in another country, it demonstrated

a ferociously anti-popular side. Even though Ireland had been drawn into the Civil War on the counter-revolutionary side, the Cromwellian "Settlement" involved national aggrandisement and the treating of foreign human beings as simple objects for exploitation. Even the most revolutionary element in the English Revolution, the Levellers, who dominated the rank and file of the Army, were, apart from a few brave protests, forced or tricked into supporting the Irish conquest.

Towards the end of the 17th. Century, Ireland was again dragged into an English conflict and again on the counter-revolutionary side. The Williamite "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 involved deposing the Catholic James II who fled ignominiously from England when William of Orange landed with an army. But his Catholic Lord Lieutenant of Ireland refused to accept William and invited James into Ireland with an army to carry on the struggle there. The fortified Protestant towns of Enniskillen and Derry closed their gates against James' troops. He

The siege of Derry has been taken into Loyalist culture as a symbol of determination and steadfastness against the "Catholic hordes" and has produced its traitor figure in the person of Lundy, the mayor who wished to surrender. Some months later the most famous battle in the Loyalist roll of honour, the Battle

of the Boyne, took place on July 12, 1690, when William of Orange beat James in a fairly minor engagement on the river Boyne.

Interestingly enough the Pope, who happened to be in alliance with William, had a Te Deum sang in Rome in celebration of the battle.

From 1692 a series of Acts were passed by the (exclusively Protestant) Dublin Parliament levelled against Catholics and known as the "Penal Code." These Acts debarred Catholics from the vote and, by exclusion, aimed to prevent Catholics from access to the more privileged social classes. But the Catholic religion was all but banned and it was the poor Catholics who suffered the torture and killing when an illegal priest was found. This period is one explanation of the devoutness of the attachment of the common Irish people to Catholicism and for the absence of any important anti-clerical movement such as existed in other Catholic countries. Far from being in collusion with the landowners and nascent bourgeoisie, the Roman Catholic Church was persecuted by them. Later, however, the Hierarchy made up for this period by the most blatant betrayals of the social and national struggles of the people.

So, over most of the country, the Protestant Ascendancy coincided with the class ascendancy of the great absentee landlords, the bourgeoisie and their host of administrators and hangers-on. However, an element of persecution was directed against Dissenters, people who we would now call Protestants, but who were outside the Established Anglican Church. They were concentrated in the North and made up the majority of non-Catholic small farmers and artisans.

During the 18th. Century there was continuing agrarian struggle by the poor

peasants or tenant farmers against the rack-renting landlords. This mainly took the form of rural terrorism. Obviously in most of the country the rural defence organisations had something of a sectarian aspect, since virtually all of their oppressors were Protestant.

This was also true in the North, but there were Protestant tenants and Protestant anti-landlord organisations. So, in spite of continuing conflict, as Catholic bided against Protestant, as to how much rent they were prepared to pay to get a bit of land, there was some co-operation and even organisational unity between Catholic and Protestant anti-landlord groups.

The Province of Ulster, or at least its Eastern side, started to become something of an industrial centre during this period. The reasons included geographical proximity to Northern England and Scotland, a rather better system of land holding for the tenants leading to the possibility of capital accumulation and, no doubt, the fact that the majority of the population was Protestant. Thus, along with the development of a relatively sophisticated bourgeoisie, there developed the first proletarian elements in Ireland. And at this period the ideas of the French Revolution had a powerful effect on the middle class and intelligentsia, already irked by the trade and political restraints on the whole of Ireland, often affected by discrimination against Dissenters and morally affected by the persecution of Catholics.

In 1791 the Society of United

Irishmen was founded around the principles of an advanced form of bourgeois democracy. The leadership of the Society was made up of lawyers, merchants, professionals, manufacturers and a few progressive gentry. Later, individuals were to represent a distinctive working class element. The leadership was inevitably mainly Protestant, but they forged a class and cross-sectarian alliance with the Catholic peasantry. Between 1792 and 1798 the agrarian agitation continued, gaining greater unity and growing closer in every way to the United Irishmen.

This development was seen as dangerous in the extreme, particularly by those classes that depended on landlordism and the English connection, and who would be severely threatened by an independent bourgeois Ireland, which was becoming the clearer objective of the United Men. The Society stood openly, then, in Wolfe Tone's words: "To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government; to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of our political evils; and to assert the independence of my country — these were my objects. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter — these were my means."

Unity of the people and freedom of the country were ideas and practices that had to be stopped. Utilising some agrarian sectarian squabbling, the "Loyal Orange Order" was formed. This had the gentry and landlords in the leadership, but organised the Protestant peasantry

against their Protestant neighbours. It attacked and broke up agrarian defence organisations. It fostered division and used force and treachery against the organisations of the working people. T.A. Jackson calls it "the first Fascist body known in history."

It still exists and is very strong today.

In 1798 the insurrection planned by the United Irishmen took place. But it was a scattered and disorganised affair and was beaten piecemeal; in spite of large-scale fighting and full battles, in some of which regular British troops were defeated. In the North several heroic actions took place with Protestant and Catholic fighting side by side. It is a poignant reminder of past unity to see the Protestant names of '98 men on the Republican memorial in Belfast's Catholic cemetery.

In 1802 the political sequel to the brutal suppression of the '98 revolt was the Act of Union which abolished the corrupt Dublin Parliament and established the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland."

During the 19th. century the North of Ireland developed disproportionately to the rest of the country. Basing itself first on linen, then on shipbuilding and engineering, the North became the first and only industrialised part of Ireland. Penal laws against Catholics had been abolished, but uprising after uprising occurred against landlordism and British rule. The Great Hunger desolated most of the country, though little affecting the North-East.

But there was no repetition of the unity of 1798. The Dissenters were firmly won over to the side of the Established Church under the leadership of a Presbyterian Minister called

Cooke, who stressed the "common danger" of Catholicism. The industrial proletariat was mainly Protestant, job discrimination and the network of the Orange Order seeing to it that Catholics were kept to the more menial and less organised jobs. The pattern still holds true to a large extent today. In spite of this, the trade union movement developed North and South and sectarianism found relatively little place in it.

AT the end of the 19th. century, the forces for some change in the relationship between Britain and Ireland had become so strong that one section of the British imperial ruling class, represented by the Liberal Party, was prepared to grant Home Rule — a measure of limited autonomy. Bill after Bill was presented to Parliament, only to be defeated by the House of Lords, representing the most reactionary sections of the upper classes. But in 1911 the power of the Lords was broken by the Liberal Government and Home Rule started to look like a real possibility.

But it was frustrated. The Unionist landlords had managed to build up an all - class alliance based on support for the Union with Britain and Protestant sectarianism. Anti - Catholic feeling was whipped up, but apparent class interests were invoked as well. For the landlords, the link with Britain was an assurance of their political influence and an insurance against the "worst excesses" of land reform, which got started in the late 19th, century. For the Protestant bit bourgeoisie, their future was intimately tied up with British imperialism, of whose economy the giant shipyards and engineering works can be seen as an integral part. For the Protestant working class, their bosses told them their jobs were at stake: "There will be grass growing on the shipyards", they said, if

Home Rule goes through. For the small farmers, the neighbours kept them firm. All were cemented by anti - Catholic bigotry and a pathological fear of appearing to be a "traitor", a "Lundy."

An armed "Ulster Volunteer Force" was openly formed and its existence together with the mutiny by senior army officers at the Curragh military camp, refusing to coerce the Unionists, was enough to prevent Home Rule. Coercion of the Unionists would have been well within the power of British imperialism in spite of the UVF and the mutiny. But then, as now the British government was not prepared to take on such a force, Unionism, that would be its last ditch defenders in Ireland.

The First World War intervened and the UVF was taken into the British Army and destroyed virtually en masse as the 36th. Ulster Division fell on the wire at the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916. This date is celebrated as a victory by Unionists in Northern Ireland.

The Rising of 1916 had little effect on the North, though the War of Independence was fought quite fiercely there. In 1920 the Treaty with the national independence forces allowed for partition of the nation. This was a disastrous capitulation by the pro - imperialist elements in the national forces. And while civil war raged in the South, a Northern statelet, containing 6 of the 9 counties of Ulster the largest area that could hope to have a permanent Protestant majority — was set up.

Northern Ireland was to remain

part of the UK. It was, in the words of its first Prime Minister, to have "a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People." It was administered under the shelter of a "Special Powers Act" that was the most draconian piece of legislation that perhaps has ever existed outside of a fascist dictatorship. It continued in force until 1973 when it was replaced by an equally repressive but more "modern sounding" Act. Job discrimination against Catholics was open, unashamed and practised everywhere. The electoral boundaries were "gerrymandered" fixed so as to deny Catholics their legitimate strength in local and provincial government. The institutions of administration were completely in the hands of the all - powerful Unionist Party. James Connolly, said of Partition that it "would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement, and paralyse all advanced movements while it endured." His words were bitterly prophetic, though "advanced movements" have not been completely paralysed!

Partition symbolises and actualised the division in the country. It symbolises the vertical division between Protestant and Catholic and actualises the physical split in the nation. It erected a sectarian and vicious statelet in the North and left the South without a major part of the Irish proletariat and with the social and cultural power of a now largely reactionary Catholic Church unchallenged. It represents the major element in Ireland's unresolved National Question.

So what does this historical review tell us? Firstly the link up between Catholicism and nationalism is a product of a long period of identification, being reinforced every day in the Catholic ghettos of the North.

Secondly the identification of Protestantism with pro - imperialism, with ascendancy,

is, not quite as complete. There is still a tradition of Protestant liberalism, building on those liberating aspects of its theology that have largely been suppressed in general.

Finally these dual identifications are political obstacles for us, they are aspects of sectarianism and the fight against them is a political fight. For example, we may be completely opposed to the use of Catholic ritual at an anti - repression demonstration. But, though a protest might be in order, the way to win people away from this sectarian identification is by winning them politically, not by attacking their religion. Again, the Provisional's often sickening religiousity is a product of their narrow idealist politics and it is they that have to be the targets.

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THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT AND THE POLITICAL PROGRAMME OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND. (M. MORRISSEY.)

In a recent speech James Stewart the Deputy General Secretary of the CPI declared: (1)

Let us be clear that the struggle we are engaged in is a power struggle — a fight for political power between the forces of the working class and working people and their present masters, British Imperialism and the Capitalist system. And let us have no doubt that to successfully complete that struggle in our class interests the only dictatorship that shall survive in Ireland shall not be that of British Imperialism or the Irish Bourgeoisie, but the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

This declaration encapsulates much of the central political perspective of the CPI. The principal enemy, British Imperialism, will only be completely defeated when the national question is resolved in a socialist revolution which establishes a dictatorship of the proletariat. While it is my contention that the entire formulation needs to be critically reviewed, in this paper I want only to look at its final element, the dictatorship of the proletariat. The last ten years has seen within the World Communist Movement a great deal of political debate about this concept. Some Communist parties, for example the PCF and the CPGB have abandoned it as a programmatic objective and have sought to replace it with alternative conceptions of the political form of the post revolutionary situation. It remains a central principal for the CPI but in the light of the debate, it is perhaps time that we reflected on its relevance and indeed examined our political programme carefully to evaluate its relationship

Here I want to do both; to explore the debate around the dictatorship of the proletariat and to put forward some tentative propositions about its usefulness with respect to our current political programme.

There can be no doubt that the dictatorship of the proletariat was a key political concept for Marx, Engels and Lenin. After 1850 Marx became convinced that only by establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat could capitalism be defeated and the transition to communism be commenced. His conviction is expressed in two important statements in the ‘Civil War in France’, he said: (2)

“But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes.” This was because, (3)
“After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief.”

Thus the successful revolution required the smashing of the bourgeois state machine and the substitution of a new type of state where contrary to all previous historical practice, a majority would oppress a minority. Marx reiterated this position forcefully in the Critique of the Gotha Programme where he argued, (4);

“Between the capitalist and the communist society lies the period of revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”

What form was this revolutionary dictatorship to take? Engels (5) was convinced that Marx’s analysis of the Paris Commune provided an account of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Although the Commune

lasted only two months before being crushed by the forces of Thiers and the Communards slaughtered, Marx saw the period as having crucial significance. The Commune was: (6)

“a working class government, the produce of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.”

The Commune suppressed the standing army and substituted for it an armed people in the shape of the National Guard. All officials including the police and the judiciary were stripped of their political attributes and all political service had to be done at workmen’s wages. The power of the Church in education was ended, forms of national chauvinism were forbidden and a host of necessary social reforms enacted. The Commune abolished parliamentarianism by becoming a working body rather than just a talking shop and all its members were to be “elective, responsible and revokable.” They were thus instantly accountable rather than elected for a fixed term of office. Further it had the support of sections of the middle classes sick of the corruption and military adventurism of the Second Empire and it offered the peasantry their only real hope of being free of crushing taxation. As Marx said, (7) it was simultaneously the true representative of all the healthy elements in French society and truly internationalist.

Lenin forcefully reiterated the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat in State and Revolution. He argued that while Marx had applied the concept to revolutions in highly bureaucratic and militarist societies, the development of Imperialism had made it vital for the revolutionary transformation of all the dev-

eloped countries in Europe. At the same time he stressed the extent to which it would almost immediately begin to ‘whither’ away. (8)

“It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves...”

Marx, Engels and Lenin, all emphasised the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat. They envisaged that state as one where the mass of the working class actively participated in the operation of their own state power. And since it was the dictatorship of a majority counterposed to the previous dictatorship of the minority of exploiters, it was also an advanced democratic state, the political form of the transition from capitalism to communism.

Since then serious questions have been asked about the nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Miliband for instance poses the following problem. (9) Lenin’s version of the concept appears to consist of unmediated class rule where instantly revokable officials are continuously supervised by armed workers. The complications of such a state in a large scale society are enormous and practical considerations alone suggest that the revolutionary power requires to be politically mediated. As Miliband says (10)

“By this I mean that the dictatorship of the proletariat is obviously inconceivable without some degree at least of political articulation and leadership which implies political organisation.”

Clearly this raises questions about the role of the revolutionary party within the dictatorship of the proletariat and the relationship between the

from the working class for the capitalist system, and his account consists of a re-elaboration of the Marxist theory of the capitalist state.

Poulantzas has taken this theory much further to produce the most sophisticated and convincing theory of the modern capitalist state. (18) He wishes to destroy the notion that the capitalist state is either a subject or an instrument. He argues that the state, conceived of as a subject, then becomes an entity with its own will, which in turn leads to a conception of its absolute autonomy. Treated as an instrument of the bourgeoisie, the tendency is to regard it as a passive or neutral tool which has no autonomy whatsoever from the bourgeoisie. Rather he suggests that the state, (19)

“is rather a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class fractions, such as this is expressed within the State in a necessarily specific form.”

Important implications derive from this. Actual policies carried out by the state are the result of the contradictions between classes and class fractions and because the state is a relationship of forces, these contradictions are inscribed within the state itself. The state is thus constituted and divided by class contradictions. This is manifested with the various apparatuses of the state. Particular apparatuses represent the base for the state power of particular fractions or alliances of fractions, and hence the existence of contradictions within and between state apparatuses. However these are not amenable to control by any fraction; as Poulantzas says, (20)

“not only does the hegemonic class or fraction establish as dominant the apparatus that already crystallises its interests, but in the long term, every dominant state apparatus...tends to be-

come the privileged seat of the hegemonic fraction's interest and to incarnate changes in the relations of hegemony.”

This theory has also a different conception of the relationship of the working class to the state. Rather than simply existing external to the state and crushed by the state, the working class exist IN the state in the form of centres of opposition to the power of the dominant classes. Thus state power is not just a simple undifferentiated form of control of the bourgeoisie but is a complex determination of the balance of forces in a concrete situation.

While the capitalist state can be no longer simply characterised as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, it still remains a system of political domination which is not amenable to control by the dominated classes. As Poulantzas argues, (21)

“Even if there is a shift in the relationship of forces and a modification of state power in favour of the popular classes, the State tends sooner or later to re-establish the relationship of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie, sometimes in a new form.”

Jessop (22) sums up the characteristics of the capitalist state. He suggests that it is best understood in terms of three propositions. Firstly it is a “structural ensemble rather than a subject, secondly it is a system of political domination rather than a neutral instrument and thirdly that state power is a complex social relation that reflects, “the changing balance of social forces in a determinate conjunction.”

What are the implications for the dictatorship of the proletariat? It is clear that we can no longer regard the concept simply and counterpose it to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Nor can it however simply be abandoned as some kind of historical relic inappropriate for the ‘democratic’ conditions of class alliances in ad-

vanced capitalism. However there is no reason why we should avoid applying some of the concepts of Poulantzas to the analysis of the proletarian state. Thus it will also be a material condensation of a relationship between classes and fractions, rather than a monolith of proletarian power imposed on the bourgeoisie. And such contradictions as well as those between the proletariat and other sections of working people will be inscribed within the state. This kind of formulation solves several of the problems that have been discussed about the dictatorship of the proletariat. Firstly it does not pose it as somehow the rule of a political elite, which is at the base of many of the doubts about the concept. Secondly it recognises the need for proletarian domination, but in fact a domination in the last instance where the proletariat is neither posed as the automatic guarantor of the interests of other classes nor as in necessary contradiction with other classes. The relationship between the peasantry and the working class in existing socialist states is a complex one wherein many difficulties still need to be resolved. The form of state power should not only reflect this but create the political context for solving some of these problems. Also conflict does take place under socialism and a form of state power is required that does not structurally confuse the distinction between necessary non antagonistic contradictions which are the dynamic of the cultural and ideological transformations taking place within socialism and counter-revolutionary forces attempting to re-establish capitalism. Finally it raises the perspective, correct in my view, that socialism is no utopia but is rather a very long transitional period between capitalism and communism filled with mistakes and ridden with contradictions but structurally capable of overcoming these problems and of creating communism. That is the sort of concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat that accords with the reality of contemporary

struggle.

Unfortunately to date we have given little thought to how the debate on the appropriateness of the dictatorship of the proletariat affects our party programme. The concept appears in the political resolution of the 17th. Congress in the following way: (23)

“...there is only one kind of socialism that they can arrive at that will guarantee a new society. This is one based on Socialist Revolution where in the transitional stage from Capitalism to Socialism the working class will uphold and protect the interests of the majority, and where the leading role will be played by a Marxist Leninist Party.”

While this describes in essence the traditional concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is also an extremely ambiguous formulation. It is true that class struggle can force changes and accommodations within capitalism so that the proletariat can represent a massive centre of opposition within the state and equally it is true that the idea of a revolution is no longer an apocalyptic event but rather a process, still Balibar's contention that socialism is the dictatorship of the proletariat remains essentially correct. Thus although the Left of the Labour Party in Britain envisage a radical transformation through winning the Alternative Economic Policy, that would be a necessary but not sufficient condition for describing Britain as a Socialist society. Again Allende's government in Chile was a tremendous advance but the counter revolution took place before proletarian state power could be established. Thus even if it is right to talk of a transitional stage from capitalism to socialism, that period is not characterised by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Yet the formulation in the document of the 17th. Congress suggests simultaneously a transitional stage from capitalism to

socialism and a dictatorship of the proletariat. The only conclusion is that we make precisely the same error as the PCF and influenced by utopian notions about the nature of socialism we displace it, posing some ill-defined transition between the socialist revolution and socialism itself. Almost by instinct rather than analysis we hold onto the concept recognising there is no necessary contradiction between an advanced democracy strategy and the dictatorship of the proletariat but having failed to reconstruct the concept in line with contemporary social and political developments, it appears in our document in the most erroneous way. Apart from the curious

ambiguity of 'the period of transition' we also imply that the state is simply an instrument that can be unproblematically wielded by the proletariat in the interests of the majority.

As Poulantzas has demonstrated, this conception of the state is plainly wrong.

Hopefully as we review and develop Ireland's Path to Socialism we will reflect more on the entire debate about the dictatorship of the proletariat and will take note of some of the difficulties in our present position.

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THE POLITICS OF THE ULSTER INDEPENDENCE COUNCIL

By Sean Morrissey

The politics of the Northern Ireland crisis has been analysed and re-analysed at length. Much of the debate has been explanation and description attempts to understand the genesis of the crisis and the forces which have ensured its persistence.

However the debate has also been characterised by a focus on proposed solutions to that crisis. The fact that the crisis continues testifies to the ephemeral character of most of the 'solutions', however that does not absolve us from attempting to analyse the possibilities for political work with the forces that propose this or that solution.

Of some importance in setting the context for this analysis is the recognition of the changes that have occurred within politics in Northern Ireland over the last ten years. The rebirth of republicanism into its most energetic military and political position since the establishment of the Northern Ireland State is one obvious fact. The accompanying transformation of the politics of the Nationalist bloc, the virtual demise of the Nationalist Party, the incorporation of Republican labour into the SDLP only to have Fitt and Devlin spewed out again and formation of new and diverse labour parties have all been significant phenomena. Indeed the decade has been one of new political fragments proliferating across the political spectrum.

For the purposes of this paper the most interesting development has been the increasing evident fissures within the Unionist bloc. The tensions which developments in the sixties had exacerbated in the seventies fractured the tight internal coherence

of that bloc and produced half a dozen different forms of Unionism. So far this plurality has not yet produced a real set of divisions, the continuing campaigns of the IRA in both the political and military arenas and the deeply rooted set of social practices that combine loyalist ideology have combined to hold unionism in to precarious but real unity. Nevertheless, some of the products of divisions within Unionism are of considerable interest.

It is in these circumstances that a group of people from the Loyalist section of N. Ireland working class have emerged to re-examine the position of the "Way Forward" to the people of N. Ireland. They were preceded slightly in time by the Peace People which was largely founded and prompted by members of the catholic community and as a result of their experience within their own areas were horrified by the daily danger to the women and children who launched the Peace Campaign and succeeded in attracting considerable support from all the people in N. Ireland and earned International acclaim. Even this is rapidly becoming a distant memory to those who believed it constituted a solution to our problems.

Now being talked about in N. Ireland is the possibility of an Independent Six Counties. A six counties consisting and confined within the geographical territory now constituted as N. Ireland appears to be in the minds of the authors of these solutions, the only way forward in the present circumstances and grouped together amongst these individuals are provincially recognised figures such as Andy Tyrrie, Chairman as the Ulster Defence Association,

Glen Barr, former member of the N. Ireland Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Vanguard Unionist Party, and formerly a senior political spokesman for the UDA. Associated with them are Mr. John McMichael, Mr. Harry Chicken, Mr. Ray Mc.Dowell, and Mr. Tommy Lyttle; men who have been known in the front ranks of the Loyalist Paramilitary organisations; men who have defiantly declared their adherence to the constitutional position in N. Ireland etc. etc.

Now they have proclaimed that the only solution to the N. Ireland problem is in the withdrawal of British troops, British administration and British influence.

In these circumstances they have prepared and set out in legal form, a constitution for N. Ireland with its political structures and its Bill of Rights and the opening paragraphs to their introduction proclaim :

“Political unity in N. Ireland between protestants and roman catholics with the same political ideology is not a new concept. At certain stages in our turbulent history it has been achieved to varying degrees of success, but for one reason or another, has never been sustained long enough to be of any real consequence.

The evolution of proper politics would no doubt remove many of N.Ireland's problems and would certainly allow the people of N. Ireland to decide their political representatives on a political basis, rather than religious bigotry and sectarian hatred.”

It goes on to say, “Without the evolution of proper politics the people of N. Ireland will continually be manipulated by sectarian politicians who make no contribution to the social and economic well being of the people of the country, but only continue

fan the flames of religious bigotry for self - gain and preservation.”

It is with these opening remarks that they proceed to prepare their constitution for N. Ireland, the people and the State.

This constitution covers voting qualifications, citizenship qualifications; the executive branch of government and the legislative branch.

It continues by setting out the responsibility of parliament; the introduction of bills; the proposed salaries; the judiciary and the problems of education and constitution amendments.

In addition to presenting in legal form the proposed constitution for an independent N. Ireland, the publication also included the necessary introduction of a Bill of Rights which not only relates to human rights and social rights, but also political rights; rights to security; rights to liberty; rights to consciousness and association; rights of expression and rights to participate in public affairs.

In addition to the political constructions of a constitution in the Bill of Rights, a considerable amount of work has also been done on the question of N. Ireland's social and economic viability and a paper from the Ulster Independent Movement cites in meticulous detail the question of hidden monies which appear at intervals to be detrimental to N. Ireland's financial position, but when examined can produce extremely positive platforms for the developing economy within the N. Ireland Independent State.

In this economic and social document questions are asked requiring more details on millions of pounds which appear to be used currently for the purpose of maintaining an elevated economic position for those responsible for operating the Northern Ireland Office.

Statistics and graphs show that N.Ireland produces well within her capacity for wage and commodity prices and goes on to conclude that in the event of the establishment of an independent N. Ireland state the possibilities exist for the viability within that declared territory.

How are we to assess this new position ? In general terms it can be criticised on grounds of economic analysis. Their starting point in proving the ‘economic viability’ of Ulster is to look at a balance of payments model between Ulster and Britain. This is designed to show that the much repeated notion of the British tax payer subsidising Ulster is false. This is fair enough as far as it goes. However it does not contend with the problem of de - industrialisation, the erosion of the manufacturing base of N. Ireland and the signal failure of re - industrialisation strategies. Man made fibres brought in to replace the old textile industry is already on the brink of collapse. The economic viability of Northern Ireland requires an advanced and effective programme of re - industrialisation, centred around public industry and workers' control.

This demands the creation of enormous surplus capital and it is unlikely that this could be generated autonomously within N. Ireland itself. External sources are not likely to solve the problem. Certainly there could be no guarantee of favourable EEC treatment of an independent Ulster State. And today internationally mobile capital is moving to third world countries rather than the poorer developed nations.

The economic future of N. Ireland is a complex problem that requires more than a few moralistic exhortations to save jobs and stability.

However that being said we need to treat the proposal for an independent Ulster seriously. It is not my view that it merely represents a new form of Unionist retrenchment - an attempt to even more furiously repress the Catholics.

This overly simple mechanical view is postulated on the view that Unionism never changes. The last ten years has generated serious crises within the Unionist bloc and tactically the position should be to engage with those forces that are the product of the crisis.

I believe we should begin a dialogue with the people and organisations who are developing the concept.

Hopefully that dialogue will help influence the concept of an Independent Ulster and will affect the strategies derived from it.

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MARXIST AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

BY V. DOYLE

It is the object of this article to give a short critical account of Marxist writings on nationalism and the national question, paying particular attention to how the Irish national question was treated by Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Marx, Engels and Lenin had no single fixed position on the national question in Ireland, indeed their views on the subject changed many times, in accordance with the changing political climate. For example, Marx initially believed that Ireland's problems (the main one for him being the land question), could be solved within the Union, then with the emergence of agrarian unrest and land agitation, he moved to an advocacy of Irish independence, though this latter position was dictated more by his analysis of class forces in Britain, than by an analysis of the composition of the Irish anti-landlord movements. The following quote illustrates the point:

"I have become more and more convinced and the only question is to drive this conviction home to the English working class, that it can never do anything decisive here in England, until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland, most definitely from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801, and replacing it by a free federal relationship. And this must be done, not as a matter of sympathy with Ireland, but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat." (1)

Thus Marx, on one level, viewed the Irish national question in terms of the retarding effect it had on the English proletariat. Marx also, at one time saw the national question being solved, not by Irish anti-landlord agitation, but by English working class agitation.

"For a long time I believed that it

would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy." (2)

Marx however shifted his position, emphasising the progressive potential of the land question in breaking the British control of Ireland. The following quote suggests what lay behind this changed position:

"The destruction of the English landed aristocracy in Ireland is an infinitely easier operation than in England herself, because in Ireland the land question has hitherto been the exclusive form of the social question, because it is a question of existence of life and death for the immense majority of the Irish people and because it is at the same time inseparable from the national question." (3)

Here Marx would appear to be viewing Ireland as the 'weakest link' in the British empire, and thus seeing Irish rebellion as more of a progressive possibility in breaking up that empire than any similar action in Britain, because the

balance of class forces was simpler and more antagonistic in Ireland than it was in Britain.

Engels had arguably a more knowledgeable position on the Irish national question than Marx, and paid much more attention to the composition of the various nationalist movements when analysing the national question. Like Marx, he saw the land issue as being central to the national question, and identified the different types of nationalists agitating on the land question. In particular, he distinguished between the 'liberal nationalism' of the urban bourgeoisie, represented by the Land League, and the physical force nationalism of the Fenians. Engels, while seeing the importance of the latter strand in pushing the land question to the fore, increasingly came to see Fenianism as a threat to the gradual land reform, and hence to any gradual solution of the national question. In a letter to E. Bernstein he says:

"Without war, or threat of war from without, an Irish rebellion has not the slightest chance."

And "...these Fenians are themselves increasingly being pushed into a sort of Bakunism: the assassination of Burke and Cavendish could only serve the purpose of making a compromise between Gladstone and the Land League impossible." (4)

Thus for Engels, the constitutional means of liberal-bourgeois nationalism was a more progressive way forward at this time than the more revolutionary demands of physical force nationalism, due to the strength of the British on the one hand, and to the pressing needs of the Irish on the other.

Thus both Marx and Engels had no fixed view in relation to the progressiveness of Irish nationalism. Nor did they analyse

the national question in terms of an abstract theory of nationhood.

Both were willing to see federation not total independence at one time as a possible solution to the national question, a position more in keeping with the nationalism of the Land League, than the nationalism of the Fenians. Thus their analysis is only meaningful when one understands that they related the national question to other political questions, in the case of Ireland to the development of the class struggle in Britain. Similarly their analysis of the Polish national question is related to the balance of class forces in Europe at the time:

"Poland lies in the middle of the continent and the conservation of her division is precisely the link that has constantly held the Holy Alliance together and therefore Poland is of great interest to us." (5)

For Marx and Engels, Poland, like Ireland, was a weak link, and the development of Polish nationalism was progressive, in that it further weakened the link in the Holy Alliance, thus developing the prospects for class struggle in Central Europe.

Thus for Marx and Engels when analysing the link between oppressor and oppressed nations, what is important and progressive is not simply the nationalist demands of the latter, but whether or not these demands will contribute to the development of class struggle in either countries or in both. In other words

the progressiveness of nationalist movements is not fixed and unchanging but is to be related to, amongst other things, the particular historical balance of class forces.

However Marx and Engels' work predates important events, in particular the epoch of Imperialism, and the development of a new phase of national liberation struggles, both of which had effects on Lenin's analysis of national questions.

Lenin's views on nationalism are perhaps best known for his defence of the 'rights of nations to self-determination.'

For Lenin the right of nations to self-determination meant the right to a 'political separation of these nations from alien national bodies and the formulation of an independent nation state.' (6)

However self-determination was not an abstract 'right' as Lenin's debate with Rosa Luxemburg demonstrated. The latter charged the notion with being abstract, arguing that why not if it is a right, have self-determination for the people of Austria or Switzerland, America or Australia? Lenin in reply stated the obvious point that none of these countries had national movements, so the question of self-determination did not apply. But more importantly, he replied that the reason why these countries don't have national movements is because the bourgeois-democratic reforms demanded by such movements had already been conceded.

Thus one component of Lenin's position on the national question was that he linked it with the question of securing bourgeois-democratic reforms, referring to Ireland before the First World War, he says:

"In England the bourgeois revolution had been consummated in Ireland it is being consummated only now, after the lapse of half a century by the reforms of the English Liberals." (6)

So at this stage, Lenin somewhat like Engels saw the granting of land reform and Home Rule as tantamount to solving the Irish national question. This is not to say that Engels and Lenin had unqualified support for the bourgeois-nationalists, as Lenin himself explained to Rosa Luxemburg:

"Some people profess to see a contradiction in the fact that while point 4 of this resolution, which recognises the right to self-determination and secession seems to concede the maximum to nationalism, in reality the recognition of the right of all nations to self-determination implies the maximum of democracy and the minimum of nationalism." (7)

However, by 1916, Lenin was applauding the Easter rising, which would appear to contradict his previous position on the national question. This shift in attitude towards Ireland was due to Lenin's increasing involvement in an analysis of Imperialism from 1914 onwards. This had repercussions for his treatment of the national question because of the political importance of nationalist movements in this, the high point of Imperialist rivalry. With the advent of the imperialist war, and the difficulties in trying to unite the European social-democratic movements against the war, Lenin realised the potential of mass national move-

ments in the oppressed nations to break imperialism at its weakest link in the midst of war. Thus in this specific conjuncture, progressive national movements possessed both a democratic and an anti-imperialist significance. It is in terms of this background that Lenin's remarks on the Easter Rising should be seen, it represented for him a potential political flash point, which could have contributed to the weakening of the imperialist camp. Thus for Lenin the uprising was of political importance in the balance of power at that time, in all probability had it occurred at any other time, he would have regarded it in the same way that Engels regarded the prospects of a Fenian rebellion — as 'Bakuninist.'

In conclusion, it can be seen that for Marx, Engels and Lenin, there is not one stock analysis of nationalism, rather there are many national questions, which have to be independently evaluated and their progressiveness is linked to other political questions.

Furthermore, all three were totally opposed to any abstract unhistorical notion of 'nationhood' as being progressive;

"...the fundamental interest of proletarian solidarity and consequently of the proletarian class struggle requires that we never adopt a formal attitude to the national question." (8)

Rather for Marx, Engels and Lenin, it was not what was similar in national movements which was of importance, but the differences and specificities of them. As Lenin said:

"The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite his-

torical limits, and if it refers to a particular country (eg the national programme for a given country), that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical epoch." (9)

It is clear that apart from this general Marxist method, nothing substantive can be gleaned from Marx, Engels or Lenin's position on the Irish national question. It was never analysed in terms of its own specificities, such as the effect uneven development had on the prospects for an all-embracing progressive nationalist movement. No work of the magnitude of the 'development of Capitalism in Russia' was produced on Ireland. Perhaps the closest to the latter work was James Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, however the contribution of the latter to a Marxist analysis of the national question would be the subject of another article.

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