

# Marxists and national questions

Workers' Liberty day schools 17 February and 17 March 2018

## Agenda

1. Basics from our tradition: the Marxist debates on the national question before 1914
2. How Orthodox Trotskyism skewed the tradition
4. Ireland
5. Israel-Palestine
6. Catalonia and the "Norwegian way"

The following is suggested as a reading list. A selection of the shorter texts in the list, marked \* in the list, is printed in this booklet.

\* Trotsky's summary of the Bolsheviks and pre-1914 socialist debates on the national question - <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/30022>

Lenin - The Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1913: his longest summing-up text on the issue) - <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14438>

Also: \* The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (1916: a shorter summary) - <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm>

Two Nations, Two States (Workers' Liberty pamphlet)

\* Summary on Ireland from the 1990s - <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/13225>

General summary on national question (written for New Politics) - <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17100>

The Left in Disarray, especially pp.149-93

\* Catalonia - <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/31921>

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## Trotsky on the national question

(from his unfinished book on Stalin)

In two countries of pre-war Europe the national question was of exceptional political significance: in Tsarist Russia and in Hapsburg Austria-Hungary. In each of these the workers' party, created its own school. In the sphere of theory, the Austrian Social-Democracy, in the persons of Otto Bauer and Karl Renner, considered nationality independent of territory, economy and class, transforming it into a species of abstraction limited by so-called "national character."

In the field of national policy, as for that matter in all other fields, it did not venture beyond a corrective status quo. Fearing the very thought of dismembering the monarchy, the Austrian Social-Democracy strove to adapt its national programme to the borders of the patchwork state.

The programme of so-called "national cultural autonomy" required that the citizens of one and the same nationality, irrespective of their dispersal over the territory of Austria-Hungary and irrespective of the administrative divisions of the state should be united, on the basis of purely

personal attributes, into one community for the solution of their "cultural" tasks (the theatre, the church, the school, and the like). That programme was artificial and utopian, in so far as it attempted to separate culture from territory and economy in a society torn apart by social contradictions; it was at the same time reactionary, in so far as it led to a forced disunion into various nationalities of the workers of one and the same state, undermining their class strength.

Lenin's position was the direct opposite. Regarding nationality as inseparably connected with territory, economy and class structure, he refused at the same time to regard the historical state, the borders of which cut across the living body of the nations, as a sacrosanct and inviolate category.

He demanded recognition of the right to secession and independent existence for each national portion of the state.

In so far as the various nationalities, voluntarily or through force of necessity, coexist within the borders of one state, their cultural interests must find the highest possible satisfaction within the framework of the broadest

regional (and consequently, territorial) autonomy, including statutory guarantees of the rights of each minority. At the same time, Lenin deemed it the incontrovertible duty of all the workers of a given state, irrespective of nationality, to unite in one and the same class organisations.

The national problem was particularly acute in Poland, aggravated by the historical fate of that country. The so-called PPS (Polish Socialist Party), headed by Josef Pilsudski, came out ardently for Polish independence; the "socialism" of the PPS was no more than a vague appendage of its militant nationalism. On the other hand, the Polish Social-Democracy, whose leader was Rosa Luxemburg, counterposed to the slogan of Polish independence the demand for the autonomy of the Polish region as a constituent part of democratic Russia. Luxemburg proceeded from the consideration that in the epoch of imperialism the separation of Poland from Russia was economically infeasible and in the epoch of socialism — unnecessary.

#### Abstraction

She looked upon "the right of self-determination" as an empty abstraction. The polemic on that question lasted for years. Lenin insisted that imperialism did not reign similarly or equably in all countries, regions and spheres of life; that the heritage of the past represented an accumulation and interpenetration of various historical epochs; that although monopolistic capitalism towers above everything, it does not supersede everything; that, notwithstanding the domination of imperialism, the numerous national problems retained their full force and that, contingent upon the internal and world conjunctures, Poland might become independent even in the epoch of imperialism.

It was Lenin's view that the right of self-determination was merely an application of the principles of bourgeois democracy in the sphere of national relations. A real, full-bodied, all-sided democracy under capitalism was unrealisable; in that sense the national independence of small and weak peoples was likewise "unrealisable". However, even under imperialism, the working class did not refuse to fight for democratic rights, including among them the right of each nation to its independent existence.

Moreover, in certain portions of our planet it was imperialism itself that invested the slogan of national self-determination with extraordinary significance. Although Western and Central Europe have somehow managed to solve their national problems in the course of the nineteenth century, in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and South America the epoch of national democratic movements had not really begun to unfold until the twentieth century. To deny the right of nations to self-determination is tantamount in effect to offering aid and comfort to the imperialists against their colonies and generally against all oppressed nationalities.

The problem of nationalities was considerably aggravated in Russia during the period of reaction. "The wave of militant nationalism," wrote Stalin, "called attention from

above to numerous acts of repressions by those in power, who wreaked their vengeance upon the border states for their love of freedom, calling forth in response a wave of nationalism from below, which at times passed into crude chauvinism."

This was the time of the ritual murder trial of the Kiev Jew Bayliss. Retrospectively, in the light of civilisation's latest achievements, especially in Germany and in the USSR, that trial today seems almost a humanitarian experiment. But in 1913 it shocked the whole world. The poison of nationalism began to affect many sections of the working class as well. Alarmed, Gorky wrote to Lenin about the need for counteracting this chauvinistic rabidness. "As for nationalism, I quite agree with you," replied Lenin, "that we must cope with it more earnestly than ever. We have a splendid Georgian staying with us here who is writing a long article for *Prosveshcheniye* (Enlightenment), after garnering all the Austrian and other material. We will bear down on it."

The reference was to Stalin. Gorky, long connected with the party, knew all its leading cadres well. But Stalin evidently was utterly unknown to him since Lenin had to resort to such an impersonal, although flattering, expression as "a splendid Georgian". This is, by the way, the only occasion when Lenin characterised a prominent Russian revolutionist by the token of his nationality. He had in mind, of course, not a Georgian, but a Caucasian: the element of primitiveness undoubtedly attracted Lenin; small wonder that he treated Kamo with such tenderness.

During his two months' sojourn abroad Stalin wrote a brief but very trenchant piece of research entitled "Marxism and the National Problem". Since it was intended for a lawful magazine, the article resorted to discreet vocabulary. Its revolutionary tendencies were nonetheless distinctly apparent.

#### Materialist

The author set out by counterposing the historico-materialistic definition of nation to the abstracto-psychological, in the spirit of the Austrian school. "The nation," he wrote, "is a historically-formed enduring community of language, territory, economic life and psychological composition, asserting itself in the community of culture." This combined definition, compounding the psychological attributes of a nation with the geographic and economic conditions of its development, is not only correct theoretically but practically fruitful, for then the solution to the problem of each nation's fate must perforce be sought along the lines of changing the material conditions of its existence, beginning with territory.

Bolshevism was never addicted to the fetishistic worship of a state's borders. Politically the point was to reconstruct the Tsarist empire, that prison of nations, territorially, politically, and administratively in line with needs and wishes of the nations themselves.

The party of the proletariat does not enjoin the various nationalities either to remain within the bounds of a given

state or separate from it: that is their own affair. But it does obligate itself to help each of them to realise its actual national will. As for the possibility of separating from a state, that is a matter of concrete historical circumstances and the relation of forces. "No one can say," wrote Stalin, "that the Balkan War is the end of internal and external circumstances that one or another nationality in Russia will deem it necessary to postulate and to solve the problem of its own independence. And, of course, it is no business of the Marxists to place barriers in such cases. But for that very reason Russian Marxists cannot get along without the right of nations to self-determination."

The interests of the nations which voluntarily remain within the bounds of democratic Russia would be fenced off by means of "the autonomies of such self-determined units as Poland, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Caucasus, and the like. Regional autonomy is conducive to a better utilisation of the natural wealth of the region; it does not divide citizens along national lines and makes it possible for them to group themselves in class parties." The territorial self-administration of regions in all spheres of social life is counterposed to the extra-territorial — that is, platonic—self-administration of nationalities in matters of "culture" only.

However, most directly and acutely significant, from the point of view of the proletariat's struggle, was the problem of the relations between workers of various nationalities inside the same state. Bolshevism stood for a compact and indivisible unification of workers of all nationalities in the party and in the trade unions on the basis of democratic centralism.

"The type of organisation does not exert its influence on practical work alone. It places an indelible stamp on the worker's whole spiritual life. The worker lives the life of his organisation, within which he develops spiritually and is educated...The international type of organisation is a school of comradely feelings, of the greatest agitation in favour of internationalism."

One of the aims of the Austrian programme of "cultural autonomy" was "the preservation and development of the national idiosyncrasies of peoples." Why and for what purpose? asked Bolshevism in amazement. Segregating the various nationalistic portions of mankind was never our concern. True, Bolshevism insisted that each nation should have the right to secede—the right, but not the duty—as the ultimate, most effective guarantee against oppression. But the thought of artificially preserving national idiosyncrasies was profoundly alien to Bolshevism.

The removal of any, even disguised, even the most refined and practically "imponderable" national oppression or indignity, must be used for the revolutionary unification rather than the segregation of the workers of various nationalities. Wherever national privileges and injuries exist, nations must have the possibility to separate from each other, that thus they may facilitate the free unification of the workers, in the name of a close

rapprochement of nations, with the distinct perspective of the eventual complete fusion of all. Such was the basic tendency of Bolshevism, which revealed the full measure of its force in the October Revolution.

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Lenin: from The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up (a shorter text from 1916)

Issue No. 2 of the Herald (Vorbote No. 2, April 1916), the Marxist journal of the Zimmerwald Left, published theses for and against the self-determination of nations, signed by the Editorial Board of our Central Organ, Sotsial-Demokrat, and by the Editorial Board of the organ of the Polish Social-Democratic opposition, Gazeta Robotnicza. Above the reader will find a reprint of the former [1] and a translation of the latter theses. [15] This is practically the first time that the question has been presented so extensively in the international field: it was raised only in respect of Poland in the discussion carried on in the German Marxist journal Neue Zeit twenty years ago, 1895–96, before the London International Socialist Congress of 1896, by Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and the Polish "independents" (champions of the independence of Poland, the Polish Socialist Party), who represented three different views. [16] [see The Rights of Nations to Self-Determination] Since then, as far as we know, the question of self-determination has been discussed at all systematically only by the Dutch and the Poles. Let us hope that the Herald will succeed in promoting the discussion of this question, so urgent today, among the British, Americans, French, Germans and Italians. Official socialism, represented both by direct supporters of "their own" governments, the Plekhanovs, Davids and Co., and the undercover defenders of opportunism, the Kautskyites (among them Axelrod, Martov, Chkheidze and others), has told so many lies on this question that for a long time there will inevitably be efforts, on the one hand, to maintain silence and evade the issue, and, on the other, workers' demands for "direct answers" to these "accursed questions". We shall try to keep our readers informed of the struggle between the trends: among socialists abroad.

This question is of specific importance to us Russian Social-Democrats; the present discussion is a continuation of the one that took place in 1903 and 1913 [17]; during the war this question has been the cause of some wavering in the thinking of Party members: it has been made more acute by the trickery of such prominent leaders of the Gvozdyov or chauvinist workers' party as Martov and Chkheidze, in their efforts to evade the substance of the problem. It is essential, therefore, to sum up at least the initial results of the discussion that has been started in the international field.

It will be seen from the theses that our Polish comrades provide us with a direct answer to some of our arguments, for example, on Marxism and Proudhonism. In most cases, however, they do not answer us directly but indirectly, by opposing their assertions to ours. Let us

examine both their direct and indirect answers.

### 1. Socialism and the Self-Determination of Nations

We have affirmed that it would be a betrayal of socialism to refuse to implement the self-determination of nations under socialism. We are told in reply that “the right of self-determination is not applicable to a socialist society”. The difference is a radical one. Where does it stem from?

“We know,” runs our opponents’ reasoning, “that socialism will abolish every kind of national oppression since it abolishes the class interests that lead to it...” What has this argument about the economic prerequisites for the abolition of national oppression, which are very well known and undisputed, to do with a discussion of one of the forms of political oppression, namely, the forcible retention of one nation within the state frontiers of another? This is nothing but an attempt to evade political questions! And subsequent arguments further convince us that our judgement is right: “We have no reason to believe that in a socialist society, the nation will exist as an economic and political unit. It will in all probability assume the character of a cultural and linguistic unit only, because the territorial division of a socialist cultural zone, if practised at all, can be made only according to the needs of production and, furthermore, the question of such a division will naturally not be decided by individual nations alone and in possession of full sovereignty [as is required by “the right to self-determination”], but will be determined jointly by all the citizens concerned...”

Our Polish comrades like this last argument, on joint determination instead of self-determination, so much that they repeat it three times in their theses! Frequency of repetition, however, does not turn this Octobrist and reactionary argument into a Social-Democratic argument. All reactionaries and bourgeois grant to nations forcibly retained within the frontiers of a given state the right to “determine jointly” their fate in a common parliament. Wilhelm II also gives the Belgians the right to “determine jointly” the fate of the German Empire in a common German parliament.

Our opponents try to evade precisely the point at issue. the only one that is up for discussion—the right to secede. This would be funny if it were not so tragic!

Our very first thesis said that the liberation of oppressed nations implies a dual transformation in the political sphere: (1) the full equality of nations. This is not disputed and applies only to what takes place within the state; (2) freedom of political separation.[2] This refers to the demarcation of state frontiers. This only is disputed. But it is precisely this that our opponents remain silent about. They do not want to think either about state frontiers or even about the stabs as such. This is a sort of “imperialist Economism” like the old Economism of 1894–1902, which argued in this way: capitalism is victorious, therefore political questions are a waste of time. Imperialism is victorious, therefore political questions are a waste of time! Such an apolitical theory is extremely harmful to Marxism.

In his Critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx wrote: “Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. There corresponds to this also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”[18] Up to now this truth has been indisputable for socialists and it includes the recognition of the fact that the state will exist until victorious socialism develops into full communism. Engels’s dictum about the withering away of the state is well known. We deliberately stressed, in the first thesis, that democracy is a form of state that will also wither away when the state withers away. And until our opponents replace Marxism by some sort of “non-state” viewpoint their arguments will constitute one big mistake.

Instead of speaking about the state (which means, about the demarcation of its frontiers!), they speak of a “socialist cultural zone”, i.e., they deliberately choose an expression that is indefinite in the sense that all state questions are obliterated! Thus we get a ridiculous tautology: if there is no state there can, of course, be no question of frontiers. In that case the whole democratic-political programme is unnecessary. Nor will there be any republic, when the state “withers away”.

The German chauvinist Lensch, in the articles we mentioned in Thesis 5 (footnote),[3] quoted an interesting passage from Engels’s article “The Po and the Rhine”. Amongst other things, Engels says in this article that in the course of historical development, which swallowed up a number of small and non-viable nations, the “frontiers of great and viable European nations” were being increasingly determined by the “language and sympathies” of the population. Engels calls these frontiers “natural”. [19] Such was the case in the period of progressive capitalism in Europe, roughly from 1848 to 1871. Today, these democratically determined frontiers are more and more often being broken down by reactionary, imperialist capitalism. There is every sign that imperialism will leave its successor, socialism, a heritage of less democratic frontiers, a number: of annexations in Europe and in other parts of the world. Is it to be supposed that victorious socialism, restoring and implementing full democracy all along the line, will refrain from democratically demarcating state frontiers and ignore the “sympathies” of the population? Those questions need only be stated to make it quite clear that our Polish colleagues are sliding down from Marxism towards imperialist Economism.

The old Economists, who made a caricature of Marxism, told the workers that “only the economic” was of importance to Marxists. The new Economists seem to think either that the democratic state of victorious socialism will exist without frontiers (like a “complex of sensations” without matter) or that frontiers will be delineated “only” in accordance with the needs of production. In actual fact its frontiers will be delineated democratically, i.e., in accordance with the will and “sympathies” of the population. Capitalism rides roughshod over these sympathies, adding more obstacles

to the rapprochement of nations. Socialism, by organising production without class oppression, by ensuring the well-being of all members of the state, gives full play to the “sympathies” of the population, thereby promoting and greatly accelerating the drawing together and fusion of the nations.

To give the reader a rest from the heavy and clumsy Economism let us quote the reasoning of a socialist writer who is outside our dispute. That writer is Otto Bauer, who also has his own “pet little point”—“cultural and national autonomy”—but who argues quite correctly on a large number of most important questions. For example, in Chapter 29 of his book *The National Question and Social-Democracy*, he was doubly right in noting the use of national ideology to cover up imperialist policies. In Chapter 30, “Socialism and the Principle of Nationality”, he says:

“The socialist community will never be able to include whole nations within its make-up by the use of force. Imagine the masses of the people, enjoying the blessings of national culture, baking a full and active part in legislation and government, and, finally, supplied with arms—would it be possible to subordinate such a nation to the rule of an alien social organism by force? All state power rests on the force of arms. The present-day people’s army, thanks to an ingenious mechanism, still constitutes a tool in the hands of a definite person, family or class exactly like the knightly and mercenary armies of the past. The army of the democratic community of a socialist society is nothing but the people armed, since it consists of highly cultured persons, working without compulsion in socialised workshops and taking full part in all spheres of political life. In such conditions any possibility of alien rule disappears.”

This is true. It is impossible to abolish national (or any other political) oppression under capitalism, since this requires the abolition of classes, i.e., the introduction of socialism. But while being based on economics, socialism cannot be reduced to economics alone. A foundation—socialist production—is essential for the abolition of national oppression, but this foundation must also carry a democratically organised state, a democratic army, etc. By transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the possibility of abolishing national oppression; the possibility becomes reality “only”—“only”!—with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the “sympathies” of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this, in turn, will serve as a basis for developing the practical elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations that will be completed when the state withers away. This is the Marxist theory, the theory from which our Polish colleagues have mistakenly departed.

## 2. Is Democracy “Practicable” Under Imperialism

The old polemic conducted by Polish Social-Democrats against the self-determination of nations is based entirely

on the argument that it is “impracticable” under capitalism. As long ago as 1903 we, the Iskra supporters, laughed at this argument in the Programme Commission of the Second Congress of the R.S.D:L.P. and said that it was a repetition of the distortion of Marxism preached by the (late lamented) Economists. In our theses we dealt with this error in particular detail and it is precisely on this point, which contains the theoretical kernel of the whole dispute, that the Polish comrades did not wish to (or could not?) answer any of our arguments.

To prove the economic impossibility of self-determination would require an economic analysis such as that used to prove the impracticability of prohibiting machines or introducing labour-money, etc. No one has even attempted to make such an analysis. No one will maintain that it has been possible to introduce “labour-money” under capitalism “by way of exception” in even one country, in the way it was possible for one small country to realise this impracticable self-determination, even without war or revolution, “by way of exception”, in the era of the most rabid imperialism (Norway, 1905).

In general, political democracy is merely one of the possible forms of superstructure above capitalism (although it is theoretically the normal one for “pure” capitalism). The facts show that both capitalism and imperialism develop within the framework of any political form and subordinate them all. It is, therefore, a basic theoretical error to speak of the “impracticability” of one of the forms and of one of the demands of democracy.

The absence of an answer to these arguments from our Polish colleagues compels us to consider the discussion closed on this point. To make it graphic, so to say, we made the very concrete assertion that it would be “ridiculous” to deny the “practicability” of the restoration of Poland today, making it dependent on the strategic and other aspects of the present war. No reply was forthcoming!

The Polish comrades simply repeated an obviously incorrect assertion (S. II, 1), saying that “in questions of the annexation of foreign territories, forms of political democracy are pushed aside; sheer force is decisive... Capital will never allow the people to decide the question of their state frontiers...” As though “capital” could “allow the people” to select its civil servants, the servants of imperialism! Or as though weighty decisions on important democratic questions, such as the establishment of a republic in place of a monarchy, or a militia in place of a regular army, were, in general, conceivable without “sheer force”. Subjectively, the Polish comrades want to make Marxism “more profound” but they are doing it altogether unsuccessfully. Objectively, their phrases about impracticability are opportunism, because their tacit assumption is: this is “impracticable” without a series of revolutions, in the same way as democracy as a whole, all its demands taken together, is impracticable under imperialism.

Once only, at the very end of S. II,1, in the discussion on Alsace, our Polish colleagues abandoned the position of

imperialist Economism and approached the question of one of the forms of democracy with a concrete answer and not with general references to the “economic”. And it was precisely this approach that was wrong! It would, they wrote, he “particularist, undemocratic” if some Alsatians, without asking the French, were to “impose” on them a union with Alsace, although part of Alsace was German-oriented and this threatened war!!! The confusion is amusing: self-determination presumes (this is in itself clear, and we have given it special emphasis in our theses) freedom to separate from the oppressor state; but the fact that union with a state presumes the consent of that state is something that is “not customarily” mentioned in politics ally more than the “consent” of a capitalist to receive profit or of a worker to receive wages is mentioned in economics! It is ridiculous even to speak of Such a thing.

If one wants to be a Marxist politician, one should, in speaking of Alsace, attack the German socialist scoundrels for not fighting for Alsace’s freedom to secede and attack the French socialist scoundrels for making their peace with the French bourgeoisie who want to annex the whole of Alsace by force—and both of them for serving the imperialism of “their own” country and for fearing a separate state, even if only a little one—the thing is to show how the socialists who recognize self-determination would solve the problem in a few weeks without going against the will of the Alsatians. To argue, instead, about the horrible danger of the French Alsatians “forcing” themselves on France is a real pearl.

### 3. What Is Annexation?

We raised this question in a most definite manner in our theses (Section 7).[4] The Polish comrades did not reply to it: they evaded it, insisting (1) that they are against annexations and explaining (2) why they are against them. It is true that these are very important questions. But they are questions of another kind. If we want our principles to be theoretically sound at all, if we want them to be clearly and precisely formulated, we cannot evade the question of what an annexation is, since this concept is used in our political propaganda and agitation. The evasion of the question in a discussion between colleagues cannot be interpreted as anything but desertion of one’s position.

Why have we raised this question? We explained this when we raised it. It is because “a protest against annexations is nothing but recognition of the right to Self-determination”. The concept of annexation usually includes: (1) the concept of force (joining by means of force); (2) the concept of oppression by another nation (the joining of “alien” regions, etc.), and, sometimes (3) the concept of violation of the status quo. We pointed this out in the theses and this did not meet with any criticism.

Can Social-Democrats be against the use of force in general, it may be asked? Obviously not. This means that we are against annexations not because they constitute force, but for some other reason. Nor can the Social-Democrats be for the status quo. However you may twist and turn, annexation is violation of the self-determination

of a nation, it is the establishment of state frontiers contrary to the will of the population.

To be against annexations means to be in favor of the right to self-determination. To be “against the forcible retention of any nation within the frontiers of a given state” (we deliberately employed this slightly changed formulation of the same idea in Section 4 of our theses,[5] and the Polish comrades answered us with complete clarity at the beginning of their S. I, 4, that they “are against the forcible retention of oppressed nations within the frontiers of the annexing state”)—is the same as being in favour of the self-determination of nations.

We do not want to haggle over words. If there is a party that says in its programme (or in a resolution binding on all the form does not matter) that it is against annexations, [6] against the forcible retention of oppressed nations within the frontiers of its state, we declare our complete agreement in principle with that party. It would be absurd to insist on the word “self-determination”. And if there are people in our Party who want to change words in this spirit, who want to amend Clause 9 of our Party Programme, we should consider our differences with such comrades to be anything but a matter of principle!

The only thing that matter is political clarity and theoretical soundness of our slogans.

In verbal discussions on this question—the importance of which nobody will deny, especially now, in view of the war—we have met the following argument (we have not come across it in the press): a protest against a known evil does not necessarily mean recognition of a positive concept that precludes the evil. This is obviously an unfounded argument and, apparently, as such has not been reproduced in the press. If a socialist party declares that it is “against the forcible retention of an oppressed nation within the frontiers of the annexing state”, it is thereby committed to renounce retention by force when it comes to power.

We do not for one moment doubt that if Hindenburg were to accomplish the semi-conquest of Russia tomorrow and this semi-conquest were to be expressed by the appearance of a now Polish state (in connection with the desire of Britain and France to weaken tsarism somewhat), something that is quite “practicable” from the standpoint of the economic laws of capitalism and imperialism, and if, the day after tomorrow, the socialist revolution were to be victorious in Petrograd, Berlin and Warsaw, the Polish socialist government, like the Russian and German socialist governments, would renounce the “forcible retention” of, say, the Ukrainians, “within the frontiers of the Polish state”. If there were members of the *Gazeta Robotnicza* Editorial Board in that government they would no doubt sacrifice their “theses”, thereby disproving the “theory” that “the right of self-determination is not applicable to a socialist society”. If we thought otherwise we should not put a comradesly discussion with the Polish Social-Democrats on the agenda but would rather conduct a ruthless struggle against them as chauvinists.

Suppose I were to go out into the streets of any European

city and make a public “protest”, which I then published in the press, against my not being permitted to purchase a man as a slave. There is no doubt that people would have the right to regard me as a slave-owner, a champion of the principle, or system, if you like of slavery. No one would be fooled by the fact that my sympathies with slavery were expressed in the negative form of a protest and not in a positive form (“I am for slavery”). A political “protest” is quite the equivalent of a political programme; this is so obvious that one feels rather awkward at having to explain it. In any case, we are firmly convinced that on the part of the Zimmerwald Left, at any rate—we do not speak of the Zimmerwald group as a whole since it contains Martov and other Kautskyites—we shall not meet with any “protest” if we say that in the Third International there will be no place for people capable of separating a political protest from a political programme, of counterpoising the one to the other, etc.

Not wishing to haggle over words, we take the liberty of expressing the sincere hope that the Polish Social-Democrats will try soon to formulate, officially, their proposal to delete Clause 9 from our Party Programme (which is also theirs) and also from the Programme of the International (the resolution of the 1896 London Congress), as well as their own definition of the relevant political concepts of “old and new annexations” and of “the forcible retention of an oppressed nation within the frontiers of the annexing state”.

Let us now turn to the next question.

#### 4. For or Against Annexations?

In S. 3 of Part One of their theses the Polish comrades declare very definitely that they are against any kind of annexation. Unfortunately, in S. 4 of the same part we find an assertion that must be considered annexationist. It opens with the following ... how can it be put more delicately?... the following strange phrase:

“The starting-point of Social-Democracy’s struggle against annexations, against the forcible retention of oppressed nations within the frontiers of the annexing state is renunciation of any defence of the fatherland [the authors’ italics], which, in the era of imperialism, is defence of the rights of one’s own bourgeoisie to oppress and plunder foreign peoples....”

What’s this? How is it put?

“The starting-point of the struggle against annexations is renunciation of any defence of the fatherland....” But ally national war and any national revolt can be called “defence of the fatherland” and, until now, has been generally recognised as such! We are against annotations, but... we mean by this that we are against the annexed waging a war for their liberation from those who have annexed them, that we are against the annexed revolting to liberate themselves from those who have annexed them! Isn’t that an annexationist declaration?

The authors of the theses motivate their... strange assertion

by saying that “in the era of imperialism” defence of the fatherland amounts to defence of the right of one’s own bourgeoisie to oppress foreign peoples. This, however, is true only in respect of all imperialist war, i.e., in respect of a war between imperialist powers or groups of powers, when both belligerents not only oppress “foreign peoples” but are fighting a war to decide who shall have a greater share in oppressing foreign peoples!

The authors seem to present the question of “defence of the fatherland” very differently from the way it is presented by our Party. We renounce “defence of the fatherland” in an imperialist war. This is said as clearly as it can be in the Manifesto of our Party’s Central Committee and in the Berne resolutions[7] reprinted in the pamphlet *Socialism and War*, which has been published both in German and French. We stressed this twice in our theses (footnotes to Sections 4 and 6).[8] The authors of the Polish theses seem to renounce defence of the fatherland in general, i.e., for a national war as well, believing, perhaps, that in the “era of imperialism” national wars are impossible. We say “perhaps” because the Polish comrades have not expressed this view in their theses.

Such a view is clearly expressed in the theses of the German internationale group and in the Junius pamphlet which is dealt with in a special article.[9] In addition to what is said there, let us note that the national revolt of an annexed region or country against the annexing country may be called precisely a revolt and not a war (we have heard this objection made and, therefore, cite it here, although we do not think this terminological dispute a serious one). In any case, hardly anybody would risk denying that annexed Belgium, Serbia, Galicia and Armenia would call their “revolt” against those who annexed them “defence of the fatherland” and would do so in all justice. It looks as if the Polish comrades are against this type of revolt on the grounds that there is also a bourgeoisie in these annexed countries which also oppresses foreign peoples or, more exactly, could oppress them, since the question is one of the “right to oppress”. Consequently, the given war or revolt is not assessed on the strength of its real social content (the struggle of an oppressed nation for its liberation from the oppressor nation) but the possible exercise of the “right to oppress” by a bourgeoisie which is at present itself oppressed. If Belgium, let us say, is annexed by Germany in 1917, and in 1918 revolts to secure her liberation, the Polish comrades will be against her revolt on the grounds that the Belgian bourgeoisie possess “the right to oppress foreign peoples”!

There is nothing Marxist or even revolutionary in this argument. If we do not want to betray socialism we must support every revolt against our chief enemy, the bourgeoisie of the big states, provided it is not the revolt of a reactionary class. By refusing to support the revolt of annexed regions we become, objectively, annexationists. It is precisely in the “era of imperialism”, which is the era of nascent social revolution, that the proletariat will today give especially vigorous support to any revolt of the

annexed regions so that tomorrow, or simultaneously, it may attack the bourgeoisie of the “great” power that is weakened by the revolt.

The Polish comrades, however, go further in their annexationism. They are not only against any revolt by the annexed regions; they are against any restoration of their independence, even a peaceful one! Listen to this:

“Social-Democracy, rejecting all responsibility for the consequences of the policy of oppression pursued by imperialism, and conducting the sharpest struggle against them, does not by any means favour the erection of new frontier posts in Europe or the re-erection of those swept away by imperialism” (the authors’ italics).

Today “imperialism has swept away the frontier posts” between Germany and Belgium and between Russia and Galicia. International Social-Democracy, if you please, ought to be against their re-erection in general, whatever the means. In 1905, “in the era of imperialism”, when Norway’s autonomous Diet proclaimed her secession from Sweden, and Sweden’s war against Norway, as preached by the Swedish reactionaries, did not take place, what with the resistance of the Swedish workers and the international imperialist situation—Social-Democracy ought to have been against Norway’s secession, since it undoubtedly meant “the erection of new frontier posts in Europe”!!

This is downright annexationism. There is no need to refute it because it refutes itself. No socialist party would risk taking this stand: “We oppose annexations in general but we sanction annexations for Europe or tolerate them once they have been made”....

We need deal only with the theoretical sources of the error that has led our Polish comrades to such a patent... “impossibility”. We shall say further on why there is no reason to make exceptions for “Europe”. The following two phrases from the theses will explain the other sources of the error:

“Wherever the wheel of imperialism has rolled over and crushed an already formed capitalist state, the political and economic concentration of the capitalist world, paving the way for socialism, takes place in the brutal form of imperialist oppression....”

This justification of annexations is not Marxism but Struveism. Russian Social-Democrats who remember the 1890s in Russia have a good knowledge of this manner of distorting Marxism, which is common to Struve, Cunow, Legien and Co. In another of the theses (II, 3) of the Polish comrades we read the following, specifically about the German Struveists, the so-called “social-imperialists”:

(The slogan of self-determination) “provides the social-imperialists with an opportunity, by demonstrating the illusory nature of that slogan, to represent our struggle against national oppression as historically unfounded sentimentality, thereby undermining the faith of the proletariat in the scientific validity of the Social-Democratic programme....”

This means that the authors consider the position of the German Struveists “scientific”! Our congratulations.

One “trifle”, however, brings down this amazing argument which threatens to show that the Lensches, Cunows and Parvuses are right in comparison to us: it is that the Lensches are consistent people in their own way and in issue No. 8-9 of the chauvinist German Glocke--we deliberately quoted it in our theses—Lensch demonstrates simultaneously both the “scientific invalidity” of the self-determination slogan (the Polish Social-Democrats apparently believe that this argument of Lensch’s is irrefutable, as can be seen from their arguments in the theses we have quoted) and the “scientific invalidity” of the slogan against annexations!!

For Lensch had an excellent understanding of that simple truth which we pointed out to those Polish colleagues who showed no desire to reply to our statement: there is no difference “either political or economic”, or even logical, between the “recognition” of self-determination and the “protest” against annexations. If the Polish comrades regard the arguments of the Lensches against self-determination to be irrefutable, there is one fact that has to be accepted: the Lensches also use all these arguments to oppose the struggle against annexations.

The theoretical error that underlies all the arguments of our Polish colleagues has led them to the point of becoming inconsistent annexationists.

#### 5. Why Are Social-Democrats Against Annexations?

In our view the answer is obvious: because annexation violates the self-determination of nations, or, in other words, is a form of national oppression.

In the view of the Polish Social-Democrats there have to be special explanations of why we are against annexations, and it is these (I, 3 in the theses) that inevitably enmesh the authors in a further series of contradictions.

They produce two reasons to “justify” our opposition to annexations (the “scientifically valid” arguments of the Lensches notwithstanding):

First: “To the assertion that annexations in Europe are essential for the military security of a victorious imperialist state, the Social-Democrats counterpose the fact that annexations only serve to sharpen antagonisms, thereby increasing the danger of war....”

This is an inadequate reply to the Lensches because their chief argument is not that annexations are a military necessity but that they are economically progressive and under imperialism mean concentration. Where is the logic if the Polish Social-Democrats in the same breath recognise the progressive nature of such a concentration, refusing to re-erect frontier posts in Europe that have been swept away by imperialism, and protest against annexations?

Furthermore, the danger of what wars is increased by annexations? Not imperialist wars, because they have other causes: the chief antagonisms in the present



imperialist war are undoubtedly those between Germany and Britain, and between Germany and Russia. These antagonisms have nothing to do with annexations. It is the danger of national wars and national revolts that is increased. But how can one declare national wars to be impossible in “the era of imperialism”, on the one hand, and then speak of the “danger” of national wars, on the other? This is not logical.

The second argument: Annexations “create a gulf between the proletariat of the ruling nation and that of the oppressed nation... the proletariat of the oppressed nation would unite with its bourgeoisie and regard the proletariat of the ruling nation as its enemy. Instead of the proletariat waging an international class struggle against the international bourgeoisie it would be split and ideologically corrupted...”

We fully agree with these arguments. But is it logical to put forward simultaneously two arguments on the same question which cancel each other out. In S. 3 of the first part of the theses we find the above arguments that regard annexations as causing a split in the proletariat, and next to it, in S. 4, we are told that we must oppose the annulment of annexations already effected in Europe and favour “the education of tire working masses of the oppressed and the oppressor nations in a spirit of solidarity in struggle”. If the annulment of annexations is reactionary “sentimentality”, annexations must not be said to create a “gulf” between sections of the “proletariat” and cause a “split”, but should, on the contrary, be regarded as a condition for the bringing together of the proletariat of different nations.

We say: In order that we may have the strength to accomplish the socialist revolution and overthrow the bourgeoisie, the workers must unite more closely and this close union is promoted by the struggle for self-determination, i.e., the struggle against annexations. We are consistent. But the Polish comrades who say that European annexations are “non-annullable” and national wars, “impossible”, defeat themselves by contending “against” annexations with the use of arguments about national wars! These arguments are to the effect that annexations hamper the drawing together and fusion of workers of different nations!

In other words, the Polish Social-Democrats, in order to contend against annexations, have to draw for arguments on the theoretical stock they themselves reject in principle.

The question of colonies makes this even more obvious.

#### 6. Is it Right to Contrast “Europe” With the Colonies in the Present Question?

Our theses say that the demand for the immediate liberation of the colonies is as “impracticable” (that is, it cannot be effected without a number of revolutions and is not stable without socialism) under capitalism as the self-determination of nations, the election of civil servants by the people, the democratic republic, and so on—and, furthermore, that the demand for the liberation of the

colonies is nothing more than “the recognition of the right of nations to self-determination”.

The Polish comrades have not answered a single one of these arguments. They have tried to differentiate between “Europe” and the colonies. For Europe alone they become inconsistent annexationists by refusing to annul any annexations once these have been made. As for the Colonies, they demand unconditionally: “Get out of the colonies!”

Russian socialists must put forward the demand: “Get out of Turkestan, Khiva, Bukhara, etc.”, but, it is alleged, they would be guilty of “utopianism”, “unscientific sentimentality” and so on if they demanded a similar freedom of secession for Poland, Finland, the Ukraine, etc. British socialists must demand: “Get out of Africa, India, Australia”, but not out of Ireland. What are the theoretical grounds for a distinction that is so patently false? This question cannot be evaded.

The chief “ground” of those opposed to self-determination is its “impracticability”. The same idea, with a nuance, is expressed in the reference to “economic and political concentration”.

Obviously, concentration also comes about with the annexation of colonies. There was formerly an economic distinction between the colonies and the European peoples—at least, the majority of the latter—the colonies having been drawn into commodity exchange but not into capitalist production. imperialism changed this. Imperialism is, among other things, the export of capital. Capitalist production is being transplanted to the colonies at an ever increasing rate. They cannot be extricated from dependence on European finance capital. From the military standpoint, as well as from the standpoint of expansion, the separation of the colonies is practicable, as a general rule, only under socialism; under capitalism it is practicable only by way of exception or at the cost of a series of revolts and revolutions both in the colonies and the metropolitan countries.

The greater part of the dependent nations in Europe are capitalistically more developed than the colonies (though not all, the exceptions being the Albanians and many non-Russian peoples in Russia) But it is just this that generates greater resistance to national oppression and annexations! Precisely because of this, the development of capitalism is more secure in Europe under any political conditions, including those of separation, than in the colonies....

“There,” the Polish comrades say about the colonies (I, 4), “capitalism is still confronted with the task of developing the productive forces independently....” This is even more noticeable in Europe: capitalism is undoubtedly developing the productive forces more vigorously, rapidly and independently in Poland, Finland, the Ukraine and Alsace than in India, Turkestan, Egypt and other straightforward colonies. In a commodity producing society, no independent development, or development of any sort whatsoever, is possible without capital. In Europe the dependent nations have both their own capital and easy access to it on a wide range of terms. The colonies

have no capital of their own, or none to speak of, and under finance capital no colony can obtain any except on terms of political submission. What then, in face of all this, is the significance of the demand to liberate the colonies immediately and unconditionally? Is it not clear that it is more “utopian” in the vulgar, caricature-“Marxist” sense of the word, “utopian”, in the sense in which it is used by the Struves, Lenches, Cunows, with the Polish comrades unfortunately following in their footsteps? Any deviation from the ordinary, the commonplace, as well as everything that is revolutionary, is here labeled “utopianism”. But revolutionary movements of all kinds—including national movements—are more possible, more practicable, more stubborn, more conscious and more difficult to defeat in Europe than they are in the colonies.

Socialism, say the Polish comrades (I, 3), “will be able to give the underdeveloped peoples of the colonies unselfish, cultural aid without ruling over them”. This is perfectly true. But what grounds are there for supposing that a great nation, a great state that goes over to socialism, will not be able to attract a small, oppressed European nation by means of “unselfish cultural aid”? It is the freedom to secede “granted” to the colonies by the Polish Social-Democrats that will attract the small but cultured and politically exacting oppressed nations of Europe to union with great socialist states, because under socialism a great state will mean so many hours less work a day and so much more pay a day. The masses of working people, as they liberate themselves from the bourgeois yoke, will gravitate irresistibly towards union and integration with the great, advanced socialist nations for the sake of that “cultural aid”, provided yesterday’s oppressors do not infringe on the long-oppressed nations’ highly developed democratic feeling of self-respect, and provided they are granted equality in everything, including state construction, that of, experience in organising “their own” state. Under capitalism this “experience” means war, isolation, seclusion, and the narrow egoism of the small privileged nations (Holland, Switzerland). Under socialism the working people themselves will nowhere consent to seclusion merely for the above-mentioned purely economic motives, while the variety of political forms, freedom to secede, and experience in state organisation—there will be all this until the state in all its forms withers away—will be the basis of a prosperous cultured life and an earnest that the nations will draw closer together and integrate at an ever faster pace.

By setting the colonies aside and contrasting them to Europe the Polish comrades step into a contradiction which immediately brings down the whole of their fallacious argument.

#### 7. Marxism or Proudhonism?

By way of an exception, our Polish comrades parry our reference to Marx’s attitude towards the separation of Ireland directly and not indirectly. What is their objection? References to Marx’s position from 1848 to 1871, they say, are “not of the slightest value”. The argument advanced in support of this unusually irate and

peremptory assertion is that “at one and the same time” Marx opposed the strivings for independence of the “Czechs, South Slavs. etc.”

The argument is so very irate because it is so very unsound. According to the Polish Marxists, Marx was simply a muddlehead who “in one breath” said contradictory things! This is altogether untrue, and it is certainly not Marxism. It is precisely the demand for “concrete” analysis, which our Polish comrades insist on, but do not themselves apply, that makes it necessary for us to investigate whether Marx’s different attitudes towards different concrete “national” movements did not spring from one and the same socialist outlook.

Marx is known to have favoured Polish independence in the interests of European democracy in its struggle against the power and influence—or, it might he said, against the omnipotence and predominating reactionary influence—of tsarism. That this attitude was correct wits most clearly and practically demonstrated in 1849, when the Russian serf army crushed the national liberation and revolutionary-democratic rebellion in Hungary. From that time until Man’s death, and even later, until 1890, when there was a danger that tsarism, allied with France, would wage a reactionary war against a non-imperialist and nationally independent Germany, Engels stood first and foremost for a struggle against tsarism. It was for this reason, and exclusively for this reason, that Marx and Engels were opposed to the national movement of the Czechs and South Slavs. A simple reference to what Marx and Engels wrote in 1848 and 1841) will prove to anyone who is interested in Marxism in real earnest and not merely for the purpose of brushing Marxism aside, that Marx and Engels at that time drew a clear and definite distinction between “whole reactionary nations” serving as “Russian outposts” in Europe, and “revolutionary nations” namely, the Germans, Poles and Magyars. This is a fact. And it was indicated at the time with incontrovertible truth: in 1848 revolutionary nations fought for liberty, whose principal enemy was tsarism, whereas the Czechs, etc., were in fact reactionary nations, and outposts of tsarism.

What is the lesson to be drawn from this concrete example which must be analysed concretely if there is any desire to be true to Marxism? Only this: (1) that the interests of the liberation of a number of big and very big nations in Europe rate higher than the interests of the movement for liberation of small nations; (2) that the demand for democracy must not be considered in isolation but on a European—today we should say a world—scale.

That is all there is to it. There is no hint of any repudiation of that elementary socialist principle which the Poles forget but to which Marx was always faithful—that no nation can be free if it oppresses other nations. If the concrete situation which confronted Marx when tsarism dominated international politics were to repeat itself, for instance, in the form of a few nations starting a socialist revolution (as a bourgeois-democratic revolution was started in Europe in 1848), and other nations serving as the chief bulwarks of bourgeois reaction—then me too

would have to be in favour of a revolutionary war against the latter, in favour of “crushing” them, in favour of destroying all their outposts, no matter what small-nation movements arose in them. Consequently, instead of rejecting any examples of Marx’s tactics—this would mean professing Marxism while abandoning it in practice—we must analyse them concretely and draw invaluable lessons for the future. The several demands of democracy, including self-determination, are not an absolute, but only a small part of the general-democratic (now: general-socialist) world movement. In individual concrete casts, the part may contradict the whole; if so, it must be rejected. It is possible that the republican movement in one country may be merely an instrument of the clerical or financial-monarchist intrigues of other countries; if so, we must not support this particular, concrete movement, but it would be ridiculous to delete the demand for a republic from the programme of international Social-Democracy on these grounds.

In what way has the concrete situation changed between the periods of 1848–71 and 1898–1916 (I take the most important landmarks of imperialism as a period: from the Spanish-American imperialist war to the European imperialist war)? Tsarism has manifestly and indisputably ceased to be the chief mainstay of reaction, first, because it is supported by international finance capital, particularly French, and, secondly, because of 1905. At that time the system of big national states—the democracies of Europe—was bringing democracy and socialism to the world in spite of tsarism.[10] Marx and Engels did not live to see the period of imperialism. The system now is a handful of imperialist “Great” Powers (five or six in number), each oppressing other nations: and this oppression is a source for artificially retarding the collapse of capitalism, and artificially supporting opportunism and social-chauvinism in the imperialist nations which dominate the world. At that time, West-European democracy, liberating the big nations, was opposed to tsarism, which used certain small-nation movements for reactionary ends. Today, the socialist proletariat, split into chauvinists, “social-imperialists”, on the one hand, and revolutionaries, on the other, is confronted by an alliance of tsarist imperialism and advanced capitalist, European, imperialism, which is based on their common oppression of a number of nations.

Such are the concrete changes that have taken place in the situation, and it is just these that; the Polish Social-Democrats ignore, in spite of their promise to be concrete! Hence the concrete change in the application of the same socialist principles: formerly the main thing was to fight “against tsarism” (and against certain small-nation movements that it was using for undemocratic ends), and for the greater revolutionary peoples of the West; the main thing today is to stand against the united, aligned front of the imperialist powers, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the social-imperialists, and for the utilisation of all national movements against imperialism for the purposes of the socialist revolution. The more purely proletarian the struggle against the general imperialist front now is, the more vital, obviously, is the internationalist principle: “No nation can be free if it oppresses other nations”.

In the name of their doctrinaire concept of social revolution, the Proudhonists ignored the international role of Poland and brushed aside the national movements. Equally doctrinaire is the attitude of the Polish Social-Democrats, who break up the international front of struggle against the social-imperialists, and (objectively) help the latter by their vacillations on the question of annexations. For it is precisely the international front of proletarian struggle that has changed in relation to the concrete position of the small nations: at that time (1848–71) the small nations were important as the potential allies either of “Western democracy” and the revolutionary nations, or of tsarism; now (1898–1914) that is no longer so; today they are important as one of the nutritive media of the parasitism and, consequently, the social-imperialism of the “dominant nations”. The important thing is not whether one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the small nations are liberated before the socialist revolution, but the fact that in the epoch of imperialism, owing to objective causes, the proletariat has been split into two international camps, one of which has been corrupted by the crumbs that fall from the table of the dominant-nation bourgeoisie—obtained, among other things, from the double or triple exploitation of small nations—while the other cannot liberate itself without liberating the small nations. without educating the masses in an anti-chauvinist, i.e., anti-annexationist, i.e., “self-determinationist”, spirit.

This, the most important aspect of the question, is ignored by our Polish comrades, who do not view things from the key position in the epoch of imperialism, the standpoint of the division of the international proletariat into two camps.

Here are some other concrete examples of their Proudhonism: (1) their attitude to the Irish rebellion of 1916, of which later: (2) the declaration in the theses (11, 3, end of S. 3) that the slogan of socialist revolution “must not be overshadowed by anything”. The idea that the slogan of socialist revolution can be “overshadowed” by linking it up with a consistently revolutionary position on all questions, including the national question, is certainly profoundly anti-Marxist.

The Polish Social-Democrats consider our programme “national-reformist”. Compare these two practical proposals: (1) for autonomy (Polish theses, III, 4), and (2) for freedom to secede. It is in this, and in this alone, that our programmes differ! And is it not clear that it is precisely the first programme that is reformist and not the second? A reformist change is one which leaves intact the foundations of the power of the ruling class and is merely a concession leaving its power unimpaired. A revolutionary change undermines the foundations of power. A reformist national programme does not abolish all the privileges of the ruling nation; it does not establish complete equality; it does not abolish national oppression in all its forms. An “autonomous” nation does not enjoy rights equal to those of the “ruling” nation; our Polish comrades could not have failed to notice this had they not (like our old Economists) obstinately avoided making an analysis of political concepts and categories. Until 1905 autonomous Norway, as a part of Sweden, enjoyed the

widest autonomy, but she was not Sweden's equal. Only by her free secession was her equality manifested in practice and proved (and let us add in parenthesis that: it was this free secession that created the basis for a more intimate and more democratic association, founded on equality of rights). As long as Norway was merely autonomous, the Swedish aristocracy had one additional privilege; and secession did not "mitigate" this privilege (the essence of reformism lies in mitigating an evil and not in destroying it), but eliminated it altogether (the principal criterion of the revolutionary character of a programme).

Incidentally, autonomy, as a reform, differs in principle from freedom to Recede, as a revolutionary measure. This is unquestionable. But as everyone knows, in practice a reform is often merely a step towards revolution. It is autonomy that enables a nation forcibly retained within the boundaries of a given state to crystallise into a nation, to gather, assess and organise its forces, and to select the most opportune moment for a declaration ... in the "Norwegian" spirit: We, the autonomous diet of such-and-such a nation, or of such-and-such a territory, declare that the Emperor of all the Russias has ceased to be King of Poland, etc. The usual "objection" to this is that such questions are decided by wars and not by declarations. True: in the vast majority of cases they are decided by wars (just as questions of the form of government of big states are decided, in the vast majority of cases, only by wars and revolutions). However, it would do no harm to reflect whether such an "objection" to the political programme of a revolutionary party is logical. Are we opposed to wars and revolutions for what is just and beneficial to the proletariat, for democracy and socialism?

"But we cannot be in favour of a war between great nations, in favour of the slaughter of twenty million people for the sake of the problematical liberation of a small nation with a population of perhaps ten or twenty millions!" Of course not! And it does not mean that we throw complete national equality out of our Programme; it means that the democratic interests of one country must be subordinated to the democratic interests of several and all countries. Let us assume that between two great monarchies there is a little monarchy whose kingly is "bound" by blood and other ties to the monarchs of both neighbouring countries. Let us further assume that the declaration of a republic in the little country and the expulsion of its monarch would in practice lead to a war between the two neighbouring big countries for the restoration of that or another monarch in the little country. There is no doubt that all international Social-Democracy, as well as the really internationalist section of Social-Democracy in the little country, would be against substituting a republic for the monarchy in this case. The substitution of a republic for a monarchy is not an absolute, but one of the democratic demands, subordinate to the interests of democracy (and still more, of course, to those of the socialist proletariat) as a whole. A case like this would in all probability not give rise to the slightest disagreement among Social-Democrats in any country. But if any Social-Democrat were to propose on these

grounds that the demand for a republic be deleted altogether from the programme of international Social-Democracy, he would certainly be regarded as quite mad. He would be told that after all one must not forget the elementary logical difference between the general and the particular.

This example brings us, from a somewhat different angle, to the question of the internationalist education of the working class. Can such education—on the necessity and urgent importance of which differences of opinion among the Zimmerwald Left are inconceivable—be concretely identical in great, oppressor nations and in small, oppressed nations, in annexing nations and in annexed nations?

Obviously not. The way to the common goal—complete equality, the closest association and the eventual amalgamation of all nations—obviously runs along different routes in each concrete case, as, let us say, the way to a point in the centre of this page runs left from one edge and right, from the opposite edge. If a Social-Democrat from a great, oppressing, annexing nation, while advocating the amalgamation of nations in general, were for one moment to forget that "his" Nicholas II, "his" Wilhelm, George, Poincaré, etc., also stand for amalgamation with small nations (by means of annexations)—Nicholas II for "amalgamation" with Galicia, Wilhelm II for "amalgamation" with Belgium, etc.—such a Social-Democrat would be a ridiculous doctrinaire in theory and an abettor of imperialism in practice.

In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and their fighting for it. Without this there can be no internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every Social-Democrat of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as a scoundrel and an imperialist. This is an absolute demand, even where the chance of secession being possible and "practicable" before the introduction of socialism is only one in a thousand.

It is our duty to teach the workers to be "indifferent" to national distinctions. There is no doubt about that. But it must not be the indifference of the annexationists. A member of an oppressor nation must be "indifferent" to whether small nations belong to his state or to a neighboring state, or to themselves, according to where their sympathies lie: without such "indifference" he is not a Social-Democrat. To be an internationalist Social-Democrat one must not think only of one's own nation, but place above it the interests of all nations, their common liberty and equality. Everyone accepts this in "theory" but displays an annexationist indifference in practice. There is the root of the evil.

On the other hand, a Social-Democrat from a small nation must emphasise in his agitation the second word of our general formula: "voluntary integration" of nations. He may, without failing in his duties as an internationalist, he

in favour of both the political independence of his nation and its integration with the neighboring state of X, Y, Z, etc. But in all cases he must fight against small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation, consider the whole and the general, subordinate the particular to the general interest.

People who have not gone into the question thoroughly think that it is “contradictory” for the Social-Democrats of oppressor nations to insist on the “freedom to secede”, while Social-Democrats of oppressed nations insist on the “freedom to integrate”. However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any other road to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road from the given situation to this goal.

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60 points on Ireland (from the early 1990s)

Ireland is one of the most important issues facing the British labour movement. For a quarter of a century the Six Counties of north-east Ulster have been in a state of latent, and sometimes open, civil war.

In all this time, the left in Britain has been able to do nothing to help our working-class brothers and sisters, the majority of the people in both the Catholic and the Protestant communities, find a way out of the bloody cul-de-sac into which sectarianism, the conflict of national identities and an irrational partition have forced them.

One reason for this is that the left itself has never understood the issues, seeing national liberation struggle where there is communal strife, a potential for socialism where the prospect is of sectarian civil war, and hope for a united Ireland — if only Britain will get its “Troops Out” — where bloody repartition would certainly follow a British withdrawal without a political settlement.

Here in 60 simple, basic, plain propositions we set out our view of the “Irish problem as it really is.” We invite comment and refutation on these propositions.

The basic conflict

1.

The Provisional IRA is backed and sustained by a sizeable part of the Catholic population of Northern Ireland, by a third or more of Northern Ireland’s Catholics.

The IRA and its long war, in Northern Ireland and in Britain, is a product of many decades of British and Orange misrule in the Six Counties, of Catholic-sectarian rule in the 26 Counties this century, and of many centuries of British oppression before that.

It is also the continuation of a long line of Catholic-sectarian politics; it is the antithesis of republicanism. Its main political ancestor is not Wolfe Tone or James Connolly, but Joseph Devlin and the Catholic version of the Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

2.

For half a century before 1969 the Catholics were second-class citizens within a Northern Ireland state ruled by the

Protestant Unionists, under British protection and nominal control.

The Six Counties state was set up to guard Ireland’s Protestant minority from possible oppression by the island’s Catholic majority. The Protestant population wanted it. It was their second-best alternative to all of Ireland remaining united to Britain. Inside the “Protestant state for a Protestant people” (as a Northern Ireland prime minister once described it), Catholics were at the start one in three of the 1.5 million population, bigger as a proportion of the population than Protestant-Unionists would have been in an all-Ireland state. They are the majority in two of the Six Counties — Fermanagh and Tyrone — and in one of the main boroughs, Derry City.

They were discriminated against in jobs, housing and local government voting rights; they were subjected to small-scale police terror by Protestant-sectarian Special Constables.

3.

The Protestants were too frightened of their big Catholic minority, which might “outbreed” them, and of the Catholic-Irish state below the border, to treat them fairly. For fear of the Catholics, and in competition with them for scarce jobs, Northern Ireland Protestant workers tied themselves politically to the Northern Ireland capitalists.

Karl Marx knew what he was talking about when he said, on the basis of the experience of the free common people, the plebs, of ancient Rome, that a nation which enslaves others can not itself be free. Keeping down the Catholics, Northern Ireland’s Protestant-Unionist workers locked themselves into a sectarian ghetto.

4.

Nothing changed until the Catholics revolted at the end of the 1960s, in marches and demonstrations for “civil rights” and “British standards”. At first — before the Provisional IRA had come into existence, and when the then-existing IRA proved no threat to anyone — the Catholics were met with great police violence.

By mid-1969 the Northern Ireland Six Counties state had already lapsed into Catholic-Protestant infighting, and, left to its own devices, it would have spiralled into chaos and civil war. The Six Counties state had shown itself unviable by collapsing.

5.

British soldiers took over the policing of Northern Ireland in August 1969; Britain abolished Protestant majority rule in a Belfast parliament in March 1972 and undertook direct rule.

For 23 years, within the state set up to protect the Protestant majority, Britain has not allowed that Protestant majority to act as a majority, with majority rights, because of the 50-year experience of that majority using its power to oppress the Catholics.

Partition and the Protestants

6.

The attempt to solve Ireland's Protestant minority problem by a partition which created a bigger, and artificial, Northern Ireland Catholic minority problem was only possible because of the brutal power and determination of the British state and the Tory-Liberal government ruling it, after the First World War. It was a stop-gap, not a solution. It is less of a solution now than it ever was.

The artificially created Catholic minority is now more than four in ten of the Six Counties population. Some time in the first two decades of the 21st century Catholics in Northern Ireland will, on present population trends, outnumber Protestants. Northern Ireland may become a Catholic majority state for a Protestant people!

The emergence of this partition and the present situation in the Six Counties can not be understood except in the perspective of the history which produced it.

Britain's dual historical role

7.

For centuries, Britain oppressed Ireland, treating it until late in the 19th century as a severely exploited internal colony. Genocidal wars of extermination; religious persecution; the operation for a century of a relentless system of Catholic-Protestant apartheid; a condition of semi-peonage imposed on the Catholic masses for many generations; rule for much of the 19th century and into the 20th century by a repressive state in which British rights such as habeas corpus were very often suspended; the supervision by the British state of business as usual, including the mass export of food, during a famine that recurred every harvest for four successive years, and in which a million people died — these are some of the terrible elements that stand at the back of British-Irish relations, as are the wars and risings that punctuate Irish history.

8.

But Irish-British political relations is not only a chapter of horrors. With the formation of William E Gladstone's first ministry in 1868 there began an era of economic, social and political reform from above, under pressure from below. Under both Liberal and Tory governments it would last in various phases for half a century. The Ireland that exists now was shaped in its fundamentals by those immense British reforms which, in sum total, amounted to Ireland's "bourgeois revolution".

i. In 1869, the Anglican Church of Ireland was disestablished.

ii. In 1870 Gladstone's Land Act gave the tenant farmers rights on the land for the first time.

iii. On the initiative of the Radical, John Bright, in 1870 the first provision was made for the state to help peasants to become owners of their land by buying out landlords willing to sell. Tenants had to put up one-third of the price and, though the measure was very important in principle, in practice very few did so.

iv. In 1881, a new Gladstone Liberal government legislated much of the anti-landlord programme of the Irish farmers, the "Three F's" — fair rents, free sale, fixity of tenure. This was not only radical but, in the eyes of many of Gladstone's contemporaries — of the famous historian of 18th century Ireland, W E Lecky, for example — revolutionary legislation. It impinged on the landlord's rights of property to such an extent that tenants now shared something like co-ownership with the old landlords. Land courts enforced fair rents, etc.

v. The decisive and all-shaping change, the transition from large-scale landholding by big landlords to a comprehensive system of ownership by the farmers of the land they farmed — the creation of so-called "peasant proprietary" — was systematically carried through over 30 years by British governments after 1885.

Ireland's bourgeois revolution from above

9.

Peasant proprietorship was not a Liberal but a Tory policy. From the 1870s, the Tories, not the Liberals, were the main party of the British bourgeoisie.\*

Beginning with the Ashbourne Act of 1885, and continuing in a series of Acts, the decisive one of which was the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, there was a wholesale transfer of land. The decisive thing in the Tory approach after 1885, the radical break with the previous Liberal conception — the Liberals protested against it — was that the "buying" tenant was not required to put up any part of the purchase price. The state would put up the whole amount, and the buyer of land would then pay the state an amount, usually less than the old rent — even after it had been reduced by the Land Court — for some decades into the future. The British state was giving back to some Irish people, at knock-down prices, what was earlier stolen from the whole Irish people, the land of Ireland. They were deliberately, as an act of social policy, creating many little and not-so-little landlords where there had been but a few very big landlords.

This was the core Tory answer to the Irish problem. Deliberate "social engineering", it was the major, the decisive element in Ireland's controlled, "bourgeois revolution". The process was brought to an effective end by the Free State Land Act of 1923, which tidied up loose ends and settled accounts with the last of the old landlords.\*\*

10.

Political and social reforms accompanied and complemented land reform. In 1898 Britain introduced democratic local government to Ireland — on the then far from democratic UK franchise. The rudimentary post-1909 Liberal welfare state was extended to Ireland, against the will of the Irish middle class (whose leader, John E Redmond, protested in the House of Commons against the 'extravagance' of old-age pensions).

11.

The British government carried through this policy of

economic and social transformation for a number of separate but interacting and evolving reasons.

i. For military strategic reasons: Trotsky, following Engels, thought that Gladstone was reacting to the fear the British ruling class had felt at the prospect of war — for a while, seemingly a real one — between the USA and Britain — which had been actively sympathetic to the South during the US Civil War — at a time, the mid 1860s, when the US-connected Fenian movement was a powerful force in Ireland, with thousands of sworn-in members inside the British Army. If it had come to war, wrote Engels, Ireland might have become a state of the Union, or else an independent republic under US protection.

ii. Because Britain's role in Ireland contradicted its generally liberal and constitutionalist politics: Gladstone had long felt the pressure of European liberal opinion on Ireland. Though European liberals, especially Italians, tended to look askance at the Irish Catholic nationalist devotees of liberalism's Papal enemy, they universally condemned the Irish land system, which English rule fostered and protected in Ireland.

iii. Because of the need to "modernise" Ireland in line with the development of the UK.

12.

Gladstone at first thought that the 1869 and 1870 Acts would suffice to quieten Ireland. (Marx, in his only available comment on the Catholic-Protestant division, thought 'Disestablishment' would solve the Catholic-Protestant antagonism.) It did not.

That the Irish were a nationality distinct from the English was then still being denied — and not only by English statesmen. Such a man as Guiseppe Mazzini, the great Italian preacher of liberation to the nations of Europe, also thought that the Irish were not a separate nationality.

In all, Gladstone would try three levels of approach to England's "Irish question", the final one being recognition of separate Irish nationhood and support for Home Rule. A decade on from 1869/70 he decided it could only be solved by radical legislation on land tenure — the "Three F's".

Reform and revolution

13.

But Gladstone did not come by pure reason to the "Three F's", or Home Rule. Reform from above was spurred by fear of revolution from below. In 1879, faced with the failure of the potato crop, and the terrible prospect of a new famine, the Fenian Michael Davitt organised the Land League.\*

The Land League was a revolutionary peasant union which bound the farmers together for war against the landlords on rents and evictions, challenging the rights of property that Gladstone would modify in their favour in 1881 in an effort to undercut the Land League. Between 1879 and 1882 a bitter land war raged.

Concessions were for decades accompanied by repression: the first British Marxist organisation, the Social Democratic Federation, founded in 1881 as the Democratic Federation, had as catalyst for its coming into existence the struggle against the Liberal Coercion Bill of 1881.

14.

Not only was there peasant social and economic struggle. There was also great political pressure, and in the background the conspiratorial and sometimes terroristic remnants of the Fenian movement. The Home Rule Association was set up in 1870 by a Protestant Tory lawyer, Isaac Butt. By the end of the '70s, Home Rule MPs had been organised into a disciplined force in Parliament under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell. The numerous Irish voters in British cities were a force in politics and the Home Rule organisations amongst them usually controlled their vote. The Parnellites, the allies of the Land League, used every possible form of parliamentary delaying and disruption at Westminster, with the declared intention of making the government of Britain impossible until Ireland was allowed to govern itself.

In 1885, in the first election under the 1884 Act that gave the franchise to the rural poor, the Parnellites returned 86 MPs to Westminster. They held the balance there and ruthlessly used it, "giving" it to the favoured British party. In 1885 Parnell told Irish voters in Britain to vote Tory and they did. In Parliament the Home Rulers backed the Tories.

15.

Now a combination of party self-interest, the evidence of the Parnellites' election victory, and the fact that neither Disestablishment nor the "Three F's" had quieted Ireland pushed Gladstone into his third approach to the Irish question. He decided that Home Rule was necessary. He split his party by it, shedding both the Liberal Whig right and the leaders of the Radical left, most importantly Joseph Chamberlain. These "Liberal Unionists" would work with the Tory Unionists and eventually form one party with them.

Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill — which denied to Ireland government control of foreign policy, the right to raise tariffs and the right to radical action against the landlords — was defeated in the House of Commons, and the Liberal government brought down on the issue in 1886. A second Gladstone Home Rule Bill passed the House of Commons in 1893, but was rejected by the House of Lords, which then exercised an absolute veto.

16.

From 1886 onwards, and especially after the death of Parnell [1891] the Irish were allied to the Liberal Party, though not without frictions, becoming by 1914 a mere tail of that party, dependent on it to one day "deliver" Home Rule.

17.

The Tories and Liberal Unionists rejected Home Rule on the grounds that inevitably it would lead Ireland to full separation, disruption of the Empire, and the use of Ireland as a military base against Britain by Britain's enemies. They evolved a policy of "killing Home Rule with kindness". But more than this self-serving "kindness" was involved in the creation of a peasant proprietary. For economic reasons it made increasing sense to the landlords.

Under Gladstone's 1881 legislation, the landlords had lost a great deal of the control of their own land. Land courts fixed the rents, and tended to lower them. The tenants were militant, and assertive and they had powerful representation in Parliament. In addition, the beginning of shipping corn and meat from Eastern Europe and America threw British and Irish agriculture into a prolonged crisis.

Many landlords came to want to get out. The problem was that the impoverished tenants could not buy them out; so the Tories brought the state exchequer into play on their behalf, evolving a landlord-serving policy that was also, they thought, wise social engineering: they would stabilise Ireland on the basis of peasant ownership. The peak of this British state action came when landlords' and tenants' representatives met and agreed a common policy [1902] and then jointly asked the government to finance a wholesale buying out of landlords. The Wyndham Land Act [1903] was the result. This was one of the decisive events in Irish history. It was the undoing of the social side of the conquest of Ireland, but in a bourgeois and Tory way.

18.

Both the British and Irish Marxists at the time were, for social and political reasons, against peasant proprietary, calling for the nationalisation of the land.

Origins of partition

19.

The forces that generated Partition were both internal Irish forces and forces external to Ireland. Internal:

i. Most colonies can be broadly divided into two sorts: where the colonists form a thin, exploiting layer on top of society, as with European rule in most of Africa, and in India; and where whole societies are transplanted and reproduce themselves, class structures and all, after the original native people are driven out, slaughtered, or marginalised — what European colonists did in North America, Argentina, Australia. Both types of colony existed in Ireland, the latter in north-east Ulster. This was the "fault-line" in "Ireland". Though it does not lie along the Six Counties border, it is the dividing line now.

ii. Over most of Ireland there was a thin smattering of an upper class and its hangers on — a ruling class never accepted, as, for example, the British ruling class was and is widely accepted by the subjugated natives.

iii. Encouraged by the Scots-English state of James the First and Sixth, large numbers of Lowland Scots and English colonists transplanted themselves to Ireland in the

first decades of the 17th century.\* In north-east Ulster, a full society was recreated from these English and Scots settlers. The 'natives' were killed or driven off.

20.

i. The plebeian planters, the so-called "Ulster Scots", inevitably developed a frontiersman outlook towards the Irish "indians". In their majority they were Presbyterians, and thus they too suffered legal disabilities in the 18th century. But, compared to the Catholics, they were free. Settlers tended to hold the good land, and when long leases came up for renewal, to resent Catholic efforts to displace them by offering the great landlord higher rents. Catholics existed on the margins of the colony, and on the high or boggy ground, "protected" for their rent by landlords who could not get enough English or Scots Protestant tenants. Areas of mixed Catholic-Protestant territory developed around the Protestant heartland of Antrim and Down. They form the bloody Borderlands of the present Six Counties.

ii. Protestant and Catholic peasant secret societies fought an intermittent war in the 18th century. The Orange Order was founded by Anglican peasants in 1795 after a skirmish in Armagh between Catholic and Protestant farmers in that long internecine war. Wolfe Tone's Republican United Irishmen formed links with the Catholic underground peasant secret society, the Defenders. This ancient distinction — whose fundamental criterion at any given moment was religious — evolved in the 19th century into the present reality.

iii. As Protestant towns like Belfast and Derry developed economically in the 19th century, Catholics moved in and found work in the lower ranks of the proletariat. They became the majority in Derry City.

21.

During the time of the French Revolution the Presbyterians were republicans, aspiring to unite all the Irish and to win "The Rights of Man in Ireland" by setting up an independent republic. The great fear of the British rulers was that they could, as they aspired to, unite with the Catholic peasants. In fact, "1798" was a series of only notionally connected risings. In the south the peasants war developed elements of a sectarian war against local Protestants — a large group of whom were burned to death in a Wexford barn, at Scullabogue.

22.

Protestants opposed and Catholics welcomed the 1800 Act of Union that abolished the separate — exclusively Protestant — Irish parliament. What proved decisive for the future was that the Union did not, as its architect, British Prime Minister William Pitt, had intended, bring full civil equality for Catholics within the UK. (The King, George III, who had the power of veto, objected that his coronation oath forbade it.) Irish Catholics in the new United Kingdom had to fight for emancipation and equal citizenship. This they did in a legal mass movement led by the liberal Daniel O'Connell, and organised in the villages and towns by the priests. This mobilisation of the Catholic



population was not only a political movement for equality, but, to Protestants, a terrifying demonstration of Catholic, and Catholic church power and of potential Catholic hegemony. Inevitably it developed sectarian traits and came to be seen as mainly sectarian by Protestants.

23.

Catholic emancipation won (1829) O'Connell developed a movement for "repeal of the Union". By now most Protestants had become reconciled to the Union because it brought prosperity to some and was seen by all as a guarantee against domination by the self-assertive Catholic majority.

24.

The Liberal adoption of Home Rule in 1886 ensured that the Protestant population soon moved politically en bloc into support for Unionist Tory politics and that Presbyterians moved into the initially Anglican, and for much of the 19th century despised - it was banned for a while in mid-century - Orange Order.

25.

The strongest labour movement in Ireland existed in north-east Ulster, and it was, because of Home Rule, and because it was mainly Protestant, allied to Orangist landlordism and the bourgeois forces in Ireland. Most workers in Catholic Ireland followed the middle-class Home Rule Party and some supported the Catholic Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

26.

When the Tories "played the Orange card" their game was to use the Irish minority — Unionism had support throughout Ireland — to stop any part of Ireland gaining Home Rule.

After 1910 the Liberals depended on Home Rule votes to stay in government. They passed the third Home Rule Bill. The House of Lords had lost the power of absolute veto, and to stop Home Rule the Tory-Unionists organised an extra-parliamentary movement to threaten armed rebellion against the Liberal government. They declared that they would resist a British backed Home Rule government where they were strong — in Ulster.

From being part of an offensive against Irish Home Rule, the Irish Unionist movement had dwindled into a defensive movement of the Irish minority in Ulster against ejection from the UK and forced incorporation into what they thought of as an alien state.

27.

Backed and incited by the Tories they organised a drilled and armed mass force, pledged to back a provisional Unionist government in Ulster against a Home Rule Dublin parliament. They began to terrorise the "enemy" in their midst, for example driving Catholics and liberal and socialist "rotten Prods" out of the Belfast shipyards.

In one way or another, almost the whole one million strong Protestant population of Ulster was involved: to

characterise this movement only by such things as the pogrom in the shipyards is, therefore, either misunderstanding from afar, with hostility generated by their alliance with British Tory landlords, loan lords and capitalist grandees — as with Lenin, who equated them with Russia's Black Hundreds — or wilful Catholic-Nationalist propaganda.

28.

In 1914, the Liberals backed down and offered a "temporary" exclusion of the Six Counties from Home Rule. The alternative was to try coercion and thus perhaps trigger UK civil war. For the same reason, the Home Rule Party and the Ancient Order of Hibernians backed the Liberal proposal to "temporarily" partition Ireland.

Class and communalism

29.

The Six County exclusion, in which Catholics were an enormous minority, was history's brutally improvised alternative to a democratic Catholic-Protestant agreement. Why did the two sorts of Irish not negotiate a democratic modus vivendi on a confederal basis? The reason why they did not even try for a democratic solution was that both Irish factions looked to their British allies — the Orange to the Tories and the Green to the Liberals — to use the state power to coerce the other Irish — either to stop Home Rule completely [Protestant-Unionists] or to grant all-Ireland Home Rule and coerce the Irish minority [the Nationalists]. This middle-class Catholic Irish policy of the degenerate Home Rule Party is embodied today in the "strategy" of the Provisional IRA — to coerce Britain into coercing the Protestants.

30.

The Protestant-Orange role in creating the present situation is well known. The share of blame for the development of the present situation that belongs to the middle-class leaders of the Catholic Irish and their "Orange Order", the Ancient Order of Hibernians, is less well known.

31.

The Home Rule movement was, especially after the priests and the Liberals destroyed Parnell (1890-91), very much, and at the grass roots very openly, a sectarian movement. In the Catholic majority areas of Ireland there went on a relentless process of winking out Protestant businessmen and of the Catholicisation of everything.\* Local priest power was undisguised and uninhibited. It was a process that would go on for decades after independence.\* It was on one level a natural process — the rise and self-assertion of those long kept down.\*\*

But it was systematised, orchestrated and organised from the early years of the century by a Catholic mirror image of the Orange Order at its grass roots worst, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin).

32.

The AOH claimed origins like the Orange Order and had

long existed in the USA. Recognition by the Liberal government as a friendly society under the 1911 Insurance Act helped it spread.

This very bigoted organisation took control of the Home Rule organisation, the United Irish League (UIL). Already Catholic and sectarian, despite having a few powerless Protestant figurehead MPs, and projecting a liberal and “tolerant” facade in England and Westminster, the Home Rule Party came on the ground to be an outright sectarian AOHist movement.

The AOH at grass roots level did almost everything the Orange Order did.\*\*\*

Some southern unionists found the militant Republican, and then clean, Sinn Fein movement preferable to the old corrupt, venal and demagogic Home Rule movement.

The mechanics of partition

33.

The external force that made partition was the bungling, brutal and partisan force exercised by Britain, which, ultimately, controlled events.

34.

In 1915 the Tories, who had so recently been in open rebellion against the Liberal government, joined the Liberals in a coalition government.\*\*\*\*

A year later Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, and the Tories assumed the majority in the coalition government.

35.

Efforts to reach internal Irish compromise on Home Rule — such as the Irish Convention of 1917 — failed. Sinn Fein won 73% of the seats for 48% of the votes cast in the November 1918 election and set up a secession Parliament (Dial Eireann) in January 1919. The Anglo-Irish War of Independence followed. Britain waged a savage war of lawless terror in the south of Ireland. Specially organised thugs — the so-called “Black and Tans” — were set on the rampage. They shot people in the street, systematically destroyed small rural factories (creameries), and burned the centre of Cork City and of small towns like Ennistymon.

A truce in July 1921 led to negotiation and in December 1921, agreement on Dominion Status — which gave the 26 Counties far more power than the old Home Rule proposals had.

36.

Meanwhile, Ireland had been partitioned by the British Tory-majority coalition government, and a separate government existed for the Six Counties. This was not a democratic solution. It laid the basis for all that has followed.

37.

British force and the threat of British force played a large part. When they negotiated with Britain in 1921, the

electd representatives of the Irish majority were given the choice of an “immediate and terrible” unequal war, or peace with partition. The civil war that broke out in the 26 Counties in June 1922 was immediately precipitated by a British government ultimatum to the Collins-Griffiths government to disarm the opposition.

38.

Partition was presented by Britain, and accepted by the majority Irish, as a temporary measure. In a few years, the extensive Catholic areas of Northern Ireland — which were conquered territory, the people held against their will — would be allowed to join the South; and, so it was said and believed, the Protestant Unionists would thereby be forced to make a new accommodation with the South: Ireland would then unite.

When in 1925 the “Boundary Commission” met to carry out this part of the 1921 British-Irish treaty, the British and the Northern Ireland Unionists conspired to defend the status quo. Finally, the representatives of southern Irish capitalism accepted it, for a cash payment.

Consequences of partition

39.

“Partition will create a carnival of reaction north and south of the border.” That was James Connolly’s prediction. It is often-quoted and applied only to Protestant rule in the Six Counties. It applied, as Connolly knew it would, to both parts of Ireland.

40.

In the north, there was communal rule; a chronically divided working class; a strong Protestant-Catholic labour movement able to unite on trade union and social questions, but unable to work out a common working class answer to the “constitutional question” — unity of the Six Counties with Britain or with the 26 Counties? — and prone in politics to self-murdering division into support for one or the other bourgeois answer. The Six Counties did however benefit from the social advances won by the British working class.

41.

Though the 1937 De Valera constitution claimed jurisdiction over Northern Ireland, where the majority were Protestants, at the same time it made the 26 Counties an explicitly Catholic confessional state, formally recognising a ‘special place’ in Ireland for the Catholic Church. Bishops and Cardinals could simply tell the government what to do and what not to do.\* Social services were rudimentary.

Building on the 1922 Treaty with Britain, the 26 Counties gradually realised full independence, sloughing off Britain’s residual rights, removing the king from his place in the constitution (in 1936), negotiating the withdrawal of Britain’s southern naval bases (1938). It was fully independent by the time of World War II and could remain neutral even in the face of a British and US threat of invasion to reclaim the recently abandoned military bases.

Between 1932 and 1958 the 26 Counties attempted to become economically “independent” and as autarkic as possible behind high tariff walls.

42.

The Southern working-class was cut off from its stronger northern segment and locked into a state whose society had been shaped by the post-1885 Tory land redistribution and by the withering dominance of the Catholic Church.

The southern labour movement too was stultified: socialists were persecuted; priest-led Catholic mobs burned the Communist Party’s building in Dublin in 1933; a priest-led campaign forced the Labour Party to abandon commitments to a — very vaguely defined — Workers’ Republic in 1937.

43.

One consequence of partition — and of the Stalinisation of the Communist movement in the ’20s and ’30s — was that revolutionary politics in Ireland remained heavily confined to the Catholic population and took the form of an anachronistic republican movement with affinities to anarchism — it has juggled with socialist, Stalinist and fascist ideas to buttress its fetishes: Irish unity irrespective of the mind of the Irish peoples and physical force on principle.\*\* Calling itself “Republican” it substituted for the Republican goal of uniting the people of Ireland, the aspiration to force a mechanical, geographical unity of “Ireland”. Politically it was saturated in the official Catholic nationalist ideology of the 26 County state and undertook in its own unofficial way to realise the objectives of that state — Irish “unity”. Essentially, despite its formal adherence to Republicanism, it was in Northern Ireland a communal movement. After 1969 this anachronistic hybrid movement would be able to shape events.

The issues now

44.

Both the people of the 26 Counties and the Northern Ireland Protestants have self-determination. The victims, those who lack self-determination, are the Six Counties’ Catholics. Most of them, those in the Protestant majority areas, could not have self-determination without denying self-determination to the larger population in which they are merged. Here it is a tragic conflict of right against right.

45.

The 26-county Republic is an independent state, part of the European Union. It is not a neo-colony; if, because of foreign investment, it is said to be a neo-colony, then it is a certainty that it is not a British neo-colony. British “occupation” of the Six Counties has nothing to do with it.

The 26 Counties of Ireland cannot become more “independent” than it is now, as a small partner within the strong EU imperialist bloc.

46.

Britain is in Northern Ireland because the majority of the people, who identify themselves as British, want it there and strongly reject Irish unity. It is there because states do not expel territory occupied by its own nationals, and because withdrawal without a political settlement would lead to Protestant-Catholic civil war for the redivision of the Six Counties.

47.

It is the Irish minority that is the stumbling block to Irish unity, not Britain. Ireland remains partitioned because Irish unity and independence have been rendered incompatible and contradictory by the division of the people of Ireland into a minority whose accepted national identity is British and those who proclaim an Irish-Ireland identity.

48.

British rule in the Six Counties is not imperialism in any Marxist sense of the word. Britain does not gain financially, it pays: £2 billion per year. If, in the days of the Cold War, Northern Ireland had military-strategic value for Britain or NATO, it was paid for by the loss of the rest of Ireland which would have had even greater military-strategic value.

26-county foreign policy was, in protest against partition, a pro-West neutralism throughout the Second World War and the Cold War.

49.

The 26 year old war in Northern Ireland erupted because:

- i. the forced, British-controlled “settlement” effected between Ireland’s Catholics and Protestants left over half a million Catholics without self-determination cut them off from the independent Irish state with which they feel most affinity and subjected them, even in the large areas of the Six Counties where they are the majority, to second-class citizenship;
- ii. there existed in Ireland in the 1960s a political tradition of physical-force-on-principle “Republican” politics, embodied in an organisation, and nourished by a widely accepted Catholic-Nationalist culture which was the official ideology of the 26 County state.

The IRA, guided by fixed tradition, used the Catholic civil rights movement as an occasion to deploy its own physical-force-on-principle methods. It thereby fixed even more firmly Protestant resolve to resist a United Ireland.

50.

The IRA war is on the ground primarily a war against Irish Protestant-Unionists who back and serve their state, the British state, in Northern Ireland. Its methods — for example, killing Protestant workers who do such jobs as fixing the lights in a police station — have been the methods of sectarian-communal war at an early stage. That is one reason why we say that the IRA is more the heir of the AOH than of Tone, Connolly or Pearse.

51.

The IRA invokes the age-old Irish struggle for self-determination. It does struggle for Six Counties Catholic self-determination. But this is not the age-old Irish fight for freedom.

It fights for a “united Ireland” in which the Six Counties Protestants — approximately one million of the five and a half million on the island — would, against their will, be sub-merged. It would, in other words, swap the present situation where half a million Northern Ireland Catholics are kept against their will in the Six Counties state for one in which one million Protestants would be forced against their will into a Catholic state.

Therefore, the IRA war can not be defined as primarily a just struggle for Six-Counties Catholic self-determination: it is simultaneously a war to deny self-determination to one million Irish Protestant-Unionists.

Once “in” a united Ireland, they would have to be kept in by as much force as necessary — just as the Catholic Six Counties minority was kept in by force. There would be neither progress nor lasting solution in such a “solution”.

The Irish Catholic majority would, then, like the Six Counties Protestants after 1921, find themselves with the dilemma defined by Marx: a nation which enslaves others can not itself be free.

52.

i. The IRA war can not be defined in any socialist, Marxist or Wolfe Tone Republican sense as a progressive anti-imperialist war.

ii. It is not and cannot ever be a war for Irish unity: Irish unity can not be won by the coercion of war. If the IRA had gained its initial objective of forcing a British withdrawal the certain result would have been Catholic-Protestant civil war to redivide the Six Counties, and then still two, reshaped, Irish states.

iii. Everything the IRA does and advocates points not to a United Ireland, not to something better for Catholics or Protestants than the reality of Northern Ireland now, but to something far worse — civil war on the Bosnian model, and bloody repartition.

Ireland’s only possible revolution

53.

There is no revolutionary nationalist solution to the present Irish problem — no solution based on the forcible overthrowing of existing institutions. It is not that sort of problem. Between Northern Ireland’s Catholics and Protestants there is a conflict of right against right. Progress is not possible except by agreement between the Irish majority and the Irish Protestant minority. There only possible constructive revolution in Ireland is the socialist revolution!

54.

IRA rule by arbitrary and often very brutal direct physical force in the Catholic ‘ghettos’ is regressive. It is not more progressive than the rule there of the agencies of a

bourgeois-democratic state, which upholds at least the pretence, and normally even in the Six Counties some degree of the practice, of rule by law under bourgeois civil liberties.

The majority of Catholics, though they want major changes in the RUC, back the SDLP and reject IRA ghetto-rule, as well as rejecting the IRA’s counter-productive sectarian war.

55.

The IRA have no right that socialists or Wolfe Tone republicans can accept to wage war.

They have the support of a big minority in the Catholic parts of Northern Ireland — but only of a minority. In southern Irish elections, Provisional Sinn Fein gets no more than 1.5% of the vote.

The idea is preposterous that either the fundamental situation in Ireland, or the situation faced by Northern Irish Catholics, or the IRA’s level of — exclusively Catholic — support, gives them the right to make war. The idea that progress in Ireland can be won by murdering Protestants is deeply hostile both to the letter and the spirit of genuine Irish Republicanism.

56.

The IRA/Sinn Fein is entirely without a coherent strategy. No coherent strategy for achieving what they want could ever be extrapolated from their military campaign, as it must be so extrapolated while that campaign goes on, overshadowing all else.

The IRA calls for Britain to leave — but first to disarm the Protestants. That is the contradiction at the heart of this so-called “Republicanism” which is really Catholic communalism. It “solves” the central problem for old-style Catholic Irish nationalism — the opposition of one million Irish Protestants to a united Ireland — by trying to force Britain to coerce Protestants into a United Ireland! This is IRA “strategy” — malignant fantasies.

These Irish “Republicans”, talking of a united Ireland, yet feel free to wage a campaign of widespread murder against Ireland’s minority people because, ultimately, they look not to Wolfe Tone’s Republican goal of a voluntary unity of the people of Ireland but to Britain which they hope will coerce the Protestants for them! Theirs is the political psychology of the trapped Catholic minority in places like Belfast, who cannot ever hope to gain their objectives with their own forces alone.

57.

There is no British solution. A solution can only be forged by the divided people of Ireland. Were Britain to do what the IRA wants, it would not be a solution but another permutation, a rearrangement of the elements, in a continuing conflict of national identities and radically incompatible objectives. Those who advocate a British solution — even the fantastic IRA version of a British solution — are not republicans. Those are not republicans who reject the root idea of the secular Irish politics that

began with Wolfe Tone — that the whole people of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant alike, are equal and have equal rights, however they choose to exercise them.

58.

The Six Counties state as it now exists is untenable, a savage bearpit for all its people. A broader framework, all-Ireland at least, is needed. A federal Ireland, with minority rights of self-government for the Protestant-majority area, and closer, confederal links between Britain and Ireland, is now the only possible framework that could replace the present failed Six Counties experiment.

It is the only “constitutional settlement” that both Catholic and Protestant workers in Ireland could subscribe to, respecting each others’ rights, and building working-class unity in the process.

The idea of mutual agreement, and of mutual guarantees against present or future oppression is a necessary part of the socialist programme. Unless socialists provide a democratic and socialist answer, now, to the “constitutional questions” that divide the workers, workers will continue to accept the answers of the Green and Orange bourgeois and petty-bourgeois factions.

“In so far as national peace is in anyway possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making and strife it is attainable only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government... the constituion of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one national and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority.

This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population etc.” - 1913 Resolution of the Bolshevik Party Central Committee.

59.

The solution to poverty, unemployment, forced emigration and violence in Ireland is socialism. Only a united working class can win socialism. Therefore, the prime immediate objective of socialists regarding Ireland is to foster whatever promotes, or might promote, working class unity, and to spurn and condemn all that stands in its way, whether it be the IRA/Sinn Fein that falsely claims to represent the Republican and Republican-socialist revolutionary tradition in Ireland, or Paisleyism.

60.

“Ireland as distinct from her people, is nothing to me: and the man who is bubbling over with love and enthusiasm for 'Ireland', and can yet pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and the suffering, the shame and the degradation brought upon the people of Ireland – yea, wrought by Irishmen upon Irishmen and women, without burning to end it, is in my opinion, a fraud and a liar in his heart, no matter how he loves that combination of

chemical elements he is pleased to call Ireland.” -

James Connolly.

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Catalonia, the "Norwegian way", and Lenin

"It is the bounden duty", wrote Lenin, "of class-conscious workers to conduct systematic propaganda and prepare the ground for the settlement of conflicts that may arise over the secession of nations, not in the 'Russian way', but only in the way they were settled in 1905 between Norway and Sweden.

"This is exactly what is meant by the demand in the program for the recognition of the right of nations to self-determination".

The "Russian way" meant the way national conflicts were settled under the Tsar (and would be settled again under Stalin). Oppressed nations were told to shut up and submit.

Lenin argued that capitalism simultaneously generated democratic impulses and openings, and tended to undermine them, empty them out, block them. Socialists could and should take up battles for democracy even within capitalism; we could win them; that would be of value even within capitalism.

This was the Norway-Sweden model which Lenin cited:

"Norway [had been] ceded to Sweden by the monarchs during the Napoleonic wars, against the will of the Norwegians; and the Swedes had to bring troops into Norway to subdue her.

"Despite the very extensive autonomy which Norway enjoyed (she had her own parliament, etc.), there was constant friction between Norway and Sweden for many decades after the union, and the Norwegians strove hard to throw off the yoke of the Swedish aristocracy. At last, in August 1905, they succeeded: the Norwegian parliament resolved that the Swedish king was no longer king of Norway, and in the referendum held later among the Norwegian people, the overwhelming majority voted for complete separation from Sweden [it was in fact a genuine 99.95% majority, and though Norwegian women were then denied the right to vote, Norwegian feminists were able to get signatures from the majority of Norwegian women for independence]. After a short period of indecision, the Swedes resigned themselves to the fact of secession.

"What position did the Norwegian and Swedish proletariat take, and indeed had to take, in the conflict over secession [of Norway from Sweden]?"

"After Norway seceded, the class-conscious workers of Norway would naturally have voted for a republic [Norway had a second referendum in 1905, after the one on independence, and voted for a monarchy rather than a republic, offering the post to a Danish prince married to an English princess]. There can be no two opinions about that...

"We do not know whether the Norwegian socialist programme made it obligatory for Norwegian Social-Democrats to hold particular views on the question of secession. We will assume that it did not, and that the Norwegian socialists left it an open question as to what extent the autonomy of Norway gave sufficient scope to wage the class struggle freely, or to what extent the eternal friction and conflicts with the Swedish aristocracy hindered freedom of economic life. But it cannot be disputed that the Norwegian proletariat had to oppose this aristocracy and support Norwegian peasant democracy (with all its philistine limitations) [Norway was then mostly a country of small farmers and fisher-people].

"And the Swedish proletariat? It is common knowledge that the Swedish landed proprietors, abetted by the Swedish clergy, advocated war against Norway. Inasmuch as Norway was much weaker than Sweden, had already experienced a Swedish invasion, and the Swedish aristocracy carries enormous weight in its own country, this advocacy of war presented a grave danger.

"There cannot be the slightest doubt that the Swedish Social-Democrats would have betrayed the cause of socialism and democracy if they had not fought with all their might... to demand, not only equality of nations in general... but also the right of nations to self-determination, Norway's freedom to secede.

"The close alliance between the Norwegian and Swedish workers, their complete fraternal class solidarity, gained from the Swedish workers' recognition of the right of the Norwegians to secede. This convinced the Norwegian workers that the Swedish workers were not infected with Swedish nationalism, and that they placed fraternity with the Norwegian proletarians above the privileges of the Swedish bourgeoisie and aristocracy...

"The Swedish workers have proved that in spite of all the vicissitudes of bourgeois policy... they will be able to preserve and defend the complete equality and class solidarity of the workers of both nations in the struggle against both the Swedish and the Norwegian bourgeoisie".

In a later article, he summed it up like this: "People who have not gone into the question thoroughly think that it is 'contradictory' for the Social-Democrats [meaning, in the usage of the time, the Marxists] of oppressor nations to insist on the 'freedom to secede', while Social-Democrats of oppressed nations insist on the 'freedom to integrate'. However, a little reflection will show that there is not, and cannot be, any other road to internationalism and the amalgamation of nations, any other road from the given situation to this goal".

The indispensable base for developing workers' unity through all the "vicissitudes of bourgeois policy" over Catalonia is that workers in Spain, and across Europe, support the right of the people of Catalonia to decide

freely whether to remain with Spain, or to secede.

Lenin's argument instructs us equally that this indispensable base does not require socialists in Catalonia positively to support secession. The question is "to what extent the autonomy [gives] sufficient scope to wage the class struggle freely, or to what extent the eternal friction and conflicts with [Madrid] hinder freedom of economic life".

A great number of socialists in Catalonia believe that autonomy within the Spanish state - maybe expanded from the current status - does give sufficient scope. To our mind it is intelligent and reasonable also for them to consider whether the advantages of independence (even if they reckon there are some, in general) outweigh destructive side-effects of a drive for independence now.

In 1916, Lenin responded to critics who said "But we cannot be in favour of a war between great nations, in favour of the slaughter of twenty million people for the sake of the problematical liberation of a small nation with a population of perhaps ten or twenty millions!"

"Of course not! And it does not mean that we throw complete national equality out of our Program; it means that the democratic interests of one country must be subordinated to the democratic interests of several and all countries.

"Let us assume that between two great monarchies there is a little monarchy whose kingly is 'bound' by blood and other ties to the monarchs of both neighbouring countries. Let us further assume that the declaration of a republic in the little country and the expulsion of its monarch would in practice lead to a war between the two neighbouring big countries for the restoration of that or another monarch in the little country.

"There is no doubt that all international Social-Democracy, as well as the really internationalist section of Social-Democracy in the little country, would be against substituting a republic for the monarchy in this case. The substitution of a republic for a monarchy is not an absolute, but one of the democratic demands, subordinate to the interests of democracy (and still more, of course, to those of the socialist proletariat) as a whole.

"But if any Social-Democrat were to propose on these grounds that the demand for a republic be deleted altogether from the programme of international Social-Democracy, he would certainly be regarded as quite mad". (The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up)

The position of some on the British left, that the most militant Catalan secessionism must be supported solely on the negative grounds that their militancy will hurt Madrid and cause disruption and conflict, is far from Lenin's socialist view that our guiding principles must be positive ones of consistent democracy. And so is any failure to combat and denounce Madrid's impositions.