

THE EASTER RISING AND IRISH HISTORY



John
Redmond
(left),
Carson,
Birrell

An attempt at a Marxist account
Sean Matgamna

The Easter Rising and Irish history

The two souls of Irish nationalism?

An attempt at a Marxist account

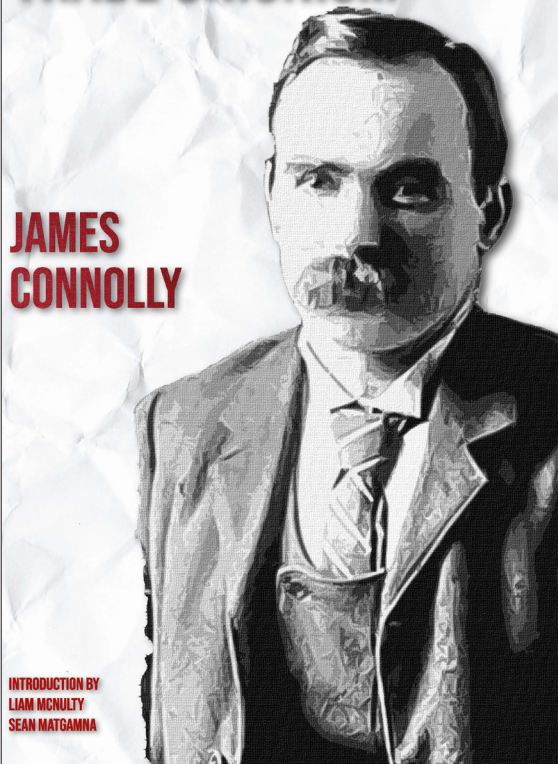
How often have the Irish set out to achieve something and each time been crushed, politically and industrially!

– Engels to Marx, 23 May 1856

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EFFECTIVE TRADE UNIONISM

JAMES
CONNOLLY



INTRODUCTION BY
LIAM MCNULTY
SEAN MATGAMNA

Aiming to replace capitalism with socialism, James Connolly's organising and ideas evolved considerably. One idea he clung to from the turn of the century to his death was industrial unionism, workers' solidarity across grades and trades, and sympathetic strikes. That is how he saw his work in the Irish Transport Union. 64 pages £5

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POBLACHT NA H EIREANN. THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty, six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE,
SEAN Mac DIARMADA, THOMAS MacDONAGH,
P. H. PEARSE, EAMONN CEANNT,
JAMES CONNOLLY. JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

Dedication

I dedicate this little pamphlet to Minnie Cleary, born July 1903 at The Hand, Miltown, whose cousin Patrick O'Mahony was "executed" by the Irish government during the civil war; and to Tommy O'Mahony (born 1908, and no relation to the O'Mahony killed by the Irish government), whose brother John died in the British Army in late July 1916 at Loos, in Belgium, and whose brother Geogheann was crippled by an explosion while fighting in the Free State army in the civil war; and to their daughter, Mary Norton. Minnie Cleary and Tommy O'Mahony married in 1934 while he was awaiting trial as one of 24 men prosecuted in Ennis for trade-union activity. They died in Manchester in September 1974 and November 1974.

Sean Matgamna, December 2023

1. Easter Monday 1916

*Some in the convict's dreary cell
have found a living tomb,
And some unseen untended fell
within the dungeon's gloom,
But what care we, although they be
trod by a ruffian band,
God bless the clay where rest today
the Felons of our Land.
Let cowards mock and tyrants frown,
ah little do we care,
A Felon's cap is the noblest crown
an Irish head can wear
And every Gael in Inishfail, who
scorns the serf's vile brand,
From Lee to Boyne, would gladly
join the Felons of our Land.*

– The Felons of Our Land,
Arthur M Forrester

It is Easter Monday 1916, 24 April. A Bank Holiday, but many places of business have not closed, including the General Post Office. People are in holiday mood, thronging the centre of Dublin. Many are going to the races at Fairyhouse.

British army uniforms are dotted through the crowd. Their headquarters and a large encampment of soldiers is at the Curragh in Kildare. They feel no threat here, even in the middle of the Great War.

The Irish, Orange and Home Rule alike, are solidly with Britain in the war, still vehemently against Germany, which has occupied almost all of Belgium. Like Ireland, Belgium is a small Catholic people. The German empire, recently denounced by German socialists for atrocities in south-west Africa, where it killed maybe 80% of the Herero people, is allied with the Austro-Hungarian empire, which is trying to crush Serbia, and with the Ottoman (Turkish) empire, which has killed a million or more Armenians in a genocide from 1915.¹

The Irish are divided into a vast majority who see the way ahead in legal Home Rule and a close alliance with England, and a tiny minority which is pro-German, or rather, anti-English and because of that pro-German. All this will change radically in the next two and a half years, but not yet. This is still John Redmond's Ireland, the Ireland with 200,000 soldiers voluntarily in the British army, the Ireland that accepts the case against Germany in Belgium and against the Austrians in Serbia. The Irish nationalist majority sees Home Rule as certain in some form and as Irish liberation, or something like it, or the beginning of it: "No man can set bounds to

the march of a nation", as Parnell had said.²

Home Rule for all of Ireland is on the statute book, but suspended until after the war, and the presumption is of some amendment to satisfy the minority in north-east Ulster. As Yeats would later say about Home Rule in his poem on the Rising, Easter 1916: "*For England may keep faith/ For all that is done and said*".

The Irish majority sees war not as an opportunity for Ireland to rise against Britain, as the Irish Republican Brotherhood and James Connolly do. It sees truth, or more truth, in the official war propaganda, that Britain is part of a "police action" to stop German aggression and that this is a war for small nations, than it sees in those like Connolly who try to make excuses and "explanations" for Germany in Belgium – who, in fact, make German propaganda.

It is an Ireland that has not yet lost belief in Britain or faced the urgent prospect of conscription into the Great War. That would come.

A lot of the people crowding the streets are more prosperous than they are accustomed to being, on "separation money" from husbands and sons in the army.

Army

On 1 July 1916 the Battle of the Somme will start. Some 5,500 Irish soldiers will die in it, maybe 2,000 of them Orange, Ulster Volunteer Force men. Many of those die on the first day of the battle. It was only there, in the slaughter and as part of the British dead, that the Irish could unite. Some 35,000 Irish soldiers will die in the World War.

The British army is loyal now, at Easter 1916, to a British coalition government at war. It has not always been loyal. In March 1914 there had been a mutiny, against a Liberal minority government kept in office by the votes of the Irish nationalists. The senior army officers at the Curragh, acting in solidarity with the Unionist Party Tories and the Orangemen in north-east Ireland, issued a proclamation telling the government that they would refuse to be sent against "Ulster".

The Orangemen of the North had in January 1913 organised the Ulster Volunteers to resist the setting up by London of an Irish Home Rule (majority Catholic) government. If the Liberal government set up Home Rule, then, they said, they would not obey the British government or the administration that it would set up in Dub-

lin. The Orangeists had already set up a Provisional Government in Belfast (September 1913). It would, they said, start to act as a Northern government the morning a Home Rule government took control in Dublin. It would not have enough weapons until late April 1914, but then had bought 19,000 German guns. It could count on 100,000 men to make good its threat of civil war.

The British machine of coercion had begun disintegrating in the Liberal government's hands. Nothing was done in response to the officers who announced their unwillingness to carry out orders they did not like. The London government saw in the officers' defiance one of a number of signs which led it to a new policy: the "temporary" partition of Ireland into Green and Orange segments. The Home Rulers let prime minister Asquith take the initiative to put partition into the Home Rule discourse.

On 9 March 1914, the Government announced an Amending Bill. Counties (and the cities of Belfast and Derry) could vote to exclude themselves from Home Rule "for six years". The House of Lords made it the permanent exclusion of Ulster, nine counties. Asquith dropped the Bill. The "Buckingham Palace" conciliation conference of 21-24 July 1914, on the very eve of war, failed. When war came, the Home Rule Bill became law for all of Ireland, unamended, but suspended for the duration of the war.

On this Easter Monday, a military column, some dressed in green uniforms, and some with Boer-war slouch hats, one side pinned up, is marching from Liberty Hall, where they had assembled, up one of Dublin's main thoroughfares, Sackville Street (it will be re-named O'Connell Street). They move towards the large Ionic columns that front Dublin's General Post Office.

To their right, in the middle of the street, near the front of the GPO, stands a gigantic stone column with a statue on top, almost out of sight in the air, commemorating Horatio Nelson, the British Naval hero killed at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, by Frenchmen allied to Irish Republicans. There, Britain made secure a mastery of the seas that it would hold until World War Two. "Nelson's Pillar" is a companion piece to "Nelson's Column" in London. It will last for another 50 years, until unofficial IRA explosives demolish it in 1966, in a deed meant to commemorate the Irish nationalists of 1916.³

The men and women marching to the

GPO in their military formation and with real guns attract jeers from some in the crowd, but mostly indifference and contempt. Some jeer at them as "Germans" or pro-Germans; British propaganda will be eager to identify their Rising as a "German" rising. The insurgents themselves have encouraged this identification with Germany. The big majority of Irish nationalists back Britain in the war. Those marching are proud and eager to identify with the enemy of Britain, Germany. Their proclamation of an Irish Republic will speak of "gallant allies" in Europe, meaning Germany and Austria and Turkey.

The marching men and women stop in front of the GPO, facing it, in the shadow of Nelson in his British uniform. Seemingly in charge is a small man beginning, at 48, to run to fat. His hair is thinning and he has a big, ragged, fierce moustache. This is James Connolly of the Irish Citizen Army, a trade-union militia founded by Jim Larkin and Captain Jack White during the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14. Larkin is in America, but Connolly has kept it up. Now he draws his sword, points it at the columned building and shouts "Charge".

The men and women, to outsiders still playing at soldiers and rebels, rush the building. As soon as they secure it, they start to expel the indignant people who had had other business there.

A crowd of onlookers begins to gather. After a while, a small group of men come out of the GPO, and one moves forward – Patrick Pearse, head of the small secret revolutionary party, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (the "Fenians"), the main group in the Rising. He begins to read a large handbill. It is the Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

He claims that Irish freedom and independence are based not on the living generation that in fact backs the Home Rule party and is for Britain in the war, but on Ireland's "dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood" and on previous insurrections. Only the dead generations, and the insurgents interpreting them, matter. Only the spirits of the insurgents can judge the insurgents. And they are the tiniest minority of a minority.

The proclamation has nothing explicit to say about the Protestant minority, or the partition of Ireland, or Home Rule. It does take votes for women for granted: the Ulster Unionist Council has promised the vote to the Orange women.

1 People in Ireland may have known less about the Armenian genocide than about the horrors in Belgium and Serbia; but the Allies officially denounced it in May 1915. Cardinal Michael Logue, head of the Catholic Church in Ireland, declared in March 1916 that the massacre of the Armenians "shocks humanity".

2 It is a remarkable fact that the Rising and even the Irish war of independence in 1919-21 caused scarcely a ripple amongst the many Irish in the British army all over the world. There was only a small, muted response in India in 1920 amongst the Connaught Rangers, for which one soldier was scapegoated and shot as an example.

3 In 1966 the Rising will be very popular in Ireland and in Irish pubs in England. The Clancy Brothers, from Tipperary and the USA, who have made Irish ballads popular, tour Britain with a concert, "50 Years After". The Dubliners record a song, *Up Went Nelson*, about the demolition of the column: "Poor old Admiral Nelson, toora loo!" 1966 is around the time of the first of the new crop of Orange killings in the North. A small new secret Protestant army which calls itself the Ulster Volunteer Force (after the Great War Protestants) kills a man it mistakenly thinks is of the IRA. It seems to be an anachronistic if not just a lunatic action. One of the Dubliners, Ronnie Drew, will live to march with a big crowd in Dublin protesting against an Provisional IRA bomb that has killed a child in Warrington, England, in 1993.

The proclamation of the Republic is anti-British. As a moving popular song, written by a Catholic monk, The Foggy Dew, will put it: *"'Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky/ Than at Suvla or Sud el Bar"*. In the Rising, Ireland's past, guns in hand, is confronting and challenging Ireland's present.

James Connolly, the small man with the moustache, has, since his article of 29 August 1914 *The War on the German Nation*⁴, made propaganda for the German side, published justifica-

tions of Germany's invasion and deeds in Belgium, and ignored Serbia.

The handbill declaration is shocking in its meaning and sentiment to most citizens of Dublin. It is also strange in its appearance. At the *Workers' Republic* printshop, they ran out of type and improvised. The Proclamation is printed in a mixture of type styles and sizes. 2,000 copies are printed, but the British eventually destroy most of them.

The proclamation is not socialist in the sense of the class struggle social-

ism that Connolly has preached until the end of August 1914. It is "socialistic" in the sense that it asserts the primacy in its Republic of the collective good over individual rights. This is Pearse's "socialism", not Connolly's.

Acoustics are bad, and the bystanders are not there out of special interest. There are seven signatures on the Proclamation, named as a Provisional Government. All seven of them know that by signing this declaration of Irish independence they have signed their

death warrants unless they win.

James Connolly is Commandment General of the Dublin garrison, the military leader of the rising. Patrick Pearse is president of the Irish Republic they are proclaiming, which is dependent on the fate of the 1,200 or 1,400 women and men who stand in arms behind that declaration, near the centre of the greatest Empire the world has seen, in the second city of that worldwide empire.

2. The Revolutionary Tradition

The Rising that erupted in Dublin on Easter Monday, 24 April 1916, was a product of hundreds of years of English oppression of Ireland and of Catholics. It was also, more specifically, the product of an Irish nationalism that had existed through many decades and centuries and had had different forms and embodiments. The Rising marked the beginning of a sharp turn, even a reversal, of what had seemed for decades the victory of a peaceful evolutionary policy, of progress with Britain's agreement, over insurrectionist Irish nationalism.

The Reform Act of 1884 had massively increased the electorate. Before then, rebels like the Fenians, if they wanted to be quickly effective, and they did, could not have confined themselves to electoral politics. After 1884, Irish politicians could.

You cannot understand the 1916 Rising and its aftermath unless you know how by 1916 "physical force" nationalists were coming to supersede British parliamentary action, and how both physical force and parliamentary Irish nationalism fitted into the long and tragic story of an Ireland that had had to live since the mid 12th century within

the reality of English power and domination.

Before 1916, the last great armed rebellion had been that of the United Irishmen, in 1798. That was a number of almost separate events.

In Antrim it was mainly Protestant, Presbyterian, and a lot of it urban. In Wexford, one of the most anglicised areas, already speaking English, it was a peasant rising, some of it led by Catholic sectarians. Their deeds included Boolavogue, where United Irishmen and others fought the British and their local supporters; it also included Scullabogue, where over a hundred local Protestants, children and women and men, were herded into a large barn, which was then set on fire, burning them alive.

In Mayo, in the West, it was the "year of the French", a peasant rising that merged with an undermanned French invasion, and a Republic that covered only a part of Connaught. After some success against British soldiers, the lack of French reinforcements led the French soldiers to surrender. Captured French were treated as prisoners of war; Irish peasants in arms were rebels, and they were hanged.

In 1803, Robert Emmet, a brother of Thomas Addis Emmet, one of the United Irish leaders, planned another uprising, but an accidental explosion in their armoury forced them to take to the streets unready. Robert Emmet, aged 25, was hanged in public in Dublin and his head cut off as the head of a convicted traitor. A speech he made during the trial was learned and recited by Irish nationalists all over the world for 200 years and more.

Between 1798 and Robert Emmet and the 1916 Rising there were a number of events called Risings as, so to speak, almost courtesy titles. William Smith O'Brien was sentenced to death for the rising of 1848, set against the background of the famine. He was reprieved. James Connolly made fun of his "Rising" as nearer to comic opera than serious politics.

The Fenians

The Irish Republican Brotherhood ("Fenians" was the name of its American section), which emerged after the Famine of 1845-9, was a serious organisation – in 1867 they had 15,000 Fenians in the British Army. Much of their organisation was in British cities with a

big Irish population such as Liverpool. They made an effective organisation in America, bringing the wealth and numbers of Irish America into Irish affairs. The rising in 1916 was an IRB Rising.

The Fenians of the 1860s saw Ireland wasting, losing millions of people. On top of the million dead of hunger and cholera, an additional million had fled for their lives around the time of the Famine. The Fenians had a guiding maxim, "soon or never". There was no constitutional way forward for them. The franchise was not given to the rural Irish until 1884.

But they missed their chance in 1867, when they failed to act with anything like the strength they had. Their effect then was nonetheless great – they frightened the British ruling class and entered the imagination of both sorts of Irish. Northern Protestants to this day call all Irish Catholics "Fenians". But their "Rising" was feeble.⁵

After that, with the Land War and Parnell, a transition in Irish politics began, to evolutionism and legal processes of reform. But the Fenians were not only a response to the Famine. They were also a product of many centuries of history.

3. England's first colony

Ireland is referred to by some ancient Romans, and by some ancient Greeks, but very little was known to them, or is known to us, about it. It was always on the fringe of the ancient world, never an organic part of it, never a unit within it. Like what we know as Scotland, it was traded with but never conquered by Rome. It must have had sea landing places of some sort, but it had no towns, no places with the functions of towns, until the invading Danes, from the 9th century, founded the ports at Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Wexford.

The nearest it had to Gaelic towns was settlements around monasteries which had some of the functions of towns, such as markets.

In the West, the fall of Rome in the 5th century led to a tremendous de-urbanisation. London itself may for a while have ceased to function as a town. But Ireland was rich in land, timber, cattle. Like ancient Greece, perhaps, it had an island-wide formal language, religion, gods and demigods, an all-island mythology. Its bearers were travelling lawyers and genealogists who were the carriers of a formal Irish Gaelic tongue. Some of these remained, as a literary caste, even after the triumph of Christianity and its priests, from about the second half of the sixth century.

It seems probable that scholarly refugees from the fallen Roman Empire played a part in making Irish monasteries the centres of learning in Europe

that they became. In about 800 AD, when Charlemagne ruled Germany and France, if someone wanted to learn Greek he would travel not East to the extant Roman Empire at Byzantium, but West, to the edge of the world as it would be known to Europe for 1,000 years to come, to Ireland.

Irish missionaries converted much of now-pagan Europe and much of Britain to Christianity. The effect on the plain people of Ireland from the monastic islands of culture was not great. The monasteries were an elite culture. The monastic archipelago of learning and religion probably coexisted side by side with, or overlapped with, the societies that threw forth marauder bands against what had been Roman Europe.

Then came the invasions of the Norse – in Ireland they are "the Danes" – the first of which took place in the year 795 of the Christian Era. The Norse shallow-draft longships sailed over Ireland's many rivers to attack the rich monasteries. Later they began to colonise, and built seaports and towns.

In Ireland at that time there were over a hundred "Tuaths", states or rather semi-states. The law was enforced by families, not by "special bodies of armed men". Each had its king, owing allegiance to one of five provincial kings and many under-kings. There was a hereditary High King (Ard Ri). What that title meant at any time depended on who held it. Brian Boru held it at what was considered the decisive bat-

4 In the *Irish Worker*, paper of the Transport Workers' Union

5 Henry Hyndman of the British Marxist movement knew James Stephens when he was responsible as Head Centre of the Fenians for the failure of plans for a rising in 1865. Hyndman said Stephen was a man of socialist views.

tle, Clontarf in 1014, though Gael and Dane were on both sides at Clontarf.

Brian Boru was a usurper. In the Irish system, succession was by any male from four generations of the noble families. There was demotion from the succession and its advantages for any one of the ruling families who had not held the kingship in four generations. This meant the possible successors were numerous and that the noble families were almost impossible to wipe out, but it meant too that the kingship was frequently in dispute. A century and a half spanned the time between the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, which is declared to be the end of the Viking period, and the landing of the first Norman knights in 1169 and then of Henry II in 1171. The quarrelling of Irish nobles continued in the interregnum after Clontarf and led directly to the Norman invasion.

Macmurragh, king of Leinster, did badly against O'Rourke, prince of Breifne, whose wife he had abducted.⁶

He got the agreement of Henry II, the Norman king of England, to recruit Norman knights to go to Ireland and help him. The Pope Nicholas Breakspear, Adrian IV, had already bestowed Ireland on the English king in 1155. The Irish Church was seen as scandalous by much of the Church in the rest of Europe. In Ireland such things as marriage were not religious sacraments, and secular divorce was allowed. Their enemies said that this was polygamy and polyandry.

The Norman "Strongbow" (Richard de Clare, second Earl of Pembroke) landed in August 1170. Norman military technique and equipment was greatly superior and they won easy victories. There is a flavour of what the Spaniards, vastly outnumbered but with horses and guns, did to the Incas and Aztecs they found in the Americas in the early 16th century. Afraid that his knights in Ireland would grow independent, Henry II soon followed after them.

Macmurragh was an elderly ruffian who died soon (May 1171). His daughter Aoife (Eva) had married Strongbow. Strongbow now became King of Leinster, Macmurragh's chosen heir. That made Ireland part of an empire almost forgotten today, the Angevin empire, covering England, Normandy, Anjou, Aquitaine, and more. Its language was French. It took 300 years of the melding of Norman and Anglo-Saxon to make them English, and to make English, not Norman-French, the language of England's court.

From the mid 12th century Norman feudal invasion to, roughly, the mid 16th century, which saw a new policy of "consuming" Ireland, Norman Ireland evolved as England did, following behind, and came to be English Ireland and English early-capitalist Ireland.

At first there was vigorous Norman invasion of Gaelic Ireland from a base fluctuating around Dublin, known as

The Pale. Norman overlords were set up over most of the Island. Typically that took the form of Irish chiefs and kings accepting Norman overlords and paying them feudal homage that overlaid and subordinated to itself the existing Irish system of exploitation of the common people by the Irish king and Irish chiefs and warlords.

In the century and a half between the Danish defeat at Clontarf in 1014 and the Norman invasion there had been a vigorous and effective "imperialising" Ard Ri, Turlough Mór O'Connor, king of Connaught. The tendency was towards something like an effective Irish system of succession. But Turlough died in 1156, and his successor was his son, Rory O'Connor, who accepted Henry II's overlordship in the Treaty of Windsor in 1175. He was the last crowned Ard Ri.

Irish chiefs were, directly or indirectly, liegemen of the kings of England and their feudatories. There was a "Gaelic revival" in the 14th century which can be seen ethnically as part of Irish responses to Norman English rule, or else from its social effect: the domination of the country over the towns. In 1315 there was a powerful Scottish invasion which had some Gaelic support and was seen as a catastrophe by the Norman-Irish towns and most of the monasteries. The working people of Drogheda turned out against them.

In England the open warfare of the Wars of the Roses lasted about 30 years (1455-85) and devastated the nobility. In Ireland such interruptions of succession were repeated over many hundreds of years, though most likely with less destruction than the Wars of the Roses.

The tendency was for chieftains of Norman origin to meld with Gaels by marriage, and to adopt customs fitting the country and Gaelic law, which for example excluded women from the succession. The overall English state intervened to stop and undo the Norman-English and Irish melding as the Anglo-Saxons and Normans had in England by the end of the 14th century. For instance, the Statutes of Kilkenny in 1366 forbade intermarriage between the native Irish and the native English, compelled English colonists to speak English, required that the English in Ireland be governed by English common law, dress, and custom, instead of the Irish Brehon law, and mandated the separation of the Irish and English Catholic churches. This was mainly to stop the Norman-English being absorbed and losing their identity to Gaelic Ireland.

But the identities were preserved, and the Gaels were "the Irish enemy", the "mere Irish".

Internecine war was the norm, and the Norman-Gaelic feudal chiefs merged Norman feudal customs with for example the Gaelic custom of coyne and livery – the "free" quartering of their soldiers on their tenants. Quartering soldiers on dissidents would be called

ESSENCE OF PARLIAMENT.

EXTRACTED FROM THE DIARY OF TOBY, M.P.



The English middle-class weekly Punch mocks the Ulster Unionists, drilling with wooden guns and led by Edward Carson and Lord Londonderry. Soon the Unionists would have real guns. (Punch, 22 May 1912)

"dragooning" in France in the 17th century and was then imposed as an effective coercion on Protestants and Jews to convert to Catholicism.

The English and the English state in Ireland (and the Church) always exercised a predatory, hostile rule, varying in degree and type from time to time and from case to case. The view that the lords, Irish, or Norman-Irish, ever represented the Irish "common people" or represented them more than the English lords, is nationalist and "Gaelic" fantasy and a misconstruing of history.

A hostile state

Ireland, Norman and English people too, was held in the grip, loose or tight, of a hostile state that intervened, when it could or felt it needed to, to again divide invaders and their descendants from ancient Gaels, and to block as they could the Gaelicising of the Normans or English.

People did know themselves as Gaels, Normans, Anglo-Saxons etc. At the beginning of the 15th Century some in the North of Ireland wrote to the Pope complaining about discrimination against them as Irish (these were excommunicated) but in general there was no sense of national identity such as developed afterwards and no sense of a fundamental religious divide until late in the 16th century, though there were two distinct Catholic churches in Ireland, the native Gaelic church and an English Catholic church.

Wars of genocide, one aim in which was to kill as many Irish as possible, men, women, and children (for instance, a bounty was paid for Irish heads) were fought in Munster (late 1570s and 1580s) and in Ulster (the 1590s and until 1603). The Gaelic leader in Ulster, Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, had been on the English side in the Munster war, which for the first time

raised the notion, also, that the Irish championed Catholicism against the heretics of Elizabeth. That note would come to predominate.

The sour joke here is that at the time of the Norman-English invasion, and before it and afterwards, the Church had been foremost in denouncing Gaelic Ireland and the Gaelic church in Ireland, accusing the Irish of polygamy and polyandry. The bishops had been foremost in advocating invasion. In response to Elizabeth from about 1570, and to Jesuit missionaries, the Irish became the champions of the Pope and his Catholicism against the heretic Elizabeth.

When serfdom in Ireland was formally abolished in 1605 (it was never formally abolished in England), the abolition was decreed by the English absolute monarchy to strike at Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. He was, to the English, owner of vast tracts of land, which to his tenants were tribe-land.

The bourgeoisie started not by coming to power but by sharing power with the lords of the land, and that by way of an absolute monarchy, raising the monarch above everything else. The monarchy was raised above society and the lower-level rulers in a way that it never had been before. Henry VII (who won the crown at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, at the end of the Wars of the Roses) was the first of the English absolute monarchs. Many of the nobility had been killed off in the Wars of the Roses. Henry subordinated the nobility and took an unprecedented absolute power to himself, and not only in England.

Gerald Fitzgerald, the Earl of Kildare, had ruled Ireland for England and his family, and he was sometimes called the uncrowned king of Ireland. It was the nearest Ireland came to the emergence of an organic historical ruler and

⁶ The story was well known in 19th century Ireland and middle-class England from one of Moore's Irish melodies, The Song of O'Rourke, Prince of Breifne

a real melding of Norman and Gael. He was on the Yorkist losing side in the Wars of the Roses, but at first England's absolute monarchy dared not act against him, even though Dublin continued after Bosworth to be an open centre of Yorkism.

It was only the second absolute monarch, Henry VIII (1509-47), who felt strong enough to cut down the Fitzgeralds, and he did. But something

far more important changed in the relationship between England and Ireland around that time.

England began to "consume" Ireland with a new economic intensity. To Ireland, England had always at best been a semi-hostile power, insisting as we have seen in the separation in Ireland of Anglo-Norman and the "mere Irish" or the "Irish enemy".

In the mid Tudor period people out

to get rich reflected on the fact that England did not, like Spain and Portugal, have gold and silver to rob in South America. But England had Ireland. And Ireland had tremendous wealth in good land, vast forests, uncleared land, and herds of cattle, unexploited.

And Ireland was relatively close and at England's mercy. Engels (in a letter to Marx, 23 May 1856) would call Ireland England's first colony, and it was.

The English robbery of Ireland was the main basis of England's first accumulation of capital. Using policies that were soon used in England's America, to which Henry VII had had the foresight to lay claim, the English Crown began to clear and plant, to depopulate and repopulate Ireland.

4. Via Dolorosa

In the 1640s, in the English bourgeois revolution, came the Confederation of Kilkenny of the Irish and the Old English Catholics (1642), and Oliver Cromwell.

The English Revolution took the form of civil war in which Parliament established its supremacy over the absolutist king. When a king was restored in 1660, it was by the will of Parliament (though it was the "supplementary" revolution of 1688 which codified that: and it was then that things like habeas corpus, an end to pre-publication censorship, etc. were established). But for Irish people there is no evading the fact that the English bourgeois revolution was led by Oliver Cromwell, whose "New Model Army" was also a sort of party – ideologically schooled and disciplined – the source, along with the revolution of 1688, of the ideas of the American revolution, of the French revolution, of the United Irishmen, and of later Irish republicanism.

There is also no evading that in Ireland, which he invaded in 1649, Cromwell was a genocidal butcher and an enslaver.

It was a bit like soldiers who had fought in Lincoln's anti-slavery army in "America's Second Revolution", the Civil War, and then went west and helped conquer, murder, cow, and make captive the Amerindians. Whether English Marxists like it or not, that was a part of their bourgeois revolution; and whether Irish Marxists like it or not, that was one part of the great period of bourgeois enlightenment in history upon whose achievements socialists aim to build socialism.⁷

In 1641, a year before the English Civil War started, rebellion broke out in Ireland. In the North, it was a rising that drove out the Protestants who had settled there in the previous 30 years and before. (North-east Ireland and parts of Scotland had been connected for many centuries, on and off). The earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell had fled to Spain in 1607. Ulster, like the rest of Ireland at different times, was "planted". Now those "planted" were of a different religion from the Irish and what were called the Old English in Ireland. They were Anglicans, members of the official

church, and Dissenters.

The areas of future Protestant strength, Antrim and Down, were not planted by the government, but rather by private companies. Donegal, Londonderry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Cavan and Armagh were planted by the government – that was "the Plantation of Ulster" – but migration to there was organised by English and Scottish merchants.

Often the settlers were driven out and treated badly. Some were killed.

A version of the story of the killing and driving out of the settlers, but grossly exaggerated, became thereafter a big force in Protestant propaganda and self-justification. In fact maybe 2,000 died. In the official version, more settlers died at the hands of the "redskin"-like Irish than there were Protestants in all Ireland.

The frightfulness was exaggerated and used for ever after to justify enormously greater frightfulness against the Irish. It would be a well-known pattern in many countries over the next 500 years.

Much of Ireland revolted, and England was preoccupied through the 1640s. The Irish organised their own state, the "Confederation of Kilkenny", from 1642. It was part of Catholic Europe, allied with Spain, France, and the Pope. The Confederation's greatest military commander, Owen Roe MacNeill, had served Spain in the wars in the Netherlands. Its centre for a time became Cardinal Rinuccini, the Papal Nuncio. It had contact with the English Royalists.

The Parliamentary side, Cromwell's, raised money on Irish land that had yet to be reconquered. The King was defeated and in January 1649 beheaded in London. It was a blow for republicanism that would echo down the decades to be repeated in Paris in 1793. Then Cromwell turned his attention on Ireland and became Cromwell the genocide.

A small section of Cromwell's New Model Army refused to go to conquer Ireland with Cromwell, but that had no impact on what happened. Cromwell went to Ireland in August 1649, and there he butchered and murdered,



Carson (left) and Redmond with "Mlle Ulster" (Punch, early 1913).

confiscated the land, and enslaved the people. The New Model Army was vastly superior and was soon in military control.

Criticism of Cromwell in Ireland tends to focus on Drogheda, which was besieged and sacked and a lot of the people massacred. The same thing happened in Wexford, which resisted too, was besieged, and massacred. It was terrible, but commonplace in that time, that cities which resisted were besieged and, when they fell, they were pillaged and their defenders and people massacred.

The atrocities in Drogheda and Wexford were not especially horrible or uncommon in warfare of that age. Many of those slaughtered in Drogheda and Wexford were English Royalists. But the country was reduced militarily. Its people were then at the mercy on the Cromwellians. A large number of them were involuntarily sent under indenture to the West Indies – that is, they were enslaved and deported. They were, in Ireland, forbidden to be Catholics. The

religion of a whole people was outlawed. A whole people was outlawed.

Cromwell was tolerant of other Protestant opinion – but not at all of Catholicism. This was still the era of the wars of religion. The Thirty Years War of 1618-48, which ruined Germany for generations, ended only a year before Cromwell came to Ireland. Catholicism was superstition and idolatry. It was an international organisation that told its people what to do. It was militant and suppressive against Protestants. It was assertive for what its priests had for over a thousand years passed off as Christianity, and which militant Protestants like Cromwell were trying to banish. The Mass was the central ceremony of Catholic worship. To Cromwell it was idolatry and superstition.

The Spanish Inquisition played a big role in European Catholic life and in Protestant dreads. So did the great massacre of Protestants in Paris on St

⁷ At the Restoration in 1660, Cromwell's body (he had died in 1658) was dug up and hung on a gibbet. The Whigs who ruled Britain in the 18th century revered the supplementary revolution of 1688, and some of them had some idea of what Cromwell's revolution had been in Britain. But in general Cromwell was in bad odour in England for 200 years, until Thomas Carlyle published his letters and speeches in 1845. Carlyle was a mentor of some of Young Ireland. He may have influenced John Mitchel in favour of Black slavery in America, on which he wrote.

Bartholomew's day in 1572. So, from 1641 onwards, would the stories and fantastic figures from Ireland of Catholic persecution of Protestants in Ireland.

Like the war in the 20th century against the Stalinist international, the Protestants' wars against the Catholic Church were against a real force, but the persecution they inspired was out of proportion, uncontrolled, and some of it using the same methods they denounced in "the enemy".

Most of Europe was on the way to the religious indifference of the 18th century, but this was also still the time of the threat of torture put on Galileo Galilei in Rome in 1633 to avow that the Sun moved around the Earth, though he knew better.

In Ireland a whole people was persecuted and robbed and conquered and kidnapped, its very right to exist at all was denied, in the name of the people

of England, of the "English people's party" of Cromwell. And Irish Protestants had their own story, of their massacres by Catholics and their escapes.

"By engaging in the conquest of Ireland", wrote Marx, "Cromwell threw the English Republic out the window. Thence the Irish mistrust of the English people's party".

The victorious Cromwellian Puritans told all the Irish to go to "hell or Connaught" (Connaught and Clare, to be exact). And they had personal gain in view when in Ireland they were militant Protestants. An English military man complained that there he couldn't find a tree "to hang a man" or water "to drown him". All the Irish were at first told to go, but they found they couldn't get replacements for the labouring Irish and therefore needed them. Protestant writings in the 16th century tend to distinguish between the working

Irish and "the swordsmen" who were said to be the cause of all troubles and all resistance.

Under Cromwell the first political union of the two islands took place. It would be reversed with the 1660 restoration of the monarchy.

Two and a half million acres of Irish land was confiscated. The Cromwellian soldiers were given land in lieu of wages. They had a bitter self-justification for killing Catholic children: "Nits will make lice", according to the great historian Lecky.

But to them Ireland was alien frontier territory. English women were very scarce there, so who would the Cromwellian soldiers and settlers mate with? They took the only wives there were, and married Catholic Irish "squaws". And many of their children were raised as Catholics by their Irish mothers. Catholic Ireland was subjugated, but



Mr. JOHN REDMOND.

The British Library

Home Rule leader John Redmond trying to charm the snake of Ulster. (Punch, mid 1913).

not assimilated.

5. From the Penal Days to the Fenians

What wonder if our step betrays

The Freedman born in Penal Days?

— Thomas Davis

The Penal Laws proper began after the wars in Ireland which followed the peaceful "Glorious Revolution" in England of 1688. Richard Talbot, Earl of Tyrconnell, raised an army, in alliance with Louis XIV of France, to restore the deposed Catholic King James II to power in England and Scotland. After the victory of the supporters of William of Orange at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691, the Penal Laws were brought in to suppress Catholics, seen as allies or potential allies of rival powers such as France.⁸ They lasted formally until Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

William, a relatively tolerant Dutchman of the time, was inclined to honour his Treaty of Limerick (1691) with the Irish, recognising Catholic rights. The Anglican Irish colonial Parliament in Dublin insisted on breaking that promise, and much else. All propor-

tions acknowledged and guarded, the development was akin to the "carnival of reaction North and South" that came with the two Irish states in the 1920s.⁹

Under the Penal Laws, the Catholics could not hold commission in the army, enter a profession, or own a horse worth more than five pounds. Catholics could not possess weaponry and arms, could not study law or medicine. A whole "nation" of Irish Catholics was outlawed, "Forbid to plead/ Forbid to read/ Disarmed, disfranchised, imbecile" (Thomas Davis).

The severity of the Penal Laws began to be relaxed around the 1770s, and can be said to have effectively ended by 1795, when the English government paid for what became the leading Catholic seminary in Ireland, Maynooth. The British government now recognised the Catholic church as one of the most conservative forces on Earth.¹⁰ But the laws were not repealed until Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

The Penal Laws outlawed a people

and by any measure were a disgrace, to be denounced and condemned, then and now. They were modelled on such measures as followed the 1685 revocation of the Protestant-tolerating Edict of Nantes against Protestants, who were then numerous, and Jews, to force them to convert to Catholicism.

In France, the measures were largely successful in forcibly converting people to Catholicism; in Ireland, they were a failure in forcibly converting people from Catholicism. The heroic spirit of defiance, resistance, and fidelity prevailed. In France the coercion subdued minorities; in Ireland it both outlawed a people, trying to exploit them while keeping them alive or trying to destroy them, and inspired a people to resist. (And England did not want to convert the mass of the Irish; they wanted them as an enslaved race of Catholic "yahhoos".)

Of further great consequence in Irish history was that the Union of Britain and Ireland, pushed through after the

1798 rising and enacted from January 1801, was not accompanied by Catholic Emancipation as British prime minister William Pitt intended. King George III vetoed it.

Catholics had tended to favour the Union, while many Protestants, discontented with England as Spanish colonists in South America were becoming discontented with Spain, opposed it. But now Catholic emancipation had to be won by agitation, partly Church agitation organised through the machinery of the chapels in the first 30 years of the Union. Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Association became the defining force of a new Irish nationalist politics. After winning Catholic emancipation, it campaigned for Repeal of the Union, i.e. restoration of Irish home rule.

Then came the Famine of 1845-9 and the Fenians. But after that, a new turn.

6. The evolution of evolutionary politics

Speaking in Ennis in September 1880, the Irish nationalist MP Charles Stewart Parnell urged the farmers to use the weapon of "shunning", what became known, after its first target, a Mayo land agent named Boycott,

as "boycotting." The Land League was a sort of agrarian trade union, started by Michael Davitt during a semi-famine in Mayo in 1879, and was allied with Parnellism in Parliament. The peasants and the land were made to be synonymous.

The tenant farmers' objective in the battle on the land was that they should become owners of the land, surrogates so to speak of the Irish people.

The "Land War" that raged across Ireland, was a revolutionary class war

backed by an aggressive parliamentary party. The IRB eventually backed this "New Departure".

All over Ireland farmers resisted eviction and boycotted those who took evictees' farms. They rejected what

8 James Connolly made much of the secular Papal state of the time having a *Te Deum* sung for the Protestant victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, of the bloc of states that had in it William of Orange. It was however, a paradox, an anomaly, an exception, a debater's point which had no relevance to 20th century Ireland and did not change the fact that the Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne were mercenaries on the side of the divine right of kings in Britain. At best it would make a bigot pause and think, which, perhaps, is all Connolly hoped to do by the reference. "In 1686 certain continental powers joined together... for the purpose of curbing the arrogant power of France. These powers [included] the Emperor of Germany, the King of Spain, William Prince of Orange, and the Pope. King James II of England, being insecure upon his throne, sought alliance with the French Monarch. When, therefore, the war took place in Ireland, King William fought aided by the arms, men, and treasuries of his allies... and part of his expenses at the Battle of the Boyne was paid for by His Holiness, the Pope. Moreover, when news of King William's victory reached Rome a *Te Deum* was sung in celebration".

9 The persecution was England's in overall responsibility, but directly much of it in the 18th century was the work of the colonial Irish parliament in Dublin. There is a disheartening parallel with the Northern Ireland state in the 50 years of the rule of the parliament in Belfast, whose Protestants were responsible for much anti-Catholic persecution in Northern Ireland. In both cases England abolished the Irish parliament, in 1801 and in 1972.

10 Before he was goaded into leading the pikemen in Wexford in 1798, Fr John Murphy had gone around, as by Church policy he was committed to, disarming the people.

they considered unfair rents, and paid what they thought fair into a fund from which the landlords could collect when they "saw sense" — Land League sense. Irish farmers challenged the power of the owners in virtually everything. Various parts of Ireland were "proclaimed" — turned over to police-military rule. On the land it was something like the situation that would later be called "dual power".

Parnell was arrested and lodged in Kilmainham Jail. The mighty British Government went to Parnell and agreed the "Kilmainham Treaty" of 1882 to limit the Land War.

The Reform Act of 1884 enfranchised many farmers. The first election under the new rules, in 1885, gave the Irish party of Parnell 63 seats, a majority in Ireland. It converted prime minister Gladstone to Home Rule.

Once the Liberal Party came out for Home Rule in 1885-6, the Home Rule party was inevitably attached to the Liberals. They could never otherwise hope for a majority in the Commons, and they began to focus on getting that majority once one of the British parties, the Liberals, came out for Home Rule. It was a corrupting influence. Instead of seeking some accommodation with the other Irish, they looked to the Liberals to coerce them. It was similar with the Irish Unionists and the Tories.

Even under the Tories, however, in 1886-92 and 1895-1905, British governments had now been convinced of the need for reforms to pacify Ireland, and world-market conditions in the late 19th century and early 20th century made the landowners amenable to state-sponsored schemes for their tenants to buy the land. There was an epoch of reform, with zigzags and disruptions of course.

The basic two trends

Parnell was an autocrat, but one with militant instincts, prepared to cooperate with the Land League to compel the Liberals to give by fear what they would not give for better reasons. In 1889 one of the Irish Party, O'Shea, an MP, sued his wife Katharine O'Shea for divorce. Parnell and Katharine O'Shea were revealed to have been living together for ten years in Brighton. It had not been a secret.

The leader of the Radical wing of the Liberal-Unionists who were in the process of fusing with the Tories on Ireland, Joseph Chamberlain, was understood to be "behind" O'Shea's belated divorce action. It was a deliberate attack, an attempt to destroy Parnell and thus to weaken the Irish Party and lessen the pressure on the Liberals in Parliament. Gladstone told the Home Rule Party that the Nonconformist Liberals would not stand for it: if Parnell continued as Irish party leader it would mean a breach with the Liberal alliance. Parnell should retire, perhaps only for a while.

Parnell's enemies in the Irish Party

made his resignation their cause. Parnell had made a special place for the Catholic Church in the Party. Any priest had an automatic vote. The hierarchy to came out against Parnell. That was decisive.

The issue became the independence of the Irish party. Parnell the autocrat proclaimed himself "master of the Party", and was told by Tim Healy MP that the real question was: "who is the mistress of the party".

The anti-Parnellites were of different sorts. The radical Michael Davitt, outraged that Parnell should put his own interest above Ireland's, leagued with such as Tim Healy who owed his prominence to serving Parnell.¹¹ The majority was led by John Dillon, the Parnellites by John Redmond. The Irish party split in 1890, and the split lasted to the end of the century, when they reunited with John Redmond as leader, and John Dillon, leader of the anti-Parnellites, considered to have the most authority.

Class in the redistribution of the land

Leading a campaign for the tenant farmers, Parnell had appealed to them to "be kind to your labourers". Against peasant avarice, he might as well have asked the sea to stop advancing on the shore.

The changes in this revolution from above substituted smaller-scale landlordism for the large-scale landlordism it replaced. In this it was a class change inside a national revolution from above.

Some in the Irish party, such as John Dillon, were afraid that the land reforms would diminish feeling for Home Rule. Nevertheless, the Irish party had made the cause of the tenant farmer, then the landowning farmer as that class grew, the cause of Ireland. James Connolly, it is clear from his writing, aspired to make the working-class cause into the Irish cause, as the tenant farmers fighting the landlords had made their cause Ireland's, but he never could. Those who said that there could be a "reconquest" of Ireland only if the land were nationalised represented a different class, the people of no property, the proletariat. But the proletariat were never central — except in north-east Ireland, where most of them were Unionist, not nationalist.

Land reform and Karl Marx

Land reform meant the British government financing mortgages so that the existing tenant farmers could take the land as their private property. The founder of the Land League, Michael Davitt, believed in not only the tenants but all the Irish people owning all the land, by nationalisation and renting land to tenants. So did James Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party.

No less than Karl Marx had written (in 1867) that Home Rule would unleash a revolution on the land in Ireland, where the landlords were sometimes the



Bonar Law on the right, Liberal prime minister Asquith on the left. Bonar Law was leader of the Conservative party, which had backed Carson and the Irish Unionists. (Punch, 13 November 1913).

same people as the landlords in Britain (against whom there was still a lot of agitation and ill-feeling).

"The English workers... must make the repeal of the Union (in short, the affair of 1783, but in a more democratic form and adapted to the conditions of the present time) an article of their pronouncement...

What the Irish need is:

1) Self-government and independence from England.

2) An agrarian revolution. With the best intentions in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them, but they can give them the legal means of accomplishing it for themselves".

In fact, yes, the English could accomplish that, and did.

Marx died in March 1883. In fact the land revolution was a revolution from above, by the English and some of the Irish ruling class in Ireland. Many of them saw it as alternative to revolution from below. It was also profitable to the landlords, as grain and frozen meat from around the world made British and Irish farming less lucrative.

The land revolution from above was

in fact nearly complete when the Third Home Bill of 1912 came on the heels of the English constitutional crisis of 1909-10 and its bitterness.

Reform and "killing Home Rule with kindness"

In the United Kingdom, Ireland was now a voluntary part, waiting for the Liberals to force through Home Rule or for an inevitable conversion of all Britain to Home Rule. But the years of waiting after the Liberal conversion to Home Rule in 1885-6 had also been years of reform, serious reform, at the heart of which was land redistribution.

The Tories had committed themselves to suppress agitation on the land and to kill Home Rule, but to do it with "with kindness", by removing or diluting the causes of discontent.¹² The great change was the revolution on the land. If it be meaningful to talk of an Irish bourgeois revolution in a part of the central state of the British Empire, this was it.

The single major land transfer was the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, prepared by a Landlord and Tenant Farmer Con-

¹¹ Healy would appear for the employers in the inquiry into the Labour War of 1913-14, and be the first Governor General of the Irish Free State in the 1920s.

¹² They paralleled such as Karl Radek, who argued against Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) after the 1916 rising that land reform had taken the force out of Irish nationalism.

ference the year before.¹³ The creation of Irish Local Government in 1898 was the second most important change.

The Liberals took office again, at the start of 1906, when they won an election with a landslide. Imperialist rivalry with an almost united Germany and a growing German navy would now be the most consequential pressure on British governments, leading up to the Great War of 1914.

It was then that the Irish opponents of Home Rule, backed by the Tory Unionist Party in Britain, brought "the gun" back into Irish politics. In the years from 1906, and then from 1910 when the Liberal government came to be dependent on the Irish vote in the Commons, the Home Rule Irish had expected self-government. When the UVF and the "Black North" organised to stop Home Rule, the rest of Ireland organised to defend the British government and the Home Rule Party.

Britain's Liberal revolution of 1909-11 and Ireland

First Britain had to go through a profound revolution, the so-named "constitutional crisis". Britain was not yet a parliamentary democracy. Britain becoming a parliamentary democracy was no small thing. The House of Lords, the unelected House of Lords, had the power of absolute veto over the elected chamber, the House of Commons. The Home Rule Bill of 1893 passed the Commons but was vetoed by the Lords.

In January 1906, the Liberals won an overall majority in Parliament. Though Irish Home Rule remained Liberal policy in principle, the government was not interested in having a Home Rule Bill.

In 1907 they brought in an Irish Council Bill, calling for a part-elected Irish Council with very limited financial and administrative powers, mostly over education, in which the Catholic church claimed and had a monopoly among Catholics.¹⁴

It was near enough to Home Rule to provoke the Orangeists and the Tories, and too far from Home Rule to satisfy even the mild Home Rulers. The Liberals dropped it.

Then they led a revolution in Britain, backed by the Irish Home Rule party in the House of Commons. In 1909 the Liberal government made a start on the modern Welfare State in its Budget, with such things as an Old Age Pension (10 shillings a week). The Lords had an absolute veto over the Commons, but the convention was that they would never use it on money Bills, including Budgets. The Lords vetoed the 1909 Budget. The Liberals saw in this the

challenge to elected Government that it was, and fought two new general elections in January 1910 and December 1910 to establish the power of the elected chamber, the House of Commons, and end the absolute power of the unelected House of Lords. Faced with the King's agreement with the Government to dilute their caste, the Lords backed down and accepted a two-year delaying power instead of the absolute veto. This was a profound redistribution of power from the hereditary aristocracy to the electorate.¹⁵

Other events near it in time overshadowed it as an event in history, but the Liberal revolution was still as important as, or more so than, the first Reform Act of 1832 which enfranchised the middle class and the relatively new unenfranchised towns like Manchester and Birmingham. It made Britain for the first time a parliamentary democracy.

The Government came out of the struggle to remove the power of the Lords and the elections of 1910 without a majority in the Commons. They were able to form a Government only with the support of the 80-odd Irish nationalist votes in the House of Commons. As a bargain to keep those votes, the Government brought in the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912. The anti-Home Rule forces, which included the Tory party, now had no aristocratic House to fall back on against the Commons.

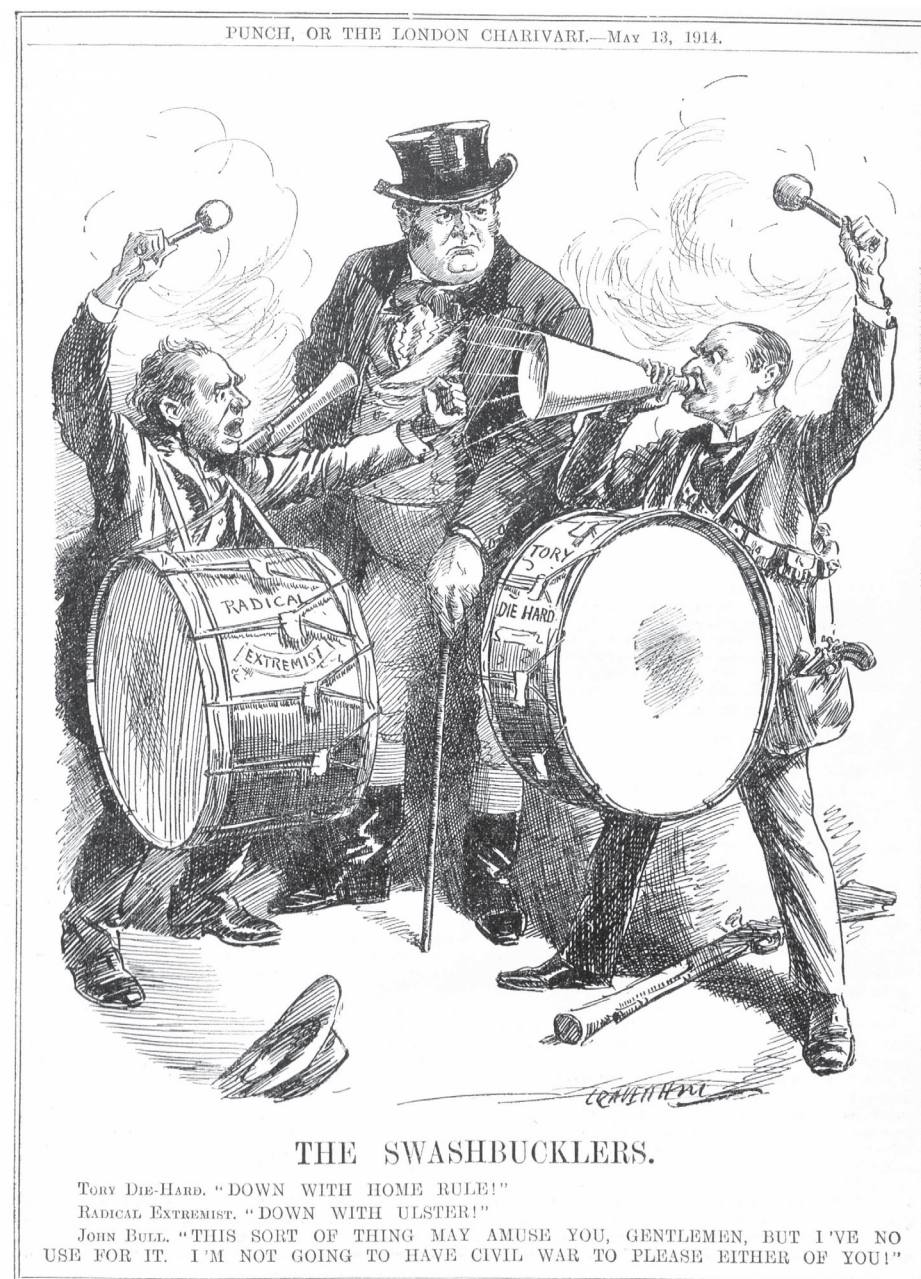
Third Home Rule Bill

The Tory opposition were not slow to point out that this was a naked bargain, and a cynical one, with continued Government by the now-minority Liberals as its main objective. The Tories and their allies raised the cry: No Home Rule without a new General Election. That is, the whole UK would be the judge of Ireland's cause. The Tories expected to win such an election, and the Liberals expected to lose it.

But Prime Minister Asquith had the Commons vote, of course – unless the Irish MPs were to be considered aliens.¹⁶

The Tories and Orangeists asked such awkward questions as: why is the territory of Ireland the unit, prefiguring one answer (Home Rule), and not the territory of the whole United Kingdom, which prefigures the other, Union? The Orange people looked to the UK majority for refuge against the Catholic majority in Ireland.

Extra-parliamentary action was now their alternative to Parliament, where they were in the minority. Unavoidably the Irish were seen as outsiders, as not a legitimate and equal part of the body politic in which they were forced to be a part. That played its part in the early undermining of the Home Rule Bill.



John Bull, symbolising middle-class England, wearily observes the contentious Irish. It is the time of the Great Unrest, with strikes and suffragette protests. (Punch, May 1914).

Always since the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, the assumption had been that any constitutional change for Ireland would be achieved only by one British side coercing its Irish opponent. The Liberals would coerce the Orangeists. Or the British Tories would coerce the nationalists against Home Rule.

One unreal, pseudo, policy was to pretend that the Orangeists were only bluffing. At first the policy was to force them, expecting that they would soon collapse. But they were not bluffing. They got 19,000 guns from Germany on the eve of the world war, and formed a formidable army, able to do what they threatened: civil war.

The Commons was now sovereign. The Third Home Rule Bill was made an extra-parliamentary issue, and it was especially embittered.

The Home Rule party would give way. They suggested a "temporary" (six-year) partition to Asquith and proposed that he suggest it publicly, which he did

in March 1914. The Liberal government would begin to substitute for all-Ireland Home Rule, with coercion, a search for policy that took account of the Irish opposition to Home Rule, in fact some variant of partition. The question of exactly what variant became the dominant question: four, six, nine counties of Ulster? There were nine counties in historic Ulster. Or divide by Poor Law Union areas? Or parliamentary constituencies? What of the city boroughs of Belfast and Derry, which in the March 1914 partition proposal would be able to vote themselves into or out of Home Rule?

In the event, after a new failed attempt at six-counties by agreement in summer 1916, and a failed "Irish Convention" in 1917-18, a British coalition government and the Orangeists of the North would in 1920¹⁷ impose a version of partition that was very artificial in its apportionments. It created a second artificial Irish minority, the Six County

¹³ Wyndham, the Tory Unionist minister, was believed to have Wolfe Tone as one of his ancestors a hundred years before.

¹⁴ Of course not only in Ireland. Catholic schools in England were provided with public money by the Education Act of 1902.

¹⁵ That, of course, still excluded women and a lot of working-class men, ruled out by the property qualification.

¹⁶ That is what Tory leader Bonar Law meant when he said in July 1912, "There are things stronger than parliamentary majorities". Implicitly he was saying that the Irish vote in Parliament should not count.

¹⁷ It was in 1920, before the Stormont Parliament was established in May 1921, that a Belfast administrative machine was set up for the six counties, and the B-Specials were organised to enforce it.

Catholics, who were a bigger percentage of the Six Counties population than were the Protestants in the whole of Ireland; and it created a separate "Protestant" statelet with its own parliament rather than having Northern Ireland directly under the British parliament, as all previous partition schemes had envisaged.

The Liberals' 1912 proposal to treat Home Rule without tackling the Northern minority, without even defining that issue, had been overcast by the British political revolution and its aftermath. Now it was central, and in a political atmosphere more heated than any since that around the Reform Bill of 1832.

In September 1912, 470,000 people in Belfast signed a Covenant to resist Home Rule in arms if need be. In September 1913 a Provisional Government was set up in Belfast, pledged to resist a Home Rule government in Dublin should London legislation impose one, as it was due to, two years after 1912. The opposition either submitted to Westminster – something they were not yet in the habit of doing – or they went outside Parliament. They went outside.

From January 1913 they organised an army which marched and drilled and camped and which would on the verge of the Great War arm itself from Germany. On resisting Home Rule, they were basically not bluffing.

But on one level they were indeed bluffing. The foremost Orange leader, a Dublin lawyer, Sir Edward Carson, and most of the other Orange leaders, were not Partitionists. When they were "for" Partition proposals, it was to oppose and obstruct a Home Rule policy for any part of Ireland. Their purpose in talking of and organising an "Ulster Provisional Government" was to stop any part of Ireland getting any form of Home Rule.

Carson and his friends could hardly go so far as they had and then climb down. But they received an accommodating set of responses from British leaders, and from some of them an openly favourable partisan response. The ancient upper-class bias against Irish Catholics showed itself still there. Part of the British ruling class showed openly and clearly the anti-Irish bias.

The too-slow evolution of Ireland via reforms including mild Home Rule would be sidetracked by the return of the gun to Irish politics. First the northern Unionists brought the gun back. Then the Home Rule nationalists responded to them.

By the years before 1914, many Irish nationalists believed there could never

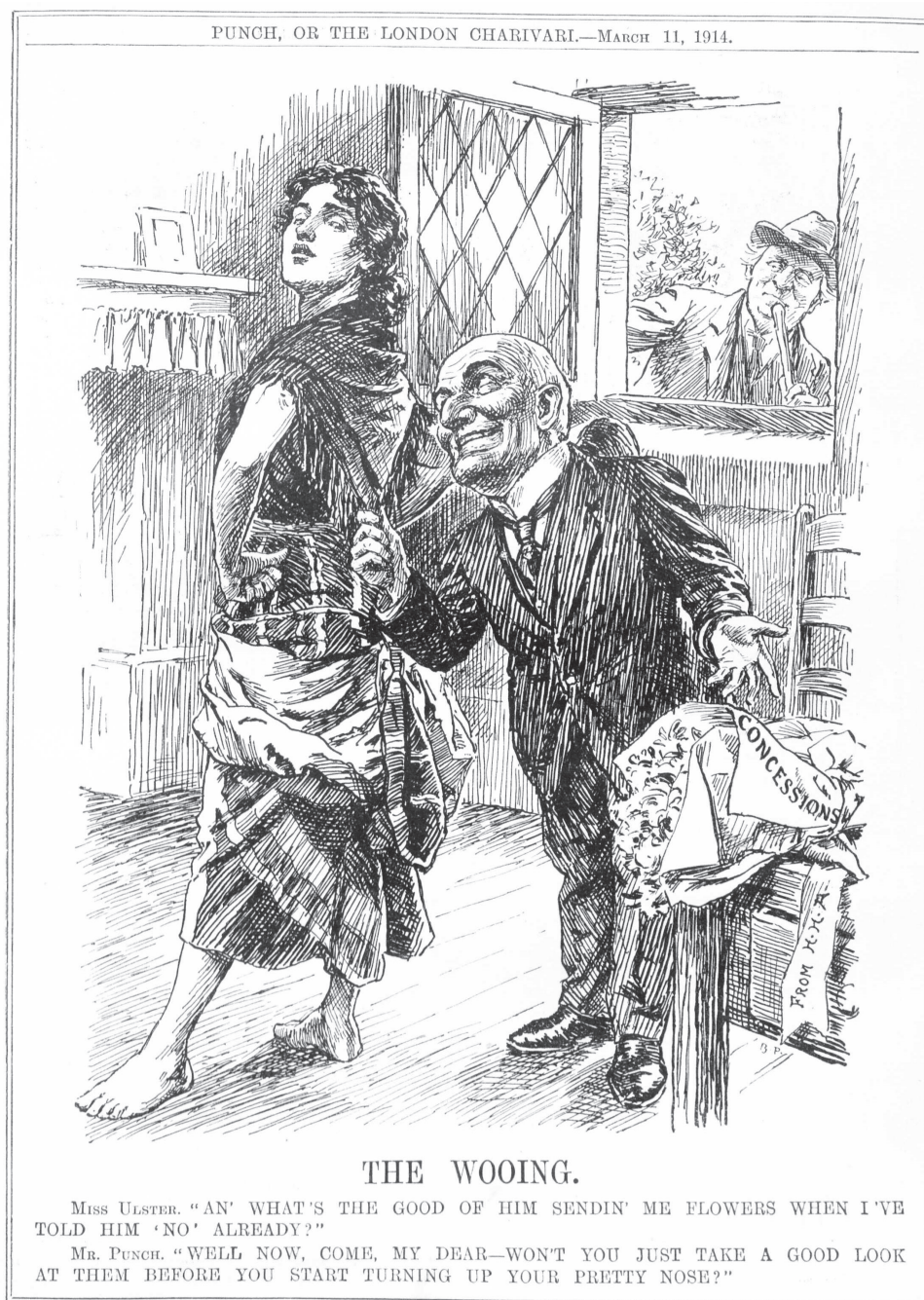
be a decisive Irish military advantage. Anyway, since 1884, mass suffrage for the Irish farmers, the ongoing re-division of the land amongst the tenant farmers, the county self-government from 1898, the steady movement (or so it long seemed) towards Home Rule and even the English Tory alternative to Home Rule, "killing it with kindness" (the Tories brought in the most important land reform, in 1903), all seemed to point to a decisive answer against violence in Irish politics. Ireland had been transformed from above in the 30 or 40 years before 1916.

Then the Irish Orange and the British Tories brought the gun centre-stage again as a force in Irish politics, against the 1912 Home Rule Bill, amidst a UK constitutional crisis. The formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913 and then the Irish Volunteers in November 1913 shifted the balance, though by no means all at once.

In the Home Rule crisis immediately before the War, the Irish labour movement had adapted itself to the prospect of living with Home Rule under a Redmond government in Dublin, and sought to build an Irish Labour Party to oppose Redmond on social issues. Its leaders, James Connolly for instance, appealed to the British Labour Party to insist that the Home Rule Bill should stipulate pro-labour measures for Ireland (such as payment for MPs, introduced in the British parliament in 1911: it allowed people without private incomes to become MPs and was a very important democratic measure).¹⁸

In early 1914, the Home Rule party leaders responded to the Orange-Tory revolt by coming to favour "temporary" partition – which they wanted Liberal prime minister Asquith to propose, for "political" reasons.

Connolly's response (*Forward* 14 March 1914), indicting the carnival of reaction on both sides of the border that would follow partition is famous, and famous because the indictment was true. Connolly's alternatives to partition around that time are much less noticed. Sometimes he wrote that he "would much rather see the Home Rule Bill defeated than see it carried with Ulster or any part of Ulster left out", i.e. that the status quo, union with Britain, was better than Home Rule with partition (11 April 1914). Sometimes he claimed the Unionists were bluffing: he wrote about the "wooden guns of Ulster" (18 April 1914) only days before the UVF landed and distributed 19,000 real guns. And sometimes he advocated the British government "use its armed forces to make an ascendancy



Miss "Ulster" is nine counties; Asquith, the prime minister offering the "concessions" (flowers) is at the window. On 9 March 1914 Asquith has proposed that each of the "counties of Ulster, including the county boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry, may contract out of the scheme of Home Rule by a bare majority vote. Six years after the first meeting of the Irish Parliament any county which has thus obtained temporary exclusion will automatically come into the scheme of the Irish Parliament" (Punch, 11 March 1914).

clique beaten at the polls recognise the machinery of the law" (30 May 1914).¹⁹

The Irish labour movement, in which Connolly was a leading figure, wanted pure Home Rule – no accommodation to Orange objections that Home Rule would be Rome rule. The movement offered no deeds or words to reconcile the Northern Irish opponents of Home Rule.

That meant British coercion. It could mean nothing else. That was the policy of the labour movement against partition. The movement was not only against England and the Home Rule party, against whom it competed in nationalism, but also against the Northern

opponents of 32 county home rule and any concession to them.

By 1914, then, Ireland faced high communal mobilisation. The Protestants in the north-east had armed against Home Rule. Catholics in the south had taken up arms to defend Home Rule. The legal, evolutionary path to Home Rule seemed, not definitively blocked, but doubtful. The labour movement was depleted after the great Dublin Labour War of 1913-14; and it lacked a working-class or democratic policy to address the impasses of the competing communal mobilisations.

¹⁸ By contrast, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, with whom Connolly would ally after August 1914, opposed Home Rule as a useless sop.

¹⁹ The response of Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) is interesting. Why weren't those who said Home Rule would be Rome Rule right? Because, he said, Britain would not allow it. (*The British Liberals and Ireland, Put Pravdy*, 12 March 1914). James Connolly repeatedly said that Irish history had made the Catholics untypically tolerant and unlike other Catholics in the world. In fact, his was an Ireland in which the Ancient Order of Hibernians was a big and growing power, and in which the Church controlled the schools.

7. The road to the Rising

Eoin MacNeill, who was a professor, an expert in ancient Ireland, published an article (*The North Began*, 1 November 1913) proposing the formation of a militia in imitation of the anti-Home-Rule Ulster Volunteer Force, whose rival it would become. Soon afterwards MacNeill agreed to chair a committee to start it. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) secretly got behind him and steered the Irish Volunteer movement. Almost overnight it swept Catholic and nationalist Ireland. People everywhere organised as soldiers, marched and drilled, many with wooden pretend-guns, and some even with pikes, the easily-made weapon of the nationalist Irish in 1798. Many acquired Volunteer uniforms. Soon Ireland had two militias, and Professor MacNeill found himself the head of a national organisation.

The original Irish Volunteers had been organised in the early 1780s and tolerated in the expectation of an American invasion that never came. Protestant only, in 1782 it would win legislative self rule for Ireland's colonial parliament (which would last for 17 years, until the Act of Union). It was well reputed as friendly to Catholics, and backed by the Catholics, forbidden themselves to carry guns, wear uniforms, parade, and drill. Its convention was held in Dungannon:

*"The church of Dungannon is full to the door,
And sabre and spur clash at times on the floor,
While helmet and shako are ranged all along,
Yet no book of devotion is seen in the throng.
In the front of the altar no minister stands,
But the crimson-clad chief of these warrior bands..."*

(Thomas Davis)

With that precedent, Patrick Pearse, who was or would soon be Head Centre of the underground IRB at first welcomed the UVF as representing "guns in Irish hands", whatever the politics.²⁰

The Home Rule Party of John Redmond and John Dillon demanded an immediate majority for their party in the leading committee of the Irish Volunteers. Otherwise they would start an organisation of their own.

That was a credible threat. They could start a militia that would reduce

the original Irish Volunteers to a small rump. It was not unreasonable, even, that the Volunteers should be led by the parliamentary leaders elected by the Irish nationalists, rather than by IRB people who had got in first.

Redmond got his majority. The IRB divided on it. John Devoy in the USA held that they should not have given way to Redmond, and blamed those who had, such as Bulmer Hobson, then a central IRB leader. Less than a year later, when war came, the Irish Volunteers split into the Home Rule nationalists, called the National Volunteers, and a small group with the IRB nationalists, who kept the name "Irish Volunteers".

In terms of the war, the Volunteers split into pro-German and pro-British. The IRB had long been committed to backing Germany in the war many saw coming, and the Citizen Army went with them; Redmond and those who became the National Volunteers backed Britain. Redmond had made good his previous threat, and reduced the Irish Volunteers to a small IRB front.

The process of splitting and selecting had by September 1914, a month into the war, produced the two organisations that would rise in April 1916. But one of them, the Irish Volunteers, was itself divided on insurrection. The IRB worked where possible secretly inside other nationalist organisations, and secretly "managed" them. It had helped set up the Irish Volunteers, at the end of 1913.

A detonating minority?

At least a big part of the Volunteers, including its main public leaders around Eoin MacNeill, the visible National Head of the Volunteers, and Bulmer Hobson²¹ were against a rising in 1916.

The argument seems to have been concerned with the ideas Connolly expressed thus, and the IRB partly shared: *"We do not believe that this is a revolutionary epoch, no more than the days of Mitchel were revolutionary in Ireland, nor the days of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien. An epoch, to be truly revolutionary, must have a dominating number of men with the revolutionary spirit – ready to dare all, and take all risks for the sake of their ideals"* (*"Ireland, disaffected or revolutionary?" Workers' Republic*, 13 November 1915).

Henry Hyndman, leader of the pre-war British Marxists (the organisation in which Connolly had first enrolled, the

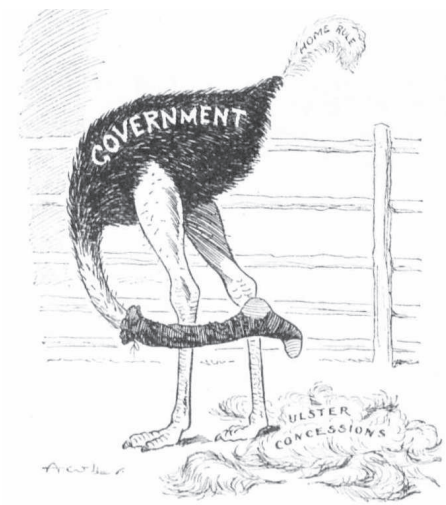
Social Democratic Federation), called the Rising the "Commune of Dublin", comparing it to the Commune of Paris in 1871. And because it was, maybe, a living link with that tradition. Perhaps the Rising was the last Blanquist revolutionary movement, with Connolly now a representative in it of the old French attempts to merge socialism with Jacobin nationalism. Connolly seems to have believed that military action, almost of any sort, could have been a detonator to nationalist Ireland. The Rising was on the pattern of the 19th century Blanquist risings in Paris, or anyway of their theory and doctrine. The Blanquists took the general situation into account, but decisive in their doctrine was the number of men ready to rise and an adequate supply of guns and ammunition.²²

At the start of the war, in August 1914, Connolly advised and publicly advocated insurrection against all war and all imperialism, German as well as British. That had been what all socialists had been saying, and what the socialists who opposed war after it started continued to say. They continued to meet at conferences at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and Stockholm, and founded a Third, Communist, International, in Moscow in March 1919.

Connolly had been of those in the Socialist International who advocated, after Gustave Hervé, an immediate general strike in response to the outbreak of imperialist war. Such as Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin) had said in reply to them that the likely pro-war mass sentiment at the beginning of a war, when people did not even know what a modern war meant, was the worst time to call for a general strike against war: if a revolutionary general strike could not be called at will before the start of war, and it could not, then threatening one for the start of war was no more than empty talk.

Leading advocates of the "general strike to stop war" such as Gustave Hervé in France, with his paper *La Guerre Sociale*, turned patriot when France was invaded and there was no German mass movement, labour or non-labour, to stop it or even to protest at the German invasion of Belgium and France, or the allied Austrian invasion and mass murder in Serbia.

Connolly had indulged in the empty talk, and then collapsed into support of German imperialism, an insurrection-now form of Irish nationalism, and



The only bird that, in Mr. TIM HEALY'S view, requires the sympathies (if not contempt) of the Plunage Bill.

Partition: Tim Healy was an All for Ireland MP (Punch, spring 1914)

a belief in mass nationalist spontaneity needing only a detonator.

Spontaneism

Connolly had the same "spontaneist" view that he had long had on industrial unions and socialism, but now he expected revolutionary impulse from Irish nationalism and anti British feeling.²³

Connolly had hoped to provoke the Irish Volunteers into an insurrection by leading and showing the way. The poor state the labour movement was in, pressure from the IRB, and his knowledge of the IRB commitment to a rising some time during the war, restrained Connolly from making a minority insurrection before Easter 1916. As it was, the Rising was far too early in relation to Irish developments, though it was in accordance with the insurgents' (erroneous) idea of how the war was going.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB: in the USA, the "Fenians"), the secret revolutionary party which had existed in Ireland, Britain, and the USA, since 1858-9, had decided on the outbreak of the world war that during it they would organise a rising in Ireland to win independence. They were in the insurrectionary tradition of the French Blanquist secret societies, to whom having enough fighters, guns, and ammunition was the decisive preparation for insurrection, yet they did take account of England's vastly superior strength in the thin and treacherous little adage, a romantic half-truth: "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity".

So the IRB was committed from the start to a Rising before the world war was over. It had been committed to it for decades! For the IRB the commit-

²⁰ Reportedly Connolly called Pearse a blithering idiot for that. Silly politics it surely was, but Pearse was trying to be a nationalist on this, and Connolly was being a frank sectarian-nationalist. On some level he must have known that.

²¹ Hobson had been frozen out of central IRB affairs after his conflict with the IRB leadership over conceding the majority in the Volunteer leadership to Redmond in 1913. Hobson was one of those who, with help from the USA, had revived the IRB in Ireland a dozen years before. He was reputed in social policy to be on the Left, closer to Connolly than to anyone else.

²² The idea that audacious action, exemplary action, even by a small minority, could make a situation that was not yet revolutionary, revolutionary, would influence the Communist International in the German "March Action" of 1921, and re-emerged in the discussions of the Guevarists in the late 1960s. There were Communists in Germany who opposed the March Action because they believed that the Communist Party in Germany had been ultra-left in January 1919, when Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht lost their lives in a rising, or quasi-rising, that they were against. Paul Levi wrote a pamphlet denouncing the CP over the March Action and for that was expelled, though Communist International leaders including Lenin thought he had been right on the substantive issue.

²³ And he had theorised on spontaneism in his dominant idea that Industrial Unionism would more or less automatically produce mass socialist consciousness. That was why at the end, as distinct from when he was a De Leonite, he saw no use, or marginal use, in a revolutionary socialist party.

ment was not a response to the defeat of a previous perspective, as it was with Connolly, but a long-held dogma. In the event the Americans would be surprised that the IRB in Ireland had decided to act so early in the war as 1916, but they decided that those in Ireland alone should decide that.

That the main public leaders of their “open” organisation, the Irish Volunteers, were against a rising, made a problem for the IRB which they never solved, which led them to try to fool MacNeill and others and try to manipulate the Irish Volunteers unknowingly into an insurrection, and which determined what happened and did not happen over the Easter Weekend of 1916.

Questions of temperament and such things aside, the disagreement was about what a minority, such as they knew they were, could do in an “epoch” which Connolly himself called “not revolutionary”. Connolly’s statement of the insurrectionist case for action now was probably written against the doubters and opponents of Connolly’s spontaneism. They argued that there would be no rallying to the all-Ireland Volunteer insurrection that was then proposed by Pearse and Connolly.

An IRB Supreme Council meeting in January decided to go for a Rising within weeks, and on 5 February a courier from Ireland arrived in New York to tell the IRB people there, who had regular communications via the German embassy in the USA, that a plan was set for Easter. Most of the Volunteers knew nothing of those plans, though as Irish Volunteers after the Volunteers split at the start of the war they had committed themselves in general to “action”. They were to be mobilised for manoeuvres and manipulated blind into a rising.

Eoin MacNeill and his co-thinkers

wanted to keep the Irish Volunteers intact through the war, biding their time, building their organisation.

The division between the insurrectionists and MacNeill, Hobson and their friends (and Roger Casement, who came to Ireland on Good Friday 1916 to stop the Rising because he knew no German officers and only meagre arms had been sent, and thought it to be hopeless) proved irreconcilable, as did their suspicion of each other. MacNeill at first did not know a Rising was planned and was imminent. Though Pearse, leader of the IRB and of the insurrectionists in the Volunteers continued to talk of a rising with the initiator and official leader of the Volunteers, he kept the actual plan secret from MacNeill. The insurrectionists’ plan was to mobilise the Irish Volunteers for “manoeuvres”, a thing that had become common in Ireland since 1913 and the UVF and Irish Volunteers, and rise against Britain under cover of the manoeuvres. Some such story might well have been dictated for “security” reasons, but in fact it became an attempt to deceive the non-IRB Volunteers, their leadership, and most of those who were to rise.

Then MacNeill was persuaded to agree to the Rising. He changed his mind again when he heard the German ship with guns had been captured (21 April) and sunk off the Kerry coast by its captain (22 April), and Casement had been arrested (also 21 April) and taken to London. Rejecting being an informer to the British state, on the Saturday night, 22nd, the head of the Volunteers bought space in the *Sunday Independent* to announce that there would after all be no manoeuvres on Easter Sunday.

And at this point everything seemed to descend to buffoonery, to comic

opera, to a bit of a joke. The fighting and the way the leaders died would help change that, “utterly”, but not until the Rising had been defeated.

The insurgents missed having the Rising on the day the Western Church had assigned for Easter Sunday that year, the day on which Jesus Christ rose from the dead, as Ireland, they believed, was rising through them. The loss was a serious one to people who would sing Catholic hymns as the GPO burned around them.

MacNeill thought he had stopped a Rising. He also thought he had stopped the manoeuvres by Pearse, Connolly and the others against himself and the anti-insurrectionists in the Volunteers. He had stopped the unknowing members of the Irish Volunteers being led unknowingly into an insurrection. But the outcome was up to the insurgents.

Depleted as they would be, unsure as they were about what would happen outside Dublin, they decided to rise in Dublin, to try to keep to the plan for Dublin that had been worked out by Joseph Plunkett and James Connolly but on the expectation of many more insurgents in Dublin, and as part of a nationwide rising. They believed that all the alternatives were worse.

The way they saw it, on Easter Sunday 1916 their choice lay between one kind of defeat or another. Either a defeat in battle, that might help rouse the forces for a new struggle. Or defeat without a fight, which would bring discouragement and demoralisation in its wake as so often before in Irish history. They decided to fight.²⁴

MacNeill had dealt the Rising of Pearse and Connolly a very serious blow, all over Ireland, but most of all in Dublin, where the rising did take place, but with seriously reduced numbers. The insurrectionists were trying to ma-



MIJNHEER KAARSON.
(*The New Orange Free Stater.*)

[Mr. WILLIAM O'BRIEN referred to Ulster as the new “Orange” Free State, which has just received official recognition.]

William O'Brien caricatured as a Boer Britain had fought a war with the Boers in 1899-1902. By 1914 the Boers had won a place in the British Empire which they would keep until 1960, after the Sharpeville massacre. An “Irish Brigade” fought in that war against Britain. The leader of that Brigade, John MacBride, was shot after the 1916 Rising. (Punch, spring 1914).

nipulate most of those they looked to, to fight on their side, to turn out for the Rising without knowing about it. MacNeill’s cancellation seriously cut the number who took part in the Rising. Some were confused; some agreed with MacNeill against a Rising; some were glad of an excuse not to put their lives at risk against the terrible odds they faced.

8. The Rising

Before the Rising, the Irish Volunteers and the Citizen Army had ended their organisational separation. Together they became the Army of the Irish Republic, though their separate command structures seem to have survived the unification.

The insurgents went out to fight the greatest empire the world had seen, in its second city, near its centre. Militarily, they would have done better with the all-Ireland insurrection planned, or even a full turn-out in Dublin. But they did very well with what they had.

As the school verse put in Brian Boru’s speech against the Danes before the battle of Clontarf: *“What though brothers league against us? What, though myriads be the foe? / Victory*

will be more honoured in the myriads’ overthrow”.

No call for strikes was made, though the military leader of the Rising, James Connolly, was a prominent leader, arguably, with Jim Larkin gone to the USA since October 1914, the leader of the Irish labour movement. The insurgents did not take the telephone exchange or the railway stations. There did attack Dublin Castle, long-time centre of British rule in Ireland. If they had pressed the attack, they could have taken it; but they did not, thinking that there were many more British troops there than there were.

Across Dublin on 24 April the events at the GPO were repeated at several locations. Something like the seizure

of the GPO headquarters was also planned for a number of cities in Ireland. Figures for the Dublin insurgents vary – there were maybe 1,200-1,400 in all, 900 Volunteers, some of the Fianna Youth, perhaps 200 or 300 women of Cumann na mBan, 200 from the Irish Citizen Army. A few of the Fianna carried pikes, the easily made weapon of the last great rising in the year 1798.

The seven signatories of the Proclamation and members of the Provisional Government were in the GPO. Tom Clarke was 58 years old and had spent 15 years in a hellish British prison designed to break him.²⁵

Patrick Pearse had been a Home Rule nationalist until 1912. James Connolly was a veteran socialist until late August

1914. His relation with socialism thereafter is a subject of dispute and misunderstanding among socialists.

Sean MacDiarmada had been disabled by polio, but was secretary of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Thomas MacDonagh was a university teacher. Joseph Mary Plunkett was the son of a Papal Count, took part in the Rising still bandaged from an operation, and perhaps would have died soon of tuberculosis.²⁶

They waited and prepared, knowing that the British would attack. The first attack came almost immediately, from a squadron of lancers who happen to be near the GPO when the insurgents seized it. They were easily routed. Shooting them down, the insurgents

24 MacNeill and his co-thinkers contributed to the myth of the “blood sacrifice”, to the false argument that the insurgents were doing nothing but to set an example, with themselves knowingly foredoomed – a blood sacrifice.

25 His wife, Cathleen, much younger, would later join the Communist Party.

26 And never in his life, as far as I know, did he do anything to merit the awful, whingeing, self-pitying but now popular song Grace, about his death-cell marriage to Grace Gifford. He was better than that; a serious revolutionary.

demonstrated that this was a serious rising. Comparatively the Irish were better trained and better marksmen; the English soldiers (who included many Irish soldiers of the British army) were raw, inexperienced and less well trained. The insurgents' performance led the British to overestimate their numbers, and some to think that the insurgents were professional soldiers from Germany. At Mount Street Bridge, for example, some thought the Irish were far more numerous than they were because their shooting was so accurate and effective. Even after the fighting was over, John Dillon in the House of Commons talked of three thousand insurgents.

The British soldiers suffered heavier casualties. But Irish losses were absolute loss. They could not, in the short term, replenish their losses by much, though they at the start (and James Connolly to the end) thought that areas outside Dublin would rise. They were short of fighters from the beginning. A cancellation of planned Irish Volunteer "manoeuvres" on Easter Sunday by Eoin MacNeill had seriously depleted the insurgent ranks and limited it to Dublin, where the Citizen Army had not been affected by MacNeill.

Apart from the headquarters at the GPO, the other centres of rebellion were chosen because each one "marked" and blocked either a British army barracks or (Boland's Mill) the route of British reinforcements into the centre of Dublin from Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), where they would come off British ships. They formed a protective cordon around the centre, in the GPO. As they advanced over the week, the British tightened the noose on the insurgent headquarters at the GPO.

For the first days, the serious fighting took place at the periphery surrounding the GPO command centre of the Rising. The initial centres of the Rising threw off centres not directly planned for. Insurgents with rifles confronted the British Army, which had the mobility and the initiative. Superimposed on the the duels of snipers were the ravages of big guns, which scattered fire as well as death on the centre of Dublin. Unseen snipers were in action, too; Ernest Kavanagh, the cartoonist of the Workers' Republic, who was not an insurgent and had no gun, was shot dead on the steps of the union and Workers' Republic headquarters, Liberty Hall, by an unseen distant British sniper.

Positions occupied by the insurgents were more or less immediately surrounded by British Army men who were in the city and who were added to all through the six days of fighting. Soon more British soldiers began to reinforce and expand the forces fighting the army of the Irish Republic that was struggling to come to life. At the end of

the week, the British soldiers numbered about 20,000, and the odds against the insurgents were more than ten-to-one.

Large parts of central Dublin were set alight by British shells. The headquarters of the Rising, the GPO, a very large building, began to burn from the top downwards, and that took time. The last evening before the surrender, the Dublin sky was lit up by the light of many fires across the city, started by widespread British artillery fire.

Connolly never attempted to involve the Transport Union in the Rising and I presume that that was because he didn't think he could. When on the eve of the Rising he, the Acting General Secretary of the union for nearly two years, raised the green flag, with a harp and without a crown, over union headquarters at Liberty Hall, he had to ask it as a personal favour. The union was then, after its great days in the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14, down to 700 or so. (It would grow again, fast, in the later years of the world war).

Some of the populace seized the chance to loot. The insurgents, in vain, told them to stop. The pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington, a journalist who wrote for the *Manchester Guardian*, went out to stop the rising; he was seized by British soldiers and shot on the order of a British officer, John Bowen-Colthurst, who was declared insane by a British inquiry and then released after a short spell in Broadmoor.

Centres of the Rising

The Four Courts, an impressive building not far from the GPO headquarters, was occupied to counter the Marlborough and Royal Barracks. The South Dublin Union, a large workhouse, was occupied to block Richmond Barracks and a common British Army route into the city, Kingsbridge station. A garrison was put into Jacob's biscuit factory (which had been an important scene of workers' action in 1913-14), and one into St Stephen's Green to block access to central Dublin from Richmond Barracks and Harcourt Street station.

Michael Mallin (his deputy was Constance Markievicz, both of the Citizen Army) took over St Stephen's Green, and at first, following the Great War example, dug trenches there.

At Boland's Mill, the garrison was led by Eamon de Valera, who would preside over much of the mass migration from independent Ireland in subsequent decades, and who was the one commander to be allowed to survive after the insurrection (perhaps because he had been born in the USA, and Britain was courting America into the war). The most tremendous fire fight took place at Mount Street Bridge, which was an offshoot of the Boland's Mill garrison. 17 insurgents killed 230 British soldiers there.

Some of the British troops did not

at first even know what country they were in. When, later on in the Rising, rumours spread that the German army had landed and were fighting against the British, a cheer went up among the insurgents.

But Britain had of course tremendous potential and even when stretched in the Great War, great reserves. They rallied soldiers nearby and then they started pouring soldiers in.²⁷

On the second day, Tuesday, a British ship, the *Helga*, came up the Liffey firing cannon at the rebel positions, already under cannon fire.

The British Army fought their way slowly towards the centre of insurgency, the GPO. The centre of Dublin had caught fire from the big guns of the English. By Friday evening the whole centre of Dublin was a sea of fire, spreading, and the English soldiers were closing in, killing and wounding. 310 unarmed civilians were killed.

By Friday the fire in the GPO had burned down to the ground floor and the walls were very hot. Some of the insurgents were singing Catholic hymns, to keep their spirits up of course, but feeling themselves the heirs and representatives of the Irish generations who fought for their right to be Catholics. In their own way they prefigured the 26 Counties future. The Irish nationalist rebellion took a distinctly Catholic religious character, as would the state the rebels would erect in 26 of Ireland's counties.

Connolly took two wounds. One on the Tuesday was a flesh wound, not too serious. Then on the Thursday a bullet shattered his left ankle. From then and until a surgeon worked on it the day before he was shot, Connolly was in sharp and continuous pain. He had to be carried around on a stretcher, but he continued to function as the military leader and (as Pearse said) brain of the Rising.

Still the fire advanced on them, arm in arm, so to speak, with the British army. In fact with the English-Irish army: Irishmen were on both sides of the fighting.

They decided to evacuate the GPO, boring through the walls, out of sight of snipers, into Moore St, only breaking cover when they had to. In Moore St died Michael O'Rahilly, disputed chief of the clan O'Rahilly, a supporter of MacNeill, who had been against a rising. He had worked hard to stop it, driving around to see people he thought he could influence. Then he joined the Rising. In the words W B Yeats put in his mouth: "Because I helped to wind the clock/ I come to hear it strike." Dying, he said: "Fancy missing this and dying of a chill or caught running for a tram!"

On the Saturday, 29 April, with the centre of Dublin on fire and the British forces continuously getting bigger and more in command, Pearse decided to surrender. A lot of the fighters did not want to surrender. They had acquitted



Belfast Home Rule politician Joe Devlin with "a pig in a poke". The idea of Partition, proposed by the Liberal government in March 1914, was not defined until the Government of Ireland Bill in early 1920. The exclusion of four, six, or nine counties was variously raised. The eventual six counties made a large artificial Catholic minority in the Northern state (Punch, spring 1914)

themselves well in the fighting and wanted to fight on: they did not feel beaten. Tom Clarke, the old Fenian, the pure spirit of the Rising, compared to whom Pearse and Connolly were newcomers (Connolly had belonged to a different political current until after the outbreak of war), wanted to fight to the death, but he accepted the majority decision and surrendered, to wait for the attentions of the firing squad. Elizabeth O'Farrell, under a white flag, took a note to General Lowe, commander of the British Army in Dublin. There is a photo of Pearse surrendering.²⁸

Dublin's people were hostile to the Rising and to the insurgents. As the insurgents were marched through the streets of Dublin, the army was also their protector from the people of Dublin. The British Army, under General Maxwell, its Commander-in-Chief for Ireland, began shooting its prisoners four days after, on 3 May. Pearse was among the first three. His brother Willie was shot although he had not been a leader in the insurrection. John MacBride, who joined the Rising at the last minute, was probably shot because he had been in an Irish Brigade that fought for the South African Boers against the British at the beginning of the 20th century. Only a few were given a trial, and no-one was allowed a defence lawyer.

90 prisoners were sentenced to death. 15 were shot. Another prisoner, Roger Casement, was hanged in Pentonville Jail on 3 August.

They were charged with giving aid

27 A few on both sides went mad.

28 But the spirit of farce and ridicule, which seemed dominant on Easter Sunday, had not quite done with Pearse. With Lowe receiving the surrender is his son John, a British officer. John takes custody of Pearse and drives him to Kilmainham Jail. John is the future American film star known as John Loder. He would die decades later in the "Distressed Gentlefolks Aid Association's Nursing Home" in London.

and comfort, intentionally, to the enemy – Germany. Pearse, at his court martial, gloried in that association. “I admit I have organised men to fight against Britain. As far as I can see, she [Germany] did her best to help us. She sent a ship with men. Germany has not sent us gold.” (In fact it had not sent soldiers, either. It had done next to nothing.)

Connolly, the wounded man about to be strapped to a chair and shot, told the court it had no right he acknowledged to try him: he believed “that the British Government has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland”. Connolly replied to only one charge, denying that he had deliberately ill-treated people who were entitled to be treated as prisoners of war.

Roger Casement was the only one to have a chance in court to make a full and proper defence of his own opinions and actions. He, like Connolly, denied England’s right to try him.

F E Smith, as Lord Chancellor, prosecuted Casement. He had been a leading Orangeman before the war.²⁹

All bar one of the 16 men met death as devout Irish Catholics; Casement, as a recent convert. The exception was not Connolly, but Tom Clarke. An old Fenian, he had formed a hostility to the Church for its denunciation of the Fenians, and Clarke was not a man to compromise his principles.

Connolly died a proselytising Catholic. On the eve of his death he got his Dublin Protestant wife Lillie to promise to convert to Catholicism, which she did, following proper instruction, three months after they strapped him in a chair in the yard of Kilmainham jail and shot him dead.

Democracy in the Rising

There was no hint of democracy in the Rising – formal or any other sort of democracy. Irish citizens were known to be for the British, for the war “for small nations”, for John Redmond and Home Rule and the belief that England “may keep faith, for all that is done and said” on Home Rule.

In 1916 Redmond’s advice to join “the army” was still very popular. Many thought they were asserting Ireland’s rights by asserting Belgium’s. Initially they had scarcely any idea even of what modern war was: they imagined gallantry and heroics, where the reality was endless machine-wrought mass murder, committing it and being its victim. Opposition to the war was equated, in Ireland as in Britain, with being pro-German and being against stopping Germany’s much-publicised atrocities in Belgium.

British troops going up against the insurgents were welcomed by the people of Dublin as saviours and heroes who had come to rescue them from madmen and pro-Germans. People fed

the army marching from Dun Laoghaire to Dublin. The troops received the welcome and food and tea as the people’s own soldiers, come to save them.

When the insurgents were being marched through the streets to imprisonment in England, Dublin citizens spat at them and made hostile demonstrations against them. The soldiers had to be their protection from the people of Dublin.³⁰

Admiration for those who had risen and put up a tremendous fight was sobering the people, and there was the folk memory in the songs and stories which the people knew and which the Home Rule politicians had taught and yarned about; but those had not yet turned opinion.

Blood Sacrifice

“Any man who tells you that an act of armed resistance – even if offered by ten men armed with stones – any man who tells you that such an act of resistance is premature, imprudent or dangerous – any and every such man should at once be spurned, spat at. For remark you this and recollect it, that somewhere, and somehow, and by somebody a beginning must be made, and that the first act of resistance is always and must be ever premature, imprudent and dangerous.” – James Fintan Lalor

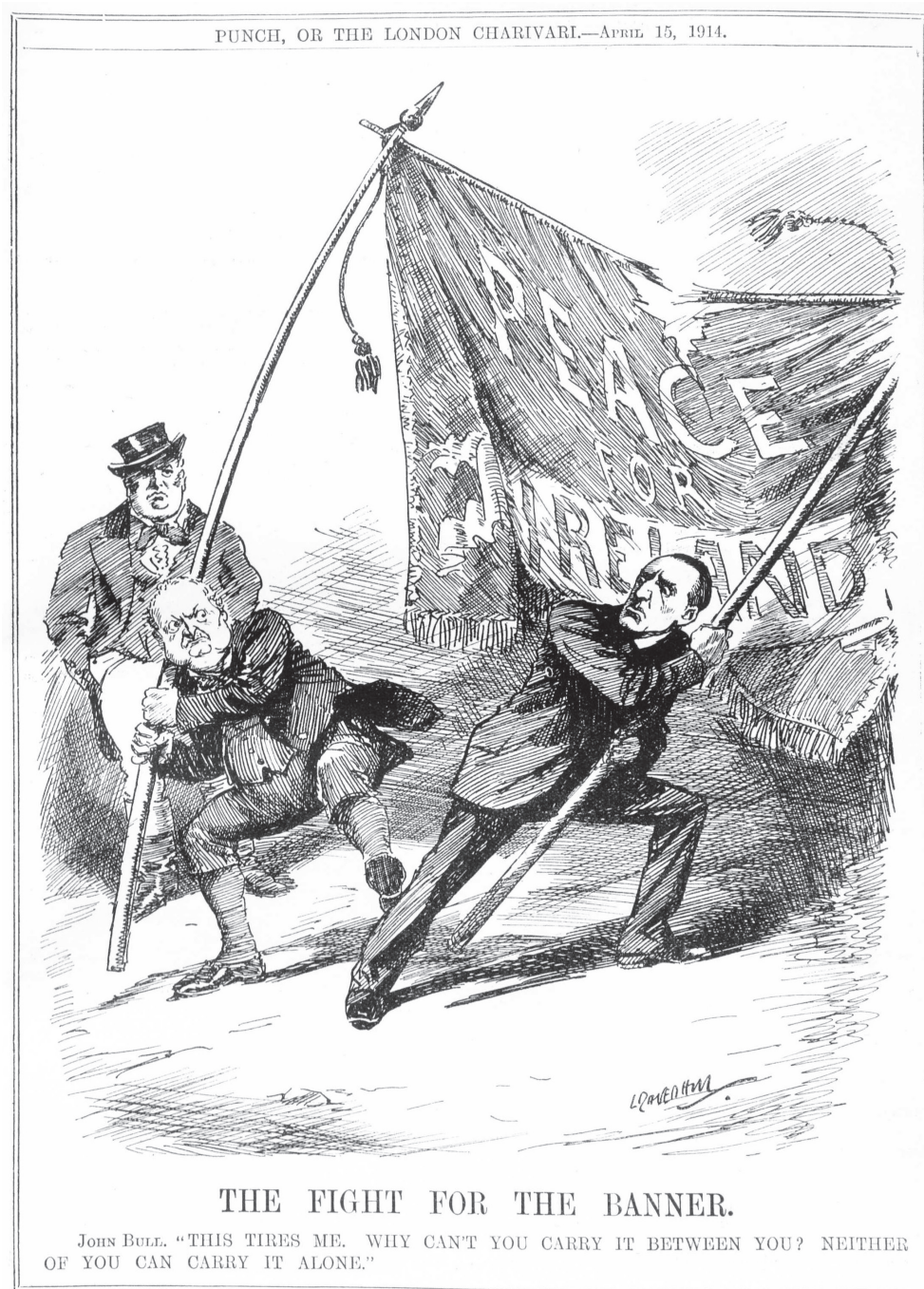
The myth of the Blood Sacrifice, the Terrible Beauty of Yeats’s poem, the single event that changed the course of history, clings like fog to the Rising as explanation, rationalisation, justification. Why, otherwise, would sane men and women start an armed struggle that they could only lose and where an unknowable number of them would surely die? Why, they thought a blood sacrifice was needed, to redeem Ireland and redeem themselves. Yeats wrote:

“O words are lightly spoken”,
Said Pearse to Connolly,
“Maybe a breath of politic words
Has withered our Rose Tree;
Or maybe but a wind that blows
Across the bitter sea”.

“It needs to be but watered”,
James Connolly replied,
“To make the green come out again
And spread on every side,
And shake the blossom from the bud
To be the garden’s pride.”

“But where can we draw water”,
Said Pearse to Connolly,
“When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There’s nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree”.

In fact, none of the insurgents behaved like people offering themselves as a “blood sacrifice” – not the men who fought so long and so well, like Joseph Mary Plunkett, who wrote a poem



Home Rule leader John Redmond and Unionist leader Edward Carson fight over the banner. Punch portrays John Bull, symbolising England, as looking on in puzzlement. (Punch, 15 April 1914)

about “seeing” Christ’s “blood upon the rose”. Or the Dublin trade unionists with Connolly, who refused to sign the surrender notice in general, but signed it with the note: “I agree to these conditions for the men only under my own command in the Moore Street District and for the men in Stephen’s Green command”.

The account of the Rising as “blood sacrifice” is a rationalisation of the actions of revolutionaries, made vicariously by non-revolutionaries. This happened; there was a big chance that it would be defeated; the deaths of revolutionaries would be its consequences; therefore, that was the intention.

Plainly the national rising which the insurgents were trying to organise, until the *Sunday Independent* came out with MacNeill’s announcement calling off the “manoeuvres”, was dangerous, and might have resulted in their deaths, but plainly no “blood sacrifice” was intended. If some psychological trait of Pearse’s might have, or could be said

to have, pointed in a certain direction, who in 1916 shared that?

MacNeill and his friends, holding aloof, thought a Rising had no chance, that only suicidal people would want it. Therefore the insurgents wanted suicide? So death must have been their settled intent, or so it is often assumed.

In fact, on Easter Sunday the insurgents faced either the fight they chose, or a demoralising defeat, the worst defeat, defeat without a fight. The British authorities knew about the plans for the Rising – they had captured the German arms ship, arrested Casement, and seen messages from the IRB people in the USA via a US secret service raid on the German consulate on 18 April – and so would have moved against the insurgents even if they cancelled action. They postponed intended arrests until after Easter because of Casement’s arrest on Good Friday. They had thought Casement was central in the affairs of the putative insurgents and so his arrest spelled the end of a possible rising. Thus, inadvertently, Casement

²⁹ Later, in 1922, he became friendly with Michael Collins.

³⁰ It was from the same playsheet as in Derry and Belfast in mid-August 1969, when British troops were put on the streets to stop Protestant-Catholic fighting. The Catholics welcomed them and fed them – “gave them cups of tea”, as short-sighted British leftists backing the troops put it. In 1969, though, leftist leaders in Ireland (and IS, today’s SWP, in Britain) called for and welcomed British soldiers. The soldiers did not return to barracks for 38 years after 1969.

ensured that the insurgents were not rounded up on the eve of the Rising.

The insurgents had planned a national rising, with serious German support in ordnance and troops. Faced with catastrophe on Easter Sunday, after MacNeill's cancellation and the sinking of the ship with (few) German

arms, they behaved thereafter as the desperate, determined revolutionaries they were.

A contemporary song tells the truth: "My name is James Connolly, and I have not come here to die".

9. Germany and the plans for a Rising

The Rising that happened (after mishaps, including an open split in its own ranks on the day originally set for the Rising), on one hand, and the Rising as they planned it, on the other, were sufficiently distinct from each other as to be two different things.

There were at least two sorts of anti-imperialism – the general anti-imperialism of the consistent anti-imperialist women and men of the Socialist International and of James Connolly in August 1914, and specific anti-imperialism such as the anti-British feeling of some of the Irish. The 1916 Proclamation was not general anti-imperialist, but only anti-English. It had no concern at all for the crimes or the victims of the imperialisms fighting Britain.

Austria's war in Serbia would kill at least 1,250,000 people in 1914-18. That most brutal Austrian imperialist attempt to kill Serbia was of no importance to those fighting for Irish independence from Britain and looking to Germany and Austria as "gallant allies". The Rising would affect anti-imperialists all over the world, but the insurgents aligned with the imperialists who were anti-British.

The rising planned, as distinct from that one that happened, had an important German dimension, of guns and officers. When the British government made much of the alleged German involvement in 1916, they exaggerated, but they did not just invent.

On Easter Monday the insurgents did not know for sure in Dublin that none of the German officers which they had asked for were coming to Ireland to organise their military effort. Roger Casement had tried to come to Dublin to tell them there would be very little German help and to get the Rising stopped. But he had been captured on the previous Friday (and after a trial, would be hanged in London on 3 August), and the ship with the few old guns sent sunk on the Saturday.

Some of the Irish leaders were still hoping for a landing by German officers to lead the widespread Rising they expected and had tried to organise. German aid came to nothing. Connolly was serving Germany as a propagandist in the belief that Germany would take Ireland's side. But Germany did not serve the insurgents.

It was a traditional IRB doctrine that only when "England" was at war could Ireland strike successfully in arms for its independence. It originated with John Mitchel, a nationalist deported from Ireland during the Famine. Mitchel's doctrine came to mean for some that the Irish could rise in any British war and that the Irish would support any power against England. At the very start of World War One, Connolly mocked the IRB for having supported the Tsar in 1904 and supporting "the German War Lord" in 1914. Days later he publicly joined those he had mocked.

The pro German policy made sense according to IRB tradition, and according to Mitchel – "Bring war in our time, O Lord" – but it made no anti-imperialist or socialist sense, and little realpolitik sense. It was foolish. There was no reason for anyone to be fooled about what Germany would do after winning the war, or to think that Britain was uniquely imperialist and Germany was not. Or even to be fooled about whether Germany would make a serious military effort in Ireland. It would not. As it happens, the German high command was right at Easter 1916. Most of the Irish would have been against them if they had tried to intervene seriously.

If Germany had made a serious military effort, then probably Ireland would have become a theatre of the Great War, with an unequal civil war within Ireland nested within it.

The Germans may have been cooled towards the idea of German soldiers in Ireland by the failure of Roger Casement to recruit even an unsteady Irish Brigade from Irish prisoners of war in Germany. Casement's way of presenting his case may have contributed to failure, but politically it was that the PoWs were on Britain's side, as they had been on the invasion of Belgium. And they were nearer the truth of things than the German apologists Casement and Connolly were.

The pro-German Irish made many proposals to Germany, from 1914 onwards, to land soldiers to fight the British, and equipment to arm the Irish. On the eve of the Rising, Sean Mac Diarmada told IRB president Dennis McCullough that there would be "probably a German submarine coming up the Liffey and... the Germans were



A FORETASTE OF HOME RULE HARMONY.
"Mr. Devlin here interposed with a remark which was not heard in the gallery, and Mr. W. O'Brien, turning round to where the hon. member was sitting, called out in an angry tone something which was not clearly heard."—"Times" Report.

This cartoon of Joe Devlin, the Belfast Home Rule leader, and William O'Brien expresses the pretence of Punch that the English can't understand the Irish. Joe Devlin led the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Board of Erin), which had controlled the Home Rule party since 1909, and William O'Brien MP had then split from the Home Rule party, to form the All for Ireland League. (Punch, summer 1914)

going to send at least 250 officers".

Ireland was divided on the war, with a pro-British majority. The more we assume the success of a Rising with serious German help and German participation, the more credence we give to the idea of a build up of a British force against them, and Ireland becoming a theatre of the Great War.

Before the war

Both Green and Orange had contact with Germany in the immediate pre-war period. Both sides brought guns from Germany to Ireland.

When war came, the Unionists sided with Britain, but in the run-up there was half-serious talk of them transferring their allegiance to Germany. Thomas Andrews, the secretary of the Ulster Unionist Council, declared in December 1910: "At all costs we will defend ourselves and if the worst comes to the worst, I can only say for myself and I believe for my colleagues that if we were deserted by Great Britain, I would rather be governed by Germany than by Patrick Ford and John Redmond and Company".

James Craig, future prime minister of the Six Counties, said in January 1911: "There is a spirit spreading abroad which I can testify from my personal knowledge that Germany and the German Emperor would be preferred to the rule of John Redmond, Patrick Ford, and the Molly Maguires."³¹

Frederick Crawford, who organised the gun-running for the UVF, said on

29 April 1912: "If they were put out of the Union... he would infinitely prefer to change his allegiance right over to the Emperor of Germany or anyone else who has got a proper and stable government". It is likely that the German government knew about the big arms shipment to the Unionists from Hamburg in April 1914, and tacitly allowed it to go ahead.

Sir Edward Carson himself, leader of the enemies of Home Rule and UK cabinet minister in 1915 and 1916-7, attended a luncheon party with Kaiser Wilhelm II in August 1913 at Homburg. (Carson is reported to have changed the subject when Wilhelm II raised the subject of "Ulster".)

The equivalent on the Home Rule side of those Unionist leaders was the Irish party at Westminster and its leader, John Redmond. The Irish party did not have contact with Germany or, still less, support it. Their votes at Westminster kept the Liberal Party in power at the start of war. On the nationalist side, it was the "rebels", the IRB and the Citizen Army, that had contact with Germany or made propaganda for Germany.

When Austria gave an ultimatum that could not be accepted by a Serbian state that wanted to retain its independence, and when Germany backed Austria, in July 1914, the dispute in the UK probably influenced those governments and thus expedited World War One. They thought England would soon be in a state of civil war over Ireland and would not be able to inter-

³¹ The "Molly Maguires" were the Catholic Orange Order, the AOH. In 1909, at the so-called "Ash Plant Convention", they took control of the Home Rule party. The section of Home Rulers led by William O'Brien MP (not to be confused with William O'Brien the trade unionist) split to form the All for Ireland League.

vene in a European war.

The Director of Ordnance on the Orange side was Frederick Crawford. In June 1913 English police seized Crawford's secret armoury in Hammer-smith. But by the eve of the Great War the UVF had imported 19,000 guns from Germany and had tens of thousands of members, now well-armed. Early in 1914 Crawford got agreement from a German arms dealer for a big consignment of high-quality guns, manufactured in Austria. The consignment, bigger than all previous deliveries of guns for the Orange cause put together, arrived at Larne harbour in April 1914 and was distributed without a hitch.

When nationalists landed a much smaller cargo of guns (1,500) at Howth, in July 1914, there was a confrontation with British soldiers, in which three civilians were shot dead and a number wounded: that was made a notorious example of the different approaches to nationalist and to Orange arming. The contempt of British officials for the nationalist and Catholic Irish runs through this story like an Orange thread.

Germany and Austria took account of the prospect of civil war in the UK. There was no equivalent in the top ranks of Irish nationalism. John Redmond was criticised by such nationalists as James Connolly for being too quick to pledge allegiance and support to Britain.

The IRB had been for Germany in the coming war from at least 1911 (*When Germany Fights England, Irish Freedom*, Oct-Nov 1911). When war came, the IRB were for Germany until the USA entered the war in April 1917: then they were for the USA. Connolly said that the IRB had supported Russia in the Japan-Russia war of 1904 because they thought Japan was Britain's friend.³²

According to John Devoy, leader of the IRB organisation in the USA, the IRB never took German gold. But they were Irish nationalists. Against British imperialism, but not anti-imperialist or even anti-racist.

Casement's plans for Germany

The scheme developed by Roger Casement and taken up by the IRB advocated no less than the radical reorganisation of the world imperialist system. Germany would displace Britain. Yet, in the fantastic Irish theory of it, the newly dominant Germany would not be an imperialist power. It would not be imperialist despite holding large areas of East Africa and South West Africa (and Belgium, and large parts of Poland).

At the end, according to the best IRB scenario, Ireland would bear about the same relation to victorious Germany as she had to Britain before the war when Britain promised Home Rule – and, of course, to get to that scenario, benign for Ireland, Germany would have

to win the war, champion Ireland, and see a revolution within the imperialist world system, what the Germans called "world politics".

Meanwhile the Irish would rise. If IRB advice were taken, the Germans would land in Ireland and sweep out the British. Or, more likely, make Ireland a theatre of the Great War, with a big element of intra-Irish civil war in it. Much of Home Rule Ireland as well as Unionist Ireland would have been on Britain's side against Germany and the IRB.

The shift of Irish feeling and opinion did not even begin until after the British shootings which followed the Rising. Even outside the north-east, a big majority in Ireland still supported Home Rule and Redmond.

Not until Britain proposed conscription in Ireland, in April 1918, was there the decisive shift from being pro-British which led to the break-up of the Home Rule party. Even then, the shift away from being pro-British was limited, and not positively pro-German. In early April 1917 the USA joined the World War on Britain's side, and the IRB, considering US pressure on Britain more valuable than hopes of German aid, immediately shifted to a pro-US, pro-Allied position. The Armistice, on 11 November 1918, brought crowds cheering the Allied victory onto the streets of Dublin; and in radical nationalist newspapers like Arthur Griffith's *Nationality* hopes that the declared policies of President Wilson of the USA would bring a peace favouring small nations and notably Ireland.

There never was even wartime nationalist sense in the pro-German policy of the Irish. The Germans had been in favour of the Irish Brigade which Casement thought he could create. With his failure, their interest and involvement waned. Would it not have revived if German officers had been in command of a rising all over Ireland?

The IRB's aim was to ensure that Ireland had a seat and a voice at the Peace Conference that would surely follow the war. But Ireland had been a subordinate part of the UK for nearly 120 years: how would Ireland have a place at the Peace Conference? Germany would win, and that would give Ireland a place? Why would Britain agree to that? It would have no choice: Germany would insist?

If the policy made sense, it was for a Rising in alliance with Germany, strong enough to win Ireland a seat at the Conference, whatever Britain wanted, but limited enough not to risk German domination of Ireland.

Casement went to Germany from the USA, backed by the IRB, in October 1914. He was to launch an Irish Brigade from Irish soldiers captured and imprisoned by Germany. Almost all Irish PoWs in fact believed in Home Rule and John Redmond. Casement seemed strange and exotic to them – "the Fenian".



First serious hint of Partition, spring 1914. Home Rule leader John Redmond leading his victorious race-horse Home Rule, ridden by prime minister H H Asquith. Redmond has suggested "temporary" partition for Asquith to propose. (Punch, 27 May 1914)

Casement's statement of his case was said not to be in their language and concerns. The soldiers reflected the Ireland from which they came, and it was not then ready to follow "Fenians". In addition, Casement would have presented his unreal picture of a post-war world of benign German hegemony. To soldiers in whose minds Germany's invasion of Belgium would have been uppermost, that boded not too well for another small Catholic country. They did not share Casement's hostility to England. All in all, though they were victims of British imperialist propaganda, they had a far better picture of reality than Casement had.

Casement recruited perhaps 50 Irish PoWs. By contrast, Josef Pilsudski had recruited some 25,000 to Polish Legions to fight with Austria against Russia. Soon Casement himself ceased to believe in the Irish Brigade and fell into despair and depression. The Germans steadily diminished their hopes in Irish nationalism, until those had dwindled to nothing by Easter 1916. Casement's

relations with Germany led him to agree in principle that his Irish Brigade could fight in Egypt to wrest control from Britain. Devoy on behalf of the IRB strongly objected to that. Nevertheless it throws light on the fact that the men and women of 1916 were not anti-imperialists.

A different-minded Connolly, as late as early August 1914, had mocked the Republicans for backing Russia, England's supposed enemy, in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, and for backing the "German War Lord" from the start in World War One. Yet a policy of fighting England alone, as distinct from fighting imperialism as a whole, i.e. from the socialist policy Connolly started with in August 1914, implied an alliance with Germany. It was nationalist opposition to a specific imperialism, as against socialist opposition to all imperialism.

The socialist argument was that now, in the world war, it was impossible to make a limited, one-sided fight against one imperialism without endorsing its

³² The IRB people in the USA explained their stance in racist terms, not at all anti-imperialist: from fear of "the savage methods adopted by Japan which may later be used by the yellow race when the 'yellow peril' which is now being encouraged from both London and Washington feels itself strong enough to attack Western civilisation" – *Gaelic American* 13 February 1904

enemy imperialisms, which were doing similar things themselves. In the war, Austria was wreaking horrors in Serbia as Britain had done against Ireland around the 1798 rising, and the Turkish empire had slaughtered a million Armenians in 1915.

Yet from September 1914 the depleted labour movement, or its Catholic majority, James Connolly in particular, was pro-German. The *Irish Worker*, the paper of the Transport Union, was banned for being pro-German in late 1915. Its replacement, the second series of *Workers' Republic*, edited by Connolly, published consistent pro-German propaganda and apologetics for Germany doings in occupied Belgium. It even (4 December 1915) reprinted material lauding the Kaiser, and (18 March 1916) presented Germany's as "a homogeneous Empire of self-governing peoples" with "more... possibilities of freedom and civilisation". Jim Larkin, from early summer 1915, was an agitator in the USA, paid by Germany, against the US joining the war on Britain's side.

The Irish Citizen Army had begun as a strikers' militia in 1913-14 to deter police and the Catholic Orange Order, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, from attacking strikers. It was continued and developed after the strike by James Connolly and others.³³

Connolly had met the war as an internationalist, an anti-imperialist, and an adherent of the Socialist International's policy of resisting all the imperialists (including German imperialism) and "making war on war". Most of his life, he believed that socialists should mobilise workers against all imperialisms. He held that stance for about a month into the war. Then Connolly came to think that he, like the IRB, could fight one imperialist side only, with the active help of the other. He was positively for Germany in the Great War, again and again until the Rising. He told lies for Germany about occupied Belgium.

In principle, Irish nationalists had a right to use one imperialism against another. But they did not have to write in

support of Germany. And what they, especially James Connolly, did not have to write in support of Germany, and yet wrote, defined them.³⁴

Within weeks of the start of war in 1914 Connolly and Pearse and Tom Clarke and Sean Mac Diarmada and Sean T O'Kelly, the future Fianna Fail president of the 26 Counties, attended a secret conference in Clarke's tobacconist shop in Dublin to coordinate the promised insurrection. That may have been the point at which Connolly crystallised the pro-German policy he had publicly mocked only days earlier. In any case, he would be an apologist for Germany for the rest of his life.³⁵

A low level apologist, using untruths and supporting German lies where he thought it necessary. For example, German invasion and, after heavy fighting, occupation of most of "gallant little Catholic Belgium", had an impact especially in small Catholic Ireland. Connolly appeared³⁶ as a full scale justifier of the invasion and the atrocities. Yet the atrocities had happened, even though the critics of Germany were hypocritical. Connolly defended and justified in Belgium what he deplored elsewhere. If one were to take sides in the war instead of opposing all imperialism (as Connolly did for most of August 1914) then on the issues, the invasion of Belgium and France and Serbia, the genocide of the Armenians, and if you could ignore Russian imperialism – of course you couldn't – then the choice would have been for British and French imperialism.

The Citizen Army wore the charge of being pro-German proudly. In its songs it declared:

"Tis the Germans they're out to destroy, me boys,

Whose prosperity did so annoy, me boys...

The great German nation has sworn their damnation,

And we'll echo the curse with a will, me boys..."

"Good old Britain, rule the waves

And gobble up all the land,

Bring out the blacks and Indian braves



THE HOME RULE BABY.

"If the Bill becomes an Act it will be born with a rope round its neck."—Mr. WILLIAM O'BRIEN.

John Redmond, leader of the Home Rule party, caricatured with his young pig Home Rule. Partition will butcher it to make sausage. William O'Brien had led a split – the All for Ireland League – from the Home Rule party in 1909, when the Catholic Orange Order, the AOH, won control of the party. O'Brien eventually joined Sinn Fein. His base was in the Cork area, with the Cork Free Press (Punch, summer 1914)

To jigger the German band..."

"When the Germans come to free us, we will lend a helping hand,

For we believe they're just as good as any in the land..."

The racism here, opposing England and France especially because they had Indian and Black soldiers in their armies, echoed the IRB. Connolly must have known about the German Social Democrats' loud denunciation of German atrocities in South-West Africa (modern Namibia) in 1907, which killed maybe 80% of the Herero people. Yet Connolly let himself describe Germany's as "a homogeneous Empire of self-governing peoples" with "more... possibilities of freedom and civilisation". In early 1916 Connolly reprinted in *Workers' Republic*, and with a note

of broad approval, writings by Meyrick Cramb which positively praised German imperialism in Africa.³⁷ Connolly cannot but have known that what he wrote glorifying Germany in the war was simply not true.

James Connolly by that stage was a politician in the bad sense, and now acted out the worse and most retrograde form of "politics", saying what he felt would serve and justify what was politically convenient, rather than what was true

The policy of the insurrectionists, both old IRB people and Connolly, was a pyramid built on interconnected and improbable speculations and implausible assumptions. It rested on a improbable concatenation of events and opinions and on wistful or magic

33 Calling it Ireland's Red Army is simply dishonest. Even considering its origins, it was not in 1916 a Red Army, or even an anti-imperialist, as distinct from an anti-British-imperialist, army

34 The IRB's equivalent to Connolly's apologetics was racist rather than anti-imperialist. "The truth is that anything like a decisive defeat of Germany will be a disaster, not only to Catholicity, but to the whole religious cause. In that case, Christendom will be handed over to barbarians and infidels. Russian treachery and despotism will straddle over eastern Europe, from Scandinavia (for that will be betrayed) to Constantinople. France, whose government to-day is led by the man who boasted, when he had struck so terrible a blow against religion, 'the lights of heaven are extinguished', France, that persecutes holy women and sends priests to fight in the field – this nation will extend its materialistic rule over a fresh frontier, and teach its poisonous doctrines to new lands. England, now almost avowedly atheist, will, by the aid of black savages [i.e. Indian troops in the British army] and yellow sorcerers [i.e. Japan], impose its anarchic principles on the future Europe, and there will be no place left where men may follow the old ideals of life – ideals of wholesome toil, sane worship, good fellowship, art, song and freedom" – *Irish Freedom*, 1 Oct 1914

35 The IRA in World War Two was not the IRB, but it was of the IRB and Connolly tradition. It allied with German imperialism against British imperialism. I would argue that given the complicated situation in Ireland it was not entitled to make such an alliance. But say that it was entitled to make it. Then it was obscene to be willing to see Europe, or Britain, in a condition of enslavement to Nazi Germany for Ireland's supposed benefit. Or to see the Protestant and Catholic citizens of Northern Ireland in Nazi enslavement so that the IRA could "free Ireland". And not only the right-wing IRA. Frank Ryan was of the left and was captured fighting the fascists in Spain. "Sprung" by Germans, he worked at liberty and freely as a news analyst for the German regime. Ryan was maybe confused by the Russian-German alliance of 1939-41. For many decades he was a hero of Irish Republicans, and the Irish left sang about him as "Frank Ryan, who died in Hitler's cruel jail". He didn't. He died in 1944 of natural causes, at liberty and voluntarily working for Hitler in Dresden. In 1941 the British and Irish Communist Parties published a book compiled by P J Musgrove, *A Socialist And War*, of Connolly's pro-German articles because they thought Connolly had been like they were, propagandists for Germany and German peace terms. That was based on the Stalin-Nazi pact of August 1939 to June 1941. When Germany invaded Russia, *A Socialist And War* ceased to be of use to the Communist Parties.

36 *Some Perverted Battle Lines*, *Irish Worker*, 26 September 1914; *How England Sacrificed Belgium*, *Irish Worker*, 17 October 1914; *Notes on the Front*, *Workers' Republic*, 23 October 1915

37 "Seeing that none of the German colonies are more than 30 years old, their development has been remarkable. If the Germans are kept out of Africa in the future it will be a greater misfortune to the cause of civilisation in that continent than if the British, French, Belgians, or Portuguese were to be kept out – not that any reasonable person would wish to see the people of any country deprived of their rightful share of a prize which is the common heritage of all Europe. Even English observers admit that in German East Africa 'an admirable type of official has been evolved'..." (*Workers' Republic*, 22 January 1916).

thinking.

Assume even that all their improbable things came true, and Ireland became a state under German patronage. Then it would be more likely to come under the German monarchy, which had far more power than the British one, than to be any sort of republic. And in fact they knew that. Pearse, during a lull in the fighting of Easter 1916, discussed the possibility of a German prince being installed as king of an independent Ireland. At a meeting of IRB

organisers before the Rising, Joseph Plunkett had already won acceptance in IRB circles for the idea of an independent Irish kingdom headed by a German Catholic prince.

The IRB had assumptions about the Germans that the Germans did not share. It had a programme projected onto Germany that was not the programme of Germany and those who ruled over it.

10. After the Rising

The quick movement from the revolutionary, British-legal, Home Rule nationalism which still, despite everything, dominated on 23 April 1916, the day before the Rising, to Sinn Féin 18 months later, is an astonishing change. It is usually attributed to the Rising or to the "blood sacrifice" of the Rising, but that is too glib.

As we have seen, there had been much Irish sympathy for Britain, and antagonism to the insurgents. The Dublin Chamber of Commerce linked the Rising to the "labour" unrest before the Great War. George Gilmore, in *Labour and the Republican Movement*, reports: "when representatives of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce were questioned by the Royal Commission investigating the causes of the rebellion they gave as their view that, despite their many protests and warnings, the government had permitted an insurrectionary situation to develop. 'Larkinism', they said, had been allowed to get out of hand". The Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution to "assure his Gracious Majesty of the loyalty of the commercial community to his person and his throne. They also do record their abhorrence of the dreadful scenes of murder, carnage and destruction resulting from the action of a section of the community in the city".

Across the country, the Ennis Chamber of Commerce adopted a similar policy, perhaps modelled on Dublin. Hostility was widespread. The *Irish Independent*, the union's antagonist in 1913-14, called on the British to shoot the wounded James Connolly.

Prime minister Asquith gave General Maxwell, who had been the British Officer Commanding in Egypt, full military powers as the Rising ended. Military rule was decreed for the whole of Ireland, from Dublin to Limerick, where not a mouse stirred during the Rising. General Maxwell was the ruling military dictator. He did what he liked. Martial law continued until November 1916.

The shootings started on 3 May, with Patrick Pearse, Thomas McDonagh, and Tom Clarke. Prisoners were shot in groups until the last, Sean Mac Diarmada and James Connolly, on 12 May.

Connolly was badly wounded from the Rising, and for most of the time in agony. Mac Diarmada was lame from polio. Connolly had to be strapped into a chair to be shot.

They were the last, but no-one knew except perhaps Maxwell. 90 had been sentenced to death. 15 had been shot. Were the shootings over? No-one knew when or whether the killings would begin again.

Famously, the experience has been compared to watching blood seeping out from under a locked door. There was no legal defence allowed to those sentenced. The procedure was later pronounced to have been illegal.

The first thing about the killings is their uncertainty, secrecy, and drawn-out character, the seeming indifference to justice and the dispensing with "due process". The uncertainty and insecurity stirred up a sizeable part of the Irish people, including those who had little sympathy with the Rising.

British power and its use was the active force, confronting all the Catholic and nationalist Irish. All alike came under the direct soldiers' rule of General Maxwell. People were arrested and searched all over Ireland. During the Rising, the Home Rule party and its National Volunteers had exerted themselves to keep the peace. Yet they also felt the arbitrary rule of the suspicious, heavy-handed soldiers in time of war.

The story that the people of Dublin were actively hostile to the Rising at first, then began to see it differently once the British started shooting the leaders, is true, but too glib.

Britain declared martial law, which remained until November 1916, throughout the island. Not only in Dublin, but also in every place where the Rising took place, in Galway county where something like a rising started but came to nothing (Liam Mellows never forgave himself for that), and in places in Limerick which had been entirely quiet.

The British Army ruled, and the Tory establishment suddenly returned to rule through the restoration of its direction of Irish affairs with British Army rule.



The Irish Volunteers were started in November as a nationalist counter-move to the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913. (Punch, 10 June 1914).

With martial law throughout Ireland for six or seven months, the British military commanders reacted to the Rising in a way that spread the concerns of the insurgents. The Army, in its own way, by its nature, and for its own reasons, spread the politics of Irish nationalism that defeated Dublin had embodied. It spread the idea that the Irish were not really equal under the law – not when things got serious.

The Ireland that had thought itself near Home Rule was plunged backwards and downwards by martial law. For more than 50 years beyond 1916, this interaction between soldiers and civilians would be repeated again and again. It even affected the British Army in 1969-70 in Northern Ireland.³⁸

Everywhere in Ireland in the six or seven months after the Rising, the rule of the Army worked to undo the efforts of those who had limited and contained the Rising, stopped it spreading outside Dublin. After that came the revival of pre-war discussions, in the Irish Convention of 1917-18; then the British talk from April 1918 of extending conscription to Ireland (there had been conscription in England, Scotland, and

Wales since January 1916, and it was extended in April 1918 to men aged 41 to 50), the campaign against it led by the Church; and the British abandonment of conscription.

The British lost the favour they had. The Home Rule party deplored the Rising and its people did their best, and effectively, to stop the Rising spreading outside Dublin. Nevertheless, events forced them to defend the insurgents in the House of Commons during and after the Rising. John Dillon had been leader of the anti-Parnell faction of Home Rulers, and after their reunion in February 1900 with the Parnellites under John Redmond was regarded as the most influential man in the party. In parliament on 11 May Dillon declared that the insurgents had "fought a clean fight, and they fought with superb bravery and skill", and called for an end to the shooting.

It was the first of a long series of cases of the Home Rule party adopting the Republicans' positions, eventually even seceding from Parliament (20 April 1918). John Dillon had been one of those agreed that land redistribution would weaken the Irish nationalist drive

³⁸ That happened with the curfew and gunfight in the Lower Falls area in Belfast in July 1970 against the Official IRA (the Stalinist faction which ceased fire forever on 29 May 1972: it eventually became the Workers Party).

for Home Rule. Now he asked rhetorically, who was ruling Ireland under martial law, and replied: "There is no Government in Ireland except Sir John Maxwell and the Dublin [gentlemen's] clubs" (in parliament, 11 May 1916). The clubs meant the old upper class, the Unionists, the old British "establishment" in Ireland.

The Irish people felt themselves thrown backward.

In fact, the evolutionary, legal Home Rule party, on the level of ideas, had never broken from the "physical force" tradition. They said it was outmoded, a thing of the past, but without having to think about it too much. Home Rule Ireland recognised and had an ingrained respect, a "historical" respect, for that "physical force" tradition. If not this way, they would say to their loyal supporters, then "we will unsheath the Fenian sword". How many of them meant that, or half-meant it, is not the point.

The Home Rule party commemorated 1798. The monuments around the country memorialising the public hanging of three Fenians in Manchester in 1867 were theirs, and so were the Maid of Erin monuments erected afterwards. So were the widespread commemorations of the 1798 Rising.

One of the events said to have revived Republicanism, or registered its revival, and led to the Rising was the funeral of O'Donovan Rossa in August 1915. There, Pearse made his speech: "Ireland unfree will never be at peace". The National Volunteers of Redmond and Dillon were there too, though unarmed (the Irish Volunteers were there with arms).

There was a great gap and yet not an insuperable gap between evolutionary nationalism and the nationalism that asserted itself again in 1916. The 1916 Rising was, of course, the new beginning, and affected all that followed.

The new Sinn Fein

In February 1917 Count Plunkett (father to Joseph Mary Plunkett, a 1916 leader; himself not yet committed to Sinn Fein) won a by-election in Roscommon North with Sinn Fein support. A Papal Count, there was no way he could be a non-sectarian candidate. In May 1917 Joseph McGuinness, who had taken part in the Rising and was in jail in England, won a by-election in South Longford for Sinn Fein.

John Redmond died in March 1918. His brother Willie Redmond, who had been an MP and a British soldier, was killed in Europe in June 1917. After Willie Redmond's death, De Valera fought the resulting East Clare by-election in July 1917 and won. It signalled that Sinn Fein was in the ascendant. It reconstituted itself over the summer of 1917 as a new movement, broader than Arthur Griffith's old Sinn Fein, which had had nothing to do with the Rising.

The Home Rule party won three by-elections in early 1918. It withdrew



THE MARCH OF CIVILISATION IN IRELAND.

Tim. "WELL, PATSY, ARE YE AFTER BUILDING AN ADDITION TO YER HOUSE?"

Patsy. "SHURE AND THE HINS LIKES A PLACE TO THIMSILVES."

How the English middle class saw Ireland in mid-1914: the Irish lived with hens and pigs (Punch, 15 July 1914)

from Westminster in April 1918, over conscription. That is, it adopted the tactic advised by Sinn Fein since mid-1917. But over the course of 1918 it was outflanked.

Sinn Fein's triumph in the General Election of 14 December 1918 was made possible, also, by the fact that after Easter 1916 Britain applied two approaches to radical nationalism.

There was conscienceless slaughter mostly in Dublin, but "only" of 15 men. 90 were sentenced to death. 74 men were reprieved, and one woman, Constance Markievicz³⁹. Some 1,900 were sent to jails and camps. They were released in instalments, some quite soon, some on 21-22 December 1916, and the rest on 16 June 1917. The places of imprisonment, like all such places were "universities" of politics, here, of nationalism. For their inmates, they were party schools. Released they formed a cadre of the new Sinn Fein party, everywhere it existed.

Those who had been "out" at Easter 1916 were now special people. The veterans of 1916 had and steadily gained prestige as the fight over conscription developed and knitted with rebellion. Sean O'Casey in his memoirs depicts "the boys" being "given the last word", as having a special place in every discussion. When the veterans pronounced, everybody else had to be silent.

Easter 1916 was called the Sinn Fein

rebellion. (Sinn Fein was usually translated as "Ourselves Alone", not "We Ourselves", and that gives it a different meaning, an enemy's meaning). The Rising was not in fact a Sinn Fein enterprise. The Sinn Fein party was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905. In 1907 it merged with the "Dungannon Clubs".⁴⁰ Looking to what had happened between Hungary and Austria in 1867, Sinn Fein's founder Arthur Griffith had suggested in 1904 that the Irish MPs should secede from Westminster and set up an Irish Parliament in Dublin, which would then recognise the King as also the king of Ireland. Griffith wanted to reorganise the centre of the Empire as a British-Hibernian dual monarchy. The idea was not new. Irish secession was suggested in Parnell's time. But Griffith made it his own.

The Sinn Fein party changed dramatically in 1917. Those who fought in 1916, and those who, even if in retrospect, supported them, gathered at Sinn Fein's Ard Fheis in October 1917, adopted a policy and leadership changed from the old Sinn Fein, and made it the party of 1916. Eamon De Valera, the only commander in the Rising to survive (he had been born in America, and Britain was then courting the USA), was elected president of Sinn Fein, with Arthur Griffith (who was not of the Rising) as his deputy.

In policy they were all republicans, even former monarchists, like Griffith

with his dual monarchy idea. The "republic" formula was a strange compromise which stated that when they had won the Irish Republic, then the Irish people could decide whether they wanted a monarchy or a republic. (Inside the GPO after proclaiming the Republic in April 1916, Pearse had discussed the possibility of a German prince being installed as king of an independent Ireland). For now, though, Sinn Fein wanted what had been declared and lost in 1916.

The British thought the king alone embodied the whole Empire. Until the Statute of Westminster in 1931 the British felt they could not co-operate on a "compromise" way to finesse the requirement that Irish members of Parliament swear allegiance to the king. That issue then became the centre of dispute in Ireland about the Treaty.

People lament the "absence of a revolutionary party", when they mean that the wrong revolutionary party was present: in Ireland in 1916-21, the IRB. Its "head centre", Michael Collins, thought the Proclamation of 1916 "a bit too socialistic". It would support the Treaty. The IRB, the secret revolutionary party, was the "secret" of Collins's ability to do what he did.

Lloyd George, Minister for War in 1916 and prime minister from Decem-

³⁹ She was the first woman elected to Westminster, but chose to secede and go to Dail Eireann.

⁴⁰ Dungannon meant the armed Protestant Volunteers of 1782, which won legislative independence for Ireland for the next 17 years until the Act of Union with Great Britain.

ber 1916, wanted to “settle” the Home Rule issue during the war in order to bring and keep the USA in alliance. In May-June 1916 he essayed a deal with six counties excluded: they would continue to be governed directly from London. He told the Home Rule party that the exclusion would be temporary (there was to be an “Imperial Conference” a year after the end of the war to reconsider it). The Home Rule politician Joe Devlin got an Ulster nationalist conference (23 June 1916) to back the scheme. At the same time Lloyd George reassured the Unionists that exclusion would be permanent. The Unionists wanted no Home Rule at all, not partition. The scheme collapsed.

In summer 1917 Lloyd George made

another attempt, convening an Irish Convention. The convention of appointed representatives included many Home Rule politicians elected to local government before 1914, and was dominated by Home Rulers and Unionists. Sinn Fein refused to take part. It sat from July 1917 to March 1918. No-one proposed partition.

Eventually a narrow majority proposed 32-county Home Rule, with customs and excise still controlled by Westminster, additional representation for Unionists in the Irish parliament, and an “Ulster committee” with veto rights. Southern Unionists and most of the Home Rulers backed it; the Ulster Unionists stood out against any Home Rule.

Facing obdurate opposition from the Ulster Unionists, and from Sinn Fein, Lloyd George quickly dropped the scheme. In late 1919 he came up with the Government of Ireland Bill 1920: two Home Rule parliaments, for Six and 26 Counties.

The Ulster Unionists did not want a Belfast parliament, but were persuaded. Lloyd George claimed that this Act, the legal frame for partition, would provide for a united Home Rule Ireland. There was to be a Council of Ireland (which never met) and an all-Ireland parliament as soon as the Northern and Southern parliaments agreed to it. The proposed Northern parliament, which the Ulster Unionists did not want, meant that all-Ireland Home Rule was now in

Irish hands and required no British decision as it would do with the Six Counties under direct rule. “With patience... you will gradually work a union of the North and South, a union of Protestant and Catholic, a union of Britain with Ireland” (Commons, 31 March 1920).

Hardly anyone believed that, but the Bill passed in December 1920 and provided the frame for the setting-up (before even the Bill had passed) of a government machine in Belfast and for elections in Ireland in May 1921. The Six Counties election set up Stormont; the 26 Counties “election” (in which no voting took place, because all candidates were unopposed) produced the second Dail Eireann.

11. The Six and 26 counties

In the 1930s Marxists called Czechoslovakia imperialist because Czechs dominated Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans. Poland too, because of Jewish, German, and Ukrainian minorities. Yugoslavia, because Serbs dominated Croats, Kosovars, etc. Imperialist in the sense that the Austro-Hungarian empire had been. Over half a century later, as Yugoslavia broke up, Serb chauvinism would provoke a series of bloody civil wars.

The Orange State was a very small Empire in Ireland. It was an empire as part of the British Empire, and from the start the Catholic or nationalist minority was homogenous, contiguous and mostly along the border with the 26 Counties. Religion, outlook, nationality, history, conception of themselves, preference on which of the two states they wanted to be in, all aligned them with the 26 Counties.

It is sometimes said that the Orange state grabbed those Catholic areas to get a more balanced and viable agricultural and industrial state. That is not true. It is a rationalisation: the British and the Orangeists did it, and they must have had reasons. Economic reasons, add the Marxists.

In fact it went on the principle of grabbing and holding as much as they could of the Ireland the Protestants had once ruled. The Orangeists talked of “Two Nations” but they had meant two nations all over the island.⁴¹ They were part of, and were backed by, the British imperialists – the wise people who made the post-war settlement in Versailles and the other post-war treaties, whose results in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia were carve-ups which helped prepare the Second World War, and its terrible aftermath in which over 13 million ethnic Germans (who had been in eastern Europe for centuries) and millions of Poles, Ukrainians, and

others were deported. More than that. Edward Carson, a Dublin barrister, had spent most of his career, even in the era of major reforms, fighting for the interests of landlords in Irish courts, in which he had upheld repression.

There is another reason. Carson and others used “Ulster” to describe the core territory they claimed. Antrim, Down, and County Londonderry (though not Derry City, which is two miles from the border with Donegal and the 26 Counties) were heavily Protestant-majority. The traditional province of Ulster covered nine counties. Nine would have given the Unionists a small and probably unstable majority; four, as proposed by a maverick Liberal in Parliament back in 1912, would have pared the Partition line too near to the Protestant-majority area.

The choice of six counties made Catholics and Nationalists a higher proportion, initially about a third, of the people in the marked-off area than all the Protestants were in all Ireland.

The Protestant majority areas were entitled to separation from the rest of Ireland on the same principle as Nationalist Ireland was from Britain. The Six Counties forcibly incorporated, from the beginning, one in three of its people, and two counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone, and a major city, Derry, on the borders, which were against the Northern state and for the nationalist and Catholic one. It put them at the mercy of a local “Protestant” parliament only lightly supervised by Westminster. That was democratic nonsense. From the late 1960s it led to revolt by the Catholics and by the IRA of the Northern Ireland community. The partition was false and artificial, and produced terrible results, North and South.

Today, 100 years after partition, more than half the people of the Six Counties are anti Unionist, though not all of

them necessarily want an immediate United Ireland.⁴²

The 26 counties partition state

“A carnival of reaction both North and South, [which] would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured” – James Connolly on partition, March 1914.

The “Southern” 26 Counties was sectarian, and in a more purely sectarian-religious way than Northern Ireland. There, Catholics were badly treated socially, and eventually revolted in 1968-9

Ireland had the serious problem of one large minority, the Protestants, and then an artificial minority in the Six Counties who were of the same people as the island majority. Partition, which supposedly solved Ireland’s minority problem, in fact gave it a second artificial minority – the Catholics of the Six Counties.

Partition was supposed to have been made rational, with the Catholic areas transferred where practical to the Catholic state. That was eminently practical in nearly half the Six Counties land area, Catholic-majority and on the borders with the 26 Counties. But there was no transfer. The transfer was to have been done by a 1924-5 “Boundary Commission” convened by Britain, involving both the 26 and Six Counties and Britain. The Six Counties refused to take part. Britain appointed a “representative” for them. The Commission recommended giving some tiny bits of land in the possession of the 26 Counties to the Northern state: the eventual deal was to shelve the Commission report and instead, as compensation to the 26 Counties, waive a debt of £157 million which Britain claimed. Eoin MacNeill, the Eoin MacNeill, was the

Southern Representative and back in Dublin his Irish opponents quoted him claiming that he got a “good bargain”.

In 1925 the 26 Counties started to make Catholic doctrine state legislation with a complete ban on divorce. For the Catholic 93% of the population, divorce was banned by their religion, a thing that should have been for them to choose to practise or not. The ban made Catholic practice compulsory for Catholics and imposed it as law on to those whose religion allowed for divorce, some 3,700 Jews and 200,000 Protestants of different sorts

In the Senate, William Butler Yeats, speaking against the ban on divorce and about those thus forbidden to divorce and locked into Catholic doctrine they had not chosen and would not choose, cited words attributed to Elizabeth I confronting the Spanish Armada: “we are no petty people” (meaning those in Ireland who did not on religious principle oppose divorce). It was a symbolic stand by the romantic elitist, the greatest maker of myths about 1916.

Once before Yeats had fought Catholic sectarianism, standing with the labour movement in the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14, when they faced the mobs and the thugs of the Catholic Orange Order, the AOH. He wrote on sectarianism in Dublin, and by implication, of Catholic sectarianism in Ireland, dominant in parts of the country, for people who did not need to be told about Orange sectarianism. In 1925 Yeats stood against the tide of Irish Catholic history as it was gaining force and power and turning into the priests’ social rule: “Rome rule”.

Towards 1968

A unique confluence of events led the nationalist minority in the Northern state to revolt.

⁴¹ In the 1880s John Redmond wrote a pamphlet against the idea that there were two Irish people. Yes, he said, Ireland had been two nations, but no more. Ireland was now a “mother country” too. He cited the Irish in Australia.

⁴² And recently, some pious Orange opponents of a united Ireland seem to have found the South, which had been priest-ridden, now too free of religion: fewer than one in three now goes to Mass each week as they are supposed to. Despite the continued strength of DUP, TUV, etc. Protestant church-going in the Six Counties has also declined steeply.

Any of the southern leaders would gladly have taken Fermanagh and Tyrone. But Collins spoke for the new state in trying to shape the new Ireland. He had no illusions that the Boundary Commission in 1925 would rectify the Border.

There was no mass movement of the Catholics and nationalists in the Six Counties for half a century. The Home Rule party survived in Northern Ireland until 1970 when, as the Nationalist Party, it was one of the founders of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the SDLP.

35 years after Partition an IRA war

on the Northern Ireland state was launched by the IRA, a split from the IRA, the Christle group, and Saor Uladh in November and December 1956. It followed a number of raids for guns on Northern police and British military barracks in which some republicans were caught and jailed.

What was remarkable was the passivity of the Northern Ireland Catholics: the raids were raids from the 26 Counties and they had a character of being raids by Catholic Ireland on heretical Protestant Ireland.

Also remarkable was the effect of the Border Campaign in the South.

Sinn Fein won four (abstentionist) seats in the Dail. After the death of Sean South, a clerical fascist, in a raid into the North, his coffin made a triumphal journey home to Limerick. Dominic Behan wrote two songs about him, one of which, a vainglorious war song, *Sean South of Garryowen*, became very popular in Catholic Ireland. Behan also wrote a much more thoughtful, more reflective, song about nationalism, about a boy who died with South, Fergal O'Hanlon, that was both true and gave a basis and tune for Bob Dylan's broader *With God On Our Side*.

35 years after a separatist govern-

ment took control in Dublin, the IRA still gripped the imagination of Catholic and nationalist Ireland. The military campaign was formally ended in 1962. It revived quickly in the years after 1968.

The South, its politicians, media, school history, and Church, was saturated by sentimental anti-partitionism. This was the time when the 26 Counties, with a population of three million, haemorrhaged about 50,000 a year, mainly to Britain: in the highest year, 1958, it was 80,000.

12. The long war

In the 1960s the Communist Party⁴³ gained control in the rump Republican movement. It backed a "civil rights" movement among nationalists in the Six Counties, where they did lack civil rights. Nationalist marching and drilling, demanding the civil rights and equality they lacked because of partition and the rule of an uneasy Protestant majority: the logic of civil rights was to raise the national question, and that was intended by the Communist Party and Connolly Association.

One new factor was the massive British and world-wide publicity and support given to the Northern Irish minority when the cameras captured a peaceful Catholic civil rights march (5 October 1968) being batoned by the RUC. Such things had been done against civil-rights activists in the Southern states of the USA. Northern Ireland was destabilised. A student movement erupted, People's Democracy. It was linked to the British IS (which has evolved in the SWP of today).

People's Democracy were half-aware nationalists with a patina of international leftism. Michael Farrell's *Struggle in the North* (1970), published by what was then the IS (SWP) publisher, Pluto Press, advocated De Valera style autarky for an all-Ireland state on the Cuban model.

But that implied joining an international network such as Cuba did. It implied Stalinism.

Its policy was ultra-left, and with a vengeance. They thought provocation made sense because the main enemy was the Unionists who wanted to reform Northern Ireland, prime minister O'Neill and his supporters.

They were successful when a PD march, backed by the then Stalinist Republican movement, later the Workers Party, marching through the Protestant heartland, was attacked. The attack got great publicity, but in terms of Catholic-Protestant relations it was very costly.

PD tactics only made sense if there was a power to appeal to when they detonated the Protestant ultras – as

the US was and would be for the black civil rights movement against the racists there. For Northern Ireland that was the British government. That, ultimately, was direct rule. And that too, ultimately, was the Provisional IRA.

In August 1969, Derry was engulfed by Protestant and Catholic fighting. After four days of fighting the British army took over. The fighting spread to Belfast, and eventually, to stop the fighting the PD leaders in Belfast and in Derry followed the logic of their politics and called for British troops, thus taking responsibility for British government activity in Northern Ireland. The British soldiers would remain on the streets, keeping the Six County state more or less intact for 38 years, from 1969 until 2007.

The IRA split in December 1969. The Stalinist "Official IRA" was the rump.

The gun and the bomb came back to Irish politics, spectacularly. The Protestant legal militia, the Ulster Defence Association, became a mass movement, killing Catholics at random to keep the unviable Six Counties state they had, allying with the British government, which, after granting the Catholics all the civil rights they demand, settled in to slug it out with the IRA, which had re-emerged on the fringes of the civil rights movement.

Disbanding of Stormont

After the disbanding of the Northern Ireland Parliament in March 1972, the question was posed very sharply: what were the Provisional IRA now for? What were they fighting for? The "Irish question" has been posed differently to the different generations. What was it now? What did the armed Republicans in the North now propose?

The existing nationalist culture of story and song and ethnic-sectarian history allowed militant nationalists – the IRA – to assert themselves and the gun in Irish politics.

This transformed part of the civil rights movement – all of whose demands were won after August 1969 –

into the armed revolt of the Provisional IRA, launched early in 1971.

In August 1971, the revolt was augmented by internment. In fact it was internment of nationalists and Catholics only, the lists being made up by the Belfast sectarian government of Brian Faulkner.

For a year the Provisionals fought the first stage in their war with a new ferocity. Using the car bomb, they blew the heart out of the northern towns, including the two cities of Belfast (where there was a solid Protestant and Unionist majority) and Derry (where there was a bigger Catholic and nationalist majority, gerrymandered out of its say in local government).

There was a powerful Protestant-Unionist backlash in the North. The British army got out of control and killed 13 (soon 14) unarmed demonstrators in one go, in Derry.

But there was still some "give" for Britain in the Northern Ireland system. Almost a year into the first Provo war, Britain took self-government in their own sub-state away from the Protestant-Unionist Six Counties. They abolished the Belfast Parliament.

Before the first World War the Protestant Unionists had won a veto on an all-island majority Home Rule. Now the Six County Catholics won a veto over Six Counties Protestant Home Rule.

It was a victory for the Provisional IRA, but a limited and purely negative victory. What would replace Stormont? A united Ireland, said the Provisional IRA; Catholic-Protestant power-sharing in the Six Counties, said the British, who had the power.

The Provisionals' war resumed after a ceasefire following the abolition of Stormont and it became plain that the British were not going to force the Protestants into some form of united Ireland, or try to do that.

In a fit of generosity in 1972-3, and in recognition of the need to accommodate the Protestants, the Provisionals came out for a federal Ireland on the basis of the old four provinces, each

with a parliament and a measure of self-rule.

The traditional province of Ulster was nine counties, with at best a slender and unstable Protestant majority.

The early Provisional leaders were political naifs. A right-wing reaction to Stalinism in the IRA, some of them were (platonic) social democrats at best, Rory O'Brady perhaps. They believed their own propaganda, that Northern Ireland was "British-occupied Ireland". It was nonsense, but they believed their own nonsense.

The best encapsulation of it I encountered put the situation then like this: we are all anti-imperialists, many of us are socialists of some sort. Where others agonised about the complexities and difficulties, the Provisionals came along, pointed at the British soldier on the corner with his gun, and shouted: "That's imperialism. Shoot him!"

It was a policy, and it pointed to the British army and the British as the old enemy and the enemy now. They were the enemy, and the markers of martyrs, in the songs and stories that had nurtured the Provisionals.

The British had taken control in Northern Ireland, pushing aside the control of the Orange sectarians. They had begun to do that in August 1969, and continued by their de facto direct rule thereafter, and clinched it in March 1972 with the abolition by Britain of Protestant rule in the Six Counties and the substitution for it of British direct rule and the quest for decades thereafter for Catholic-Protestant power-sharing.

The Six Counties had been designed for one-community rule – Protestant rule. Transplanting power-sharing into that gerrymandered state proved impossible for decades. It was easy on paper, impossible in reality. They didn't manage it for a very long time – 25 years – and even now it is unstable.

The Protestants reacted to the Provisionals' war in 1971 with an attempt at a general strike and a march demanding internment. There were strikes and

⁴³ Both British, through the Communist subsidiary the Connolly Association, and Irish. There were two Irish Communist Parties from 1941 to 1970. World War Two led the party to decide that it had best divide along the Border when in June 1941 it switched to support for Britain in the war.

a march when Stormont was abolished. Some Orange bosses saw and said that that the true meaning or logic of the civil rights demands was towards a united Ireland.

Broadly that diagnosis was accepted by most of Protestant-Orange Northern Ireland. Ian Paisley ran an independent ultra-Protestant fringe opposition to any change as a “sell-out” to “Rome” (Catholicism). He and his obsession were seen as an archaic lunatic figure in Britain.

He preached a seeming species of class distrust and class struggle against the Orange establishment, the relatively progressive reformist Orange establishment: every move they made towards reform or placating the Catholic minority was denounced as pandering to “Rome” and “a united Ireland”.

Paisley was an evil bigot. But a number of Protestants were listening to Paisley, and an increasing number began to see and interpret things as Paisley did.⁴⁴

Power-sharing

In spring 1973 the British government set up a new Northern Ireland Assembly, which it hoped would allow Catholic-Protestant power-sharing by way of a rule that “an Executive can no longer be solely based upon any single party”. The Assembly was elected on 28 June 1973, and lasted until 29 May 1974. On 21 November, under British pressure, a coalition Executive was formed from it, led by Brian Faulkner’s faction of the Unionists and by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) formed in 1970 as a constitutional nationalist party, from the old Nationalist Party and Labour fragments.

In January 1974 that Executive started operating in Belfast, in Stormont, the old seat of Protestant rule but now working Britain’s new policy of power-sharing.

Its prime minister was Brian Faulkner, who had been prime minister in the now-superseded Northern Ireland regime from March 1971 to March 1972, and architect of the internment policy (of Catholics only) from August 1971 which had made the Provisional IRA a major force in Northern Ireland. Faulkner had not opposed the British White Paper of March 1973; in the June 1973 election he had said he would never share power with anyone whose objective was to “break the Union”; but now he had joined a coalition with the SDLP.

Much of the Unionist Party split away, and the strength of his government now was the SDLP. A Stormont majority for the Executive held, despite uproar including fist-fights in the chamber. Then a miners’ strike led the UK government under Heath to call a UK general election in February 1974. Of the 12 Six Counties MPs elected then, eleven were hardline opponents of power-sharing.

Faulkner tried to soldier on, but his government had lost all moral authority. A general strike called by an Ulster Workers’ Council, 12 to 29 May 1974, brought down the Executive. The prime minister in London, Harold Wilson, was reduced to fuming at the strikers and hurling abuse at them.

The strike was initially spread by paramilitary intimidation, but it quickly turned into a real general strike, one of the most powerful and successful in history. To say the British government didn’t stand up to it enough – that is the typical right-wing response to any strike.

After the fall of the Six Counties power-sharing Executive, a Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention was held for about a year, from May 1975 to March 1976. The IRA was on ceasefire for that time. The Convention led to nothing, and the IRA restarted the war.

There was talk now of a “twenty years war”. What could be the objectives of the bombings and killings unleashed? (There had been many hundreds of killings of random Catholics by Protestant paramilitaries). Did the Provisionals propose forcible incorporation of the Protestants in a united Ireland? They evaded that conclusion, though it was vaguely implied. They knew they could not do it.

They said they wanted the British to become “persuaders” of the Irish Protestants to go into a united Ireland. In other words, they had a British and not an Irish policy. That is why they could go on bombing and killing Irish Protestants while still saying they wanted unity with them. The “persuasion” they wanted from Britain was not verbal. There had been no shortage of British “advice”, unheeded. They wanted to coerce Britain into coercing the Northern Ireland Protestants into a united Ireland. That was their policy in the long war. It made no sense. It is hard to believe that the Provisional IRA leaders themselves believed it, though many heroic activists of the IRA died pursuing it.

In the end, the Provisionals declared a ceasefire in 1994, and eventually agreed to and worked the power-sharing deal in the Good Friday Agreement of April 1998. There were some differences in that Agreement compared to the power-sharing of 1973. The later system included “the extremes” on both sides as First Minister and Deputy First Minister, in fact co-equal in powers, whereas the earlier one was geared to a coalition of the “moderates”, with a single prime minister. But in essence the power-sharing they accepted in 1998 and after was on offer to them from 1973.

The war led to different personnel in government, but was it worth fighting a long and terrible war so that Martin McGuinness, former of Chief of Staff of the IRA, could become Deputy First Minister, with Ian Paisley as First Minister?



The flag flown above the General Post Office.

The Provisionals

The simple nationalist, all-Ireland, idea, the island is the nation – that was the understanding and policy of the Provisional IRA when it started what would last as a shooting and bombing war for 23 years.

It recruited people politically roused for Catholic civil rights, on both sides of the border, by the plight of the Catholics in the Six Counties. The picture they saw was true, and also not true – that it was the militia of the civil rights movement of the Six Counties Catholics.

They brought their own simple nationalist ideas, and they were able to use the songs and stories from all over nationalist Ireland. What did Ireland lack? Unity, with a Catholic majority. It was one island, and that was the nation. The claim of the 26 Counties government to all-island rule was natural. Geography and ancient myth were current politics.

But it was the “they” (the people) that mattered, not “it” (the island). The war the Provos started in early 1971 was the continuation of the IRA wars started in 1956 and in 1916, and insurgencies back through the centuries. Some of the IRA leaders had defected to Stalinism in 1969 or earlier, to end with the Workers Party (which collapsed in 1991 when, with the fall of the USSR, it was revealed that they had money from that source). The Provo leaders (Stephenson, O’Brady, O’Connell) had been out in 1956, and had been jailed. They did not go with those who went Stalinist – Goulding, Garland, McGill.

Within a year the Provisionals won their only victory – the abolition of Stormont. They gained a veto over Protestants having home rule in the Six Counties, balancing the Protestant veto on an all-Ireland state.

They went on ceasefire when Stormont fell in March 1972. The Official IRA did too, and then ceased fire for

good (though they still exist “secretly”).

The United Irishman, in the issue after the fighting in 1969 and the British Army deployment in Ireland, had on its front page: “Blame England” It summed up Republicanism then, the future Provisional IRA too. The Stalinist-led section would soon move on. The Provisionals took a lot longer.

The Protestants had an Ulster Defence Association from 1971, a legal militia claiming 30,000 members. The Protestant population of the Six Counties was about a million. Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, a massacre by the army of demonstrators in Derry, led Britain to abolish Stormont and seek a Catholic-Protestant-inclusive solution.

For Britain, all solutions started with the existing Six Counties sub-state as given: solutions had to be within that state. The British would spend decades defending partition and trying to graft dual power, Catholic-Protestant power-sharing, onto an artificial state, gerrymandered to serve Protestant hegemony. They are still doing it.

The Provisional IRA fought a number of wars between 1971 and 1994, when the war in the Six Counties ceased. The last IRA military action in Britain was in 1997, when they demolished part of central Manchester. They won their one and only victory when Britain abolished the Belfast parliament in March 1972. That might have been prelude to a British united Ireland policy – if Six Counties Protestants did not exist, or if they could be and should be ignored.

From the end of Stormont in March 1972 to the start of 1976 there was movement on and in the Six Counties. The Catholics won a veto over Protestant rule in the Six Counties. From now on, it would be power-sharing between Protestant and Catholic, or British direct rule, in the Six Counties. The “Protestant state for a Protestant people”, as Brookeborough, one of the five North-

⁴⁴ The idiot ultra-leftism of IS’s co-thinkers in Ireland led Bernadette Devlin, an MP from April 1969, to visit Paisley and propose a “working-class” (Paisley, naturally, representing the Protestant-Unionist workers) alliance to him against Unionist reformists. Or so he said publicly, without contradiction.

ern Ireland prime ministers, once put it, could not be that. But the Six Counties entity, which had had its borders drawn to give Protestants a majority over Catholics, could never again be that. Britain took over from Protestant majority rule responsibility for maintaining the Six Counties, whose artificiality was shown by the Provisionals' war.

There was an interlude between the abolition of Protestant rule in March 1972 and the end of the Northern

Ireland Constitutional Convention in March 1976.

In 1971 the Provisionals adopted *Eire Nua*, a policy of Ireland as a federation of four provinces, Munster, Connaught, Leinster, and Ulster, Ulster being nine counties, three more than the current Northern Ireland sub-state of six.

On one level the Provisionals' *Eire Nua* policy of 1971 was nonsense. The Protestants would have had an unstable majority in nine-counties Ulster, and be

far more insecure than in Six Counties,

As before, in 1914, Catholics (James Connolly for instance) had looked to Britain to coerce a recalcitrant Protestant population, so too again.

However, it was possible to hope or convince oneself to hope that *Eire Nua* could be the start of a process of negotiation that would lead to the Protestant areas having some sort of autonomy in a negotiated united Ireland. No longer so after 1981, when the Provisionals

officially revoked "federalism". More recently, today's parliamentarist Sinn Féin has shifted back. As Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald puts it: "British identity can and must be accommodated in a united Ireland, and I believe nationalist Ireland is open to constitutional and political safeguards to ensure this".

13. Socialism, nationalism, and Connolly

The failure of the revolutionary-socialist, communist left in Ireland to create adequate forms of revolutionary politics provided the framework and background within which the archaic Republican definition of revolutionary politics by physical-force methods alone remained dominant for decades.

For example, if the Communist Party which became a powerful force in industrial Northern Ireland in the 1930s and 40s, and later held on to some of the influence won then, had been a real Marxist party and not the Stalinist sub-reformist abomination that it was, then there would have been no political and social space for an IRA to revive in the 1970s.

The Marxist organisation would have built on the existing trade-union-level working-class unity to create a cross-community revolutionary party. That party would, over the years, have systematically agitated on all the grievances of the workers of both communities. It would have educated sizeable sections, at least, of both communities in a socialist, internationalist outlook.

The advanced working-class movement of both Protestants and Catholics would have continually exposed, denounced, and campaigned against all the practices, political and social, which for 50 years made Northern Ireland's Catholics second-class citizens, discriminated against in jobs, social housing, and civil and political rights.

It would have openly campaigned against a partition that made no democratic sense – but in a democratic and internationalist spirit, and not in one that mimicked middle-class Catholic Irish nationalism. In that spirit it would have educated Catholic workers to understand the concerns of Protestant workers and their honest fear of "Rome Rule"; and to despise and oppose the social role of the Catholic clergy in the North as well as the South. (It was the Catholic Church in the North which, insisting on separate Catholic schools, determined that education in the North would be along rigidly sectarian lines).

It would have educated the Protestant workers against the obscenity of ranting Orange-sectarian bigots claiming as theirs the tradition of liberty and freedom from clerical oppression. It would have taught them a sympathetic understanding of the nationalist out-

look which centuries of oppression had ingrained in Irish Catholics.

It would have educated both communities to approach the question of minority and majority relationships on the island, and the relationship in the Six Counties of the Protestants (the Irish-island minority, but local majority) and the artificially created Northern Catholic minority, in a radically democratic, Leninist, spirit.

It would have been guided in this by the approach outlined in a 1913 resolution of the Bolshevik Central Committee:

"In so far as national peace is in any way 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 constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the right of a national minority.

"This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local self-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."

Such a party would have been able to influence and recruit from the workers in the cities and towns of mainly agricultural southern Ireland. A working-class movement so constituted would have been able to influence the very poor working farmers of the west of Ireland.

It would have educated the working class of Ireland, North and South, in a positive socialist outlook counterposed to the ruling classes North and South, and enthused workers to fight for socialism. It would have had fraternal links and organisational ties with a similar movement in Britain, as in their times the United Irishmen and the Fenians had.

Such an Irish Marxist movement would have exerted great influence of workers in the Irish diaspora around the world and through them drawn courage and confidence from the workers' movement around the world. In short it would have worked to achieve the prospects James Connolly described

in the conclusion to his book *Labour In Irish History* (1910), referring back to the United Irishmen and forward to a future we have yet to win:

"The North and South will again clasp hands, again it will be demonstrated, as in '98, that the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social democracy."

Connolly

In that perspective, how must we judge Connolly's written legacy?

Sean O'Casey, the future dramatist, a Protestant worker of Dublin, was the first secretary of the Irish Citizen Army during the great Dublin strike and lock-out of 1913-14. In 1919, after the Rising, he published a small book, *The Story of the Irish Citizen Army*. In it he disputes the idea that Connolly was Ireland's first, or any, socialist martyr. In Connolly, Casey insisted, Ireland had yet another nationalist martyr.

O'Casey had left the Citizen Army in July 1914 as it became predominantly nationalist and began to merge its political identity with the Irish Volunteers. It became distinguished, at most, by militancy and irreconcilability. The specific issue he broke on was that Constance Markievicz, a member of the Citizen Army, was allowed to hold dual membership also in the Irish Volunteers.

There is no doubt that in James Connolly Irish nationalism gained for its pantheon a saint and a martyr. Did Ireland gain a socialist martyr of any sort, or was O'Casey right?

From the article in the *Irish Worker* of 29 August 1914, *The War Against the German Nation*, Connolly was a soldier in the German propaganda war, justifying what Germany did in Belgium, including the German war atrocity at Louvain. For the month of August he had advocated what the Socialist International had advocated before the war, at the Basle conference on war in 1912, for example. Among the things he wrote in that month of August 1914 was a polemic against the IRB, whose doctrine was to back any power at war with Britain (*Our Duty in This Crisis, Irish Worker*, 8 August 1914). He made fun of their automatic support of "the Ger-

man War Lord". Then he changed and himself did what he had made fun of the IRB for doing.

Connolly and his comrades in August opposed all imperialism, refusing support to any imperialism because they all did the same, more or less, and if you took one side's part because of its "imperialist" deeds of its rival, you could only do that by endorsing or condoning, tacitly or explicitly, the similar deeds of the first side.

Then Connolly explicitly endorsed Germany in Belgium. On 29 August 1914 Connolly publicly self-dwindled from being anti-imperialist, against all imperialism including Germany's imperialism and Germany's war, and became just anti-English, against England's war, for Germany's.

Of course Connolly knew better, and publicly drew the political conclusions of that knowledge, before 29 August 1914. Then he switched to the politics he had mocked, of half-knowledge.

It has to be one of two things. Either Connolly, like others who have shifting opinions, dropped one opinion when he picked up a different one, or Connolly's opinions are laid out side by side and the commentator can cite as equally valid, for example, his siding with Karl Liebknecht in the first month, and his siding with Liebknecht's enemies, the dominant right wing of Germany Social Democracy for the rest of his life.

Like everyone, Connolly's politics evolved. Mostly, he dropped one thing when he took up its opposite. The older articles still exist as articles, and may even be used to refute the new opinion, but you can't put together one opinion with its opposite, and present the combination as one position, or claim that both opinions were equally valid.

But if the positions differ, on the same subject, they are different.

Reasons for changed opinions may be perfectly valid. Circumstances change. We recognise errors. But such things have to be shown, or, where they are shown, indicated.

Connolly has been treated as if there is no sequence – as if he was right to back Karl Liebknecht in August and equally right to adopt, at the end of

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August, the politics on the war of Liebknecht's mortal enemies. As if his pronouncements when being anti-English only were against all imperialism, and his comments against England's war were anti-war. Not so, if simultaneously he was for German imperialism and Germany's war.

Connolly as a socialist is an attractive character. He tried to live his politics, and who, nowadays, but an extreme reactionary would object to the things which Connolly, like Larkin, tried to win for and with the Irish (and all) workers? People who did not themselves have to wage Connolly's struggle for literacy are uneasy criticising Connolly. Connolly's position in the Irish nationalist pantheon protects him from socialist and Marxist reporting, let alone criticism.

To be able to cite and claim Connolly is seriously valuable. Of course it is.

But an uncritical attitude has consequences that are not good. Connolly wrote well on "physical-force-ism" in Irish politics. He wrote against the political and moral idiocy of a-political siding with whatever power opposed England. He wrote against imperialism, including German imperialism. But then he espoused the things he condemned.

The main consequence of uncritical admiration of Connolly in the broad labour movement is the acceptance of the methods of physical-force nationalism. Many who are socialists have gone to Republicanism, or socialist Republicanism; how many have taken the other route from nationalism and Republicanism to socialism?⁴⁵

Workers' Fight, a predecessor of *Solidarity*, wrote about Connolly on the centenary of his birth:

"When it came to the Rising the main forces commanded by the rump nationalists (the majority were supporting the British Empire) were called off at the last moment: the Citizen Army was left to play a major part. 'We are going out to be slaughtered', Connolly muttered on the steps of Liberty Hall on Easter Monday. But he knew that this would be less disastrous than another of the missed opportunities and botched risings which were scattered through Irish history, and which he himself had chronicled so bitterly in his book *Labour in Irish History*".

At Liberty Hall, before the march to the GPO, Connolly is supposed to have said to the trade

union leader William O'Brien: "In the event of victory, hold on to your guns, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political liberty". That has been used to show that Connolly had objectives larger than the Rising.

It has been disputed whether he actually said it. More important, it was just what Connolly would say to such as William O'Brien, an old socialist comrade. And what a phenomenal understatement it was that "those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached". Almost everybody in the Rising was against socialism, and they would show that in deeds when many of them came to power in the 26 counties.

What was Connolly doing in the GPO, or in the Rising, or in the centre of the IRB, to which he was co-opted in January 1916?

Writing "for effect"

Connolly was a rebel first of all. He was, it seems, whole-hearted about nationalism. Connolly wanted a Workers' Republic. But by 1916, perhaps from when he left the De Leonites in 1907-8, Connolly was a politician in the bad sense. He wrote this (30 January 1908) on his Catholicism to his friend John Carstairs Matheson: *"For myself tho' I have usually posed as a Catholic I have not gone to my duty for 15 years, and have not the slightest tincture of faith left. I only assumed the Catholic pose in order to query the raw freethinker..."*

Whether he was lying in the letter to Matheson, or had been lying all the years he had given it out or let it be inferred that he was a Catholic, Connolly publicly accepted and deliberately let it be known that he was a Catholic. He was a Catholic in 1916, anyway.

Connolly believed in the class struggle and as something to be fought on the workers' side. He believed in a cause-and-effect more-or-less materialist conception of history – but he also believed in a supranature and an afterlife.

All of the prominent leaders in 1916, except Tom Clarke, were fervent Catholics, Connolly at the end a proselytising one. They all, except maybe Clarke, believed that after the stone-breakers' yard at Kilmainham and the firing squad would come a glorious afterlife.

As Connolly's dispute with De Leon showed also, Connolly did not have a typical socialist's

view of the family. He had a Catholic view.

The evidence, from Pearse and from Connolly himself, is that he rejected the then-prevailing socialist idea of an obligation to truth – the idea that you tell the truth if for no better reason than because you want the workers who listen to you to understand reality as it really is, and you cannot help them do that unless you tell the truth. You tell the truth because you want workers to learn to know and analyse reality for themselves.

Connolly came to say what he thought would get the effect he wanted. It didn't matter if it was true or not. He came to a manipulative rather than a truth-oriented view as guide to what he said. Thus it is very hard to know for sure what he thought and believed. But we know what he did, and he died fighting English imperialism.

Take two examples of Connolly writing, "for effect", what he cannot have believed to be the truth.

The idea that the bourgeoisie would not destroy capitalist towns or buildings is often attributed to Connolly. I traced it to a pamphlet published in Dublin in 1917 by someone I had not heard of. Then I read it in Desmond Ryan, who was in the GPO, and Pearse's secretary during the Rising. I had to believe it. But it is a fool's argument, and Connolly was no-one's fool.

So Connolly did use that essentially silly argument. He may have used it to placate, to "jolly" people along? Possibly. We know Connolly to have "jollied" people along.

Many times Connolly wrote to claim that Catholic workers were not only more revolutionary but also more tolerant than Protestant workers. There was no fear that Home Rule would be Rome Rule. He had in mind a 32 county state. But can he have believed what he wrote, as distinct from finding it useful?

He had experienced hooligan priests and the Catholic Orange Order, the AOH, as strike-breakers in the Dublin Labour War. Can he have believed that there was no threat of Rome Rule?

He had experience of the rule that non-Catholics could only marry in church with Catholic spouses if they solemnly promised to raise the children as Catholics. He and his Protestant wife, Lillie, had experienced it when they married in church.

Priests controlled Catholic schools and it was they who insisted on religious segregation of schooling. Priests told Catholics that they could not be socialists. Where and when they could,

they set up Catholic schools. There was already intolerance where the priests had control.

And Connolly knew how the game was played. He wrote an obsequious open letter to Archbishop Walsh of Dublin towards the end of the workers' fight in 1913-14, admitting all the pretensions of Walsh. Dora Montefiore, a socialist who have come to help the children of strike-bound Dublin, had reported that Walsh *"has the insolence to suggest to three women delegates from the workers of Great Britain that he is not certain whether the 'sinister rumours'... have not a sub-stratum of truth!... rumours set about purposely by the priests and Hibernians that we three women were agents of the White Slave Traffic"*, recruiters of prostitutes. Yet Connolly professed confidence that *"his Grace... will assuredly see that in his diocese the garb of a priest is not made a shield for the acts and language of a scoundrel"*.

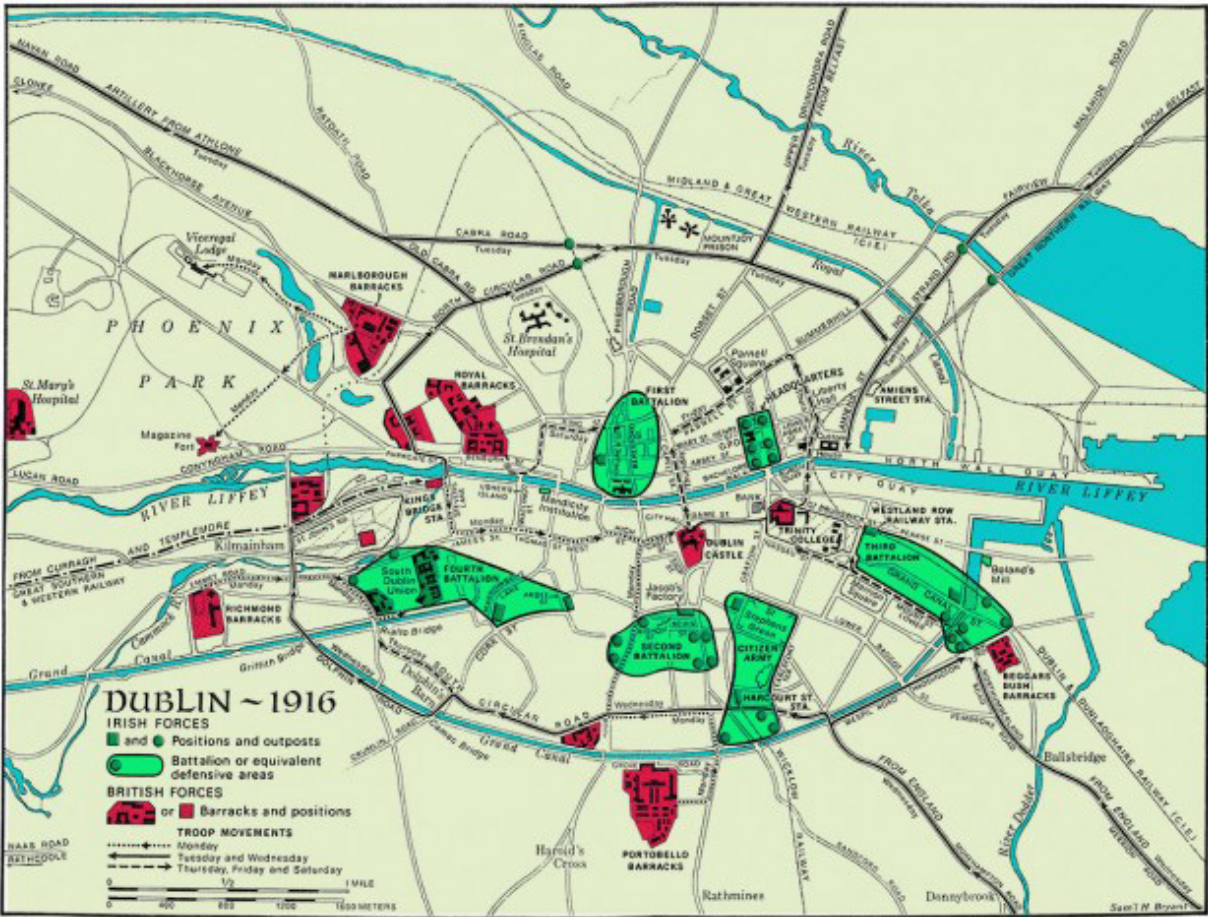
A filched inheritance

The description of the Rising as a terrible beauty being born came to be words that described the Irish bourgeoisie's myth of its own origin and legacy.

The Ireland that took shape after the English left the 26 counties in 1922 – the Pope's part of the green island that became a Catholic theocracy – knew self-rule as Rome rule. It was the island of mass unemployment, mass migration, and as much economic isolation as possible. The island which lived by exporting meat, cattle and workers, the island of the peasant economy, and even of the present proper integration in European economy – that priest-bourgeois Republic was a grim mockery of the protracted and pitched battles of the Irish working people that had gone before. That is a filched bourgeois inheritance.

Yeats's *September 1913* was nearer the truth.
*What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone;
For men were born to pray and save...
For whom the hangman's rope was spun,
And what, God help us, could they save?
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave...
In all their loneliness and pain...
But let them be, they're dead and gone,
They're with O'Leary in the grave.*

45 Ceylon (Sri Lanka) is Ireland looking in a sort of mirror. It was given independence in 1948 under an urbane upper-class elite. There was a Sinhala majority, a Tamil minority, and, over the narrow sea in India a state, Tamil Nadu, with 30 million people (in 1951) and a different religion (Hinduism) to the Buddhism of the Sinhala majority in Sri Lanka. The ruling elite were above the politics of community or ancient history or religion. Yet after a few years of independence Solomon Bandaranaike broke from the ruling United National Party and started a Sinhala agitation and eventually a Sinhala cultural and religious revival. Bandaranaike was assassinated in 1959, but his widow Sirimavo Bandaranaike carried on his work. The Sinhala majority went on to assert itself against the Tamils. They changed the name of the country to Sri Lanka in 1972 and slowly made it a place of oppression against the Tamils. A civil war resulted from 1983 to 2009, and more than 800,000 Tamils fled overseas.



Front cover: who brought the gun back into Irish politics? Carson and the Tories did. Unionist leader Carson, the swashbuckling gun man, armed to the teeth, whispers to Augustine Birrell, the Liberal Secretary for Ireland. Peaceful Home Rule leader Redmond is docile in the queue. (Punch, 17 December 1913)



Contact us

020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

Write to: 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG

Production team: Martin Thomas, Simon Nelson, Zack Muddle ☐

