It is over a hundred years since the great Dublin Lockout of 1913; what is its significant for today's revolutionaries, what lessons must we learn from this great mass movement and why did it fail? What material and political conditions globally and in Britain and Ireland led to the strike?
Where We Stand

WE STAND WITH KARL MARX: ‘The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. The struggle for the emancipation of the working class means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule’ (The International Workingmen’s Association 1864, General Rules).

The capitalist state consists, in the last analysis, of ruling-class laws within a judicial system and detention centres overseen by the armed bodies of police/army who are under the direction and are controlled in acts of defence of capitalist property rights against the interests of the majority of civil society. The working class must overthrow the capitalist state and replace it with a workers’ state based on democratic soviets/workers’ councils to suppress the inevitable counter-revolution of private capitalist profit against planned production for the satisfaction of socialised human need.

We recognise the necessity for revolutionaries to carry out serious ideological and political struggle as direct participants in the trade unions (always) and in the mass reformist social democratic bourgeois workers’ parties despite their pro-capitalist leaderships when conditions are favourable. Because we see the trade union bureaucracy and their allies in the Labour party leadership as the most fundamental obstacle to the struggle for power of the working class, outside of the state forces and their direct agencies themselves, we must fight and defeat and replace them with a revolutionary leadership by mobilising the base against the pro-capitalist bureaucratic mis-leaders to open the way forward for the struggle for workers’ power.

We are fully in support of all mass mobilisations against the onslaught of this reactionary Con-Lib Dem coalition. However, whilst participating in this struggle we will oppose all policies which subordinate the working class to the political agenda of the petty-bourgeois reformist leaders of the Labour party and trade unions.

We oppose all immigration controls. International finance capital roams the planet in search of profit and imperialist governments disrupts the lives of workers and cause the collapse of whole nations with their direct intervention in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and their proxy wars in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc.

Workers have the right to sell their labour internationally wherever they get the best price. Only union membership and pay rates can counter employers who seek to exploit immigrant workers as cheap labour to undermine the gains of past struggles.

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The 1913 Dublin Lockout; its significance for revolutionaries today

By Gerry Downing, July 2013

It is a hundred years since the great Dublin Lockout of 1913; what is its significant for today’s revolutionaries, what lessons must we learn from this great mass movement and why did it fail? What material and political conditions globally and in Britain and Ireland led to the strike?

Ireland lost its bourgeois revolution in the failed uprising of 1798; union with Britain was imposed in 1801. This had profound economic and political consequences for Ireland. In the north of Ireland, the Presbyterian republicans (Dissenters) were suppressed and 32 of its leaders including Henry Joy McCracken and Roddy McCorley, were hanged. But they did not suffer anything like the reign of terror visited on the south, upwards of 20,000 died in the short few weeks of the revolution and the reign of terror that followed, mainly in north County Wexford.

Dublin was the second city of the Empire at the time of the Act of Union in 1801. By 1913 the south was a rural backwater, taxed out of all proportion to its ability to pay, its industries and commerce suppressed, its peasantry reduced to subsistence living typified by the Great Famine of 1845-52. This was imposed by Britain, particularly the Whig/Liberal administration of Lord John Russell from 1846. They wanted to clear the land for pastures for dairy produce following the repeal of the pro-Tory Corn Laws and were satisfied to see upwards of a million starve and another million emigrate rather than divert the food exports to save them. It also had the happy consequences for them of undermining the Tory party, who gained the most from their Irish rack-ruined estates.

The north was industrialised and depended on its close connections with the empire. The Presbyterian population was reintegrated into the sphere of influence of the sectarian Orange Order (of course there were always principled radical opponents) after 1798. But the populations of the southern cities were mainly unskilled labourers living often in single rooms in the centre city town houses vacated by the Ascendancy ruling class as they moved to the suburbs. Infant mortality was the worst in Europe, disease, particularly the killer tuberculosis, periodically swept the tenements and ‘free labour’ vied for availa-
ble work on the basis of who would work for the least. As University College Cork’s Multitext Padraig Yeats says: “There was good reason for discontent in Dublin in 1913. Unskilled workers lived in desperate poverty. Housing conditions were deplorable. Overcrowding was a serious problem, and bred disease and infection. Malnutrition was common. The death rate in Dublin (27.6 per 1000) was bad as Calcutta, and the city’s slums were amongst the worst in the world. Over 20,000 families lived in one-room dwellings. There were often more than ten families in town houses that were built for one upper-class family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These houses became dilapidated when wealthy elites left them and moved to the suburbs. The houses were often taken over by landlords who rented them out, room by room, to poor families, and they quickly became slums. There was little privacy. Facilities for cooking, cleaning, and washing were wholly inadequate. Sanitary conditions were worse. Many tenement buildings shared one lavatory in a yard.”

In 1913, events occurred which made clear the dreadful conditions of poverty in Dublin. On the evening of Tuesday, 2 September 1913, at about 8.45 (just a week into the strike), two houses in Church Street suddenly collapsed, burying the occupants. The buildings were four storeys high, with shops on the ground floor. The sixteen rooms upstairs were occupied by about ten families, over forty people. Rescue parties worked through the night digging people out. Seven were killed in this disaster and many more were badly injured. [1] Meanwhile Britain had overcome the loss of its American colonies by the inauguration of the ‘Second Empire’ from 1783–1873. Australia and New Zealand were conquered and in 1763 India was added (formally following the defeat of the Great Uprising in India 1857-1858) and Sri Lanka in the Kandian Wars between 1796 and 1818. Having defeat Napoleon in 1815 Britain grabbed the Cape Colony, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, Guyana, and Malta. Irish peasants supplied much of the cannon fodder for these wars.

After the Great Depression of 1873-79 the modern global epoch of Imperialism opened. Britain’s participation in the Grab for Africa gained it the modern-day lands of Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Egypt and Myanmar and Malaya in Asia. William Martin Murphy, the anti-Parnellite ex-MP and leading Dublin millionaire and chief organiser of the Lockout, had substantial interests in Africa. The 1913 map of Africa is a telling account of the politics of the age:

Politically the world had changed fundamentally from 1873 to 1913 and there is a large volume of literature analysing these changes. For revolutionaries the fundamentals are summed up in Lenin’s Imperialism the Highest stage of Capitalism (1916). In a few sentences the differences are that capitalism is now dominated by huge industrial and financial monopolies, these finance houses dominate the globe in this alliance and capital is now exported to colonies to extract super profits from brutally exploited sweat-ed labour. The rise of organised labour in the metropolitan countries has made this necessary and an aristocracy of La-
bour had arisen here who accepted colonialism and later semi-colonialism as the sources of wealth that will buy off this skilled layer of workers. The Reform Act of 1867 extended the franchise and so made the trade union branch secretary the object of the attention of politicians seeking his members’ votes. This saw the development of the trade union bureaucracy as a career-orientated middle class layer who welcomed the booty of empire as the source of their privileges.

The partial gains made in the New Unionism of the late 1880s when the unskilled labour forced their way into political consideration in the Bryant and May’s ‘Match Girls’ strike of 1888 and the ‘Dockers’ Tanner’ strike of 1889 led to the formation of the Labour party eventually. But the TU bureaucracy controlled the movement; thus, the Labour party was a pro-Imperialist party from the outset reliant on the booty of empire for its gains for themselves and for the labour aristocracy, the upper layers of the British working class. Ireland’s 1913 Lockout fundamentally challenged this.

James Connolly understood all this background only too well: “If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organization of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, and the blood of our martyrs”. Shan Van Vocht (socialist newspaper) January, 1897. Reprinted in P. Beresford Ellis (ed.), “James Connolly – Selected Writings”, p. 124.

**Why was the Lockout different from and yet part of the Great Unrest that swept Britain and its Irish colony in before WWI?**

It is the nature of the workforce the south of Ireland in 1913, particularly in Dublin, and its political and economic history that set this strike apart as different from the Great Unrest in Britain itself. But it was also very much a part of that great industrial movement. Falling wages and rising prices were destroying the living standards of the British working class in the decade before 1911, when the Great Unrest began. Cynical trade union leaders sold out strikes and negotiated compromises detrimental to their membership to offset the loss of international markets to the more efficient rising capitalist powers of Germany and the USA, very much as they have done today since 1985 defeat of the miners’ strike.

A layer of women and young workers lost confidence in the TU leaders and began to embrace the politics of syndicalism whose most prominent members were Tom Mann and Jim Larkin. The
movement grew to revolutionary proportions, embracing miners, dockers, seafarers, railway workers and even school students. 961,000 workers took strike action in 1911. Asquith’s Liberal government sent warships to the Mersey in 1911 and Churchill notoriously sent troops to Tonypandy to put down the riots of 1910 and 1911 and prevent the strike from winning.

Jim Larkin is often cited as a typical example of the syndicalist leaders of his day. In one way he was but in another he was very different. Larkin supplemented his syndicalism with revolutionary socialism and Irish Republicanism, often in a very contradictory way.

Most syndicalists simply wanted to improve the conditions of workers under capitalism and this meant accepting the booty of Empire, including the super-profits gleaned from Ireland. In 1907 he had organised a successful strike in Belfast as an official of the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL), whose general secretary James Sexton who had been a Fenian. But Sexton had become a British TU bureaucrat pure and simple, a defender of the status quo and Larkin’s talk of revolution disturbed him greatly. He expelled Larkin in 1908 on a trumped-up charge of embezzling union funds he used for a strike in Cork, for which he later had him jailed. Larkin correctly immediately formed the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and broke from the British TUC because he recognised the social and national chauvinism of Sexton and his likes in Britain.

The ITGWU now began using the revolutionary tactics Larkin had developed in Belfast and which became integral to the Great Unrest itself; sympathy strikes and blacking, very militant pickets against scabs and inspiring propaganda for socialism and revolution. More importantly the ITGWU began organising women workers and the unskilled in the same union as skilled men. The conservative principles of the labour aristocracy were breached and the class was acting as one unit in defence of its weakest members – it was now truly a class for itself, a condition that had never been fully achieved in Britain itself despite the New Unionism and the Great Unrest. Here they had turned this great potential into the safer realms of the Labour party and parliament. Instead of using parliament as a means to develop the cause of the working class in revolution it quickly became apparent that it was a substitute for this; they simply wanted to advance the cause of the working through parliament, they said. It quickly became apparent that their ‘cause’ had now become their own careers as servants and administrators of the capitalist system.
TUC and Ben Tillett betrays the Dublin strikers

But syndicalism was no answer to the treachery of class-collaborating TU bureaucrats. A rejection of corrupt leadership with no strategy to replace them meant no leadership at all, no political perspective and no solution to the question of the state and its unbending allegiance to the capitalist class. On this rock the Great Unrest foundered and sections of the British ruling class welcomed WWII because of (probably unfounded) fears of its revival. Matters were different in Ireland.

Two more cases that illustrate the treachery of the British TU leaders are Ben Tillett and Arthur Henderson. As Laurence Humphries noted in his review Rebel City by John Newsinger: With many Dublin workers locked out and their families starving, there was support from British workers who sent £50,000 worth of food parcels to the ITGWU and its supporters. The leadership tried to secure a compromise settlement, but as Newsinger observes, the Dublin employers led by Murphy “did not want to inflict defeat on the ITGWU, but to completely destroy it”. Larkin came to Britain. There was tremendous solidarity support in Manchester. 130 NUR rail union branches called for action. In South Wales, rail workers and dockers went out on unofficial Strike.

The response of the TUC leadership was to head off the movement and they called a special conference. Newsinger criticises Larkin for agreeing to the TUC conference and feels that unofficial action would have resolved the situation. He says: “The union leaders would have been carried along by the momentum of the movement.” But he produces no evidence to back this assertion.

On 9 December 1913, the TUC Special Conference met and predictably there was a sell-out and betrayal of the Dublin strikers. As Newsinger comments, talking about the reason for calling the conference: “In reality it was to decide what was to be done about Larkin.”

Ben Tillett, the dockers leader who Larkin had considered a fellow supporter, “wielded the knife that struck the fatal blow”. This final decision not to support the Dublin workers led to defeat and intimidation with the full weight of the state used against the ITGWU’s members. [2]

Tillett went on to support WWII and denounced those Labour leaders like Keir Hardy and Ramsey McDonald who opposed the war and failed to act as recruiting sergeants for the killing fields of France, showing his essential Empire loyalty. So the treachery of the left bureaucrat should come as no surprise. Arthur Henderson was another matter, no one expected him to do any other as a right winger but what this former trade union leader and now leader of the Labour party did astonished even his closest followers. He entered the cabinet in 1914 under Asquith, precisely to act as a recruiting sergeant for the war, then became a member of the small War Cabinet under Lloyd George in 1916 and approved the death sentences on the 1916 Easter Rising leaders, including on fellow socialist and trade unionist James Connolly. Reportedly he led the cheering in the House of Com-
mons when it was reported that the executions had begun.

**Griffiths argued in favour of a dual monarchy for Britain and Ireland**

Arthur Griffiths, pre-1916-Sinn Fein and the Irish Parliamentary Party were also bitterly opposed to the Lockout as were the right wing dual-monarchist nationalist of pre-1916 Sinn Fein led by Arthur Griffiths. The blog *Work in Progress Political World Flower*, in response to a laudatory obituary on the 90th anniversary of Griffith’s death, makes the following observations on his politics:

Griffiths backed the employers during the 1913 lock-out – attacking Larkin and the ITGWU for ‘undermining Irish trade’ and accused Larkin of being a British saboteur and demanded that he be removed as leader of the ITGWU. Regularly during the period from 1919–1922 Griffith backed the use of the IRA against striking workers. Indeed, one of his last actions was to meet with Farmers’ leader Laffin during the farm labourers strike in East Limerick and ordered the IRA to declare martial law and break the strike.

Some of the more enlightening pieces written by Griffith: *An intro to (John) Mitchel's Jail Journal* are: “His (Mitchel’s) demolition of the “moral basis” of the Abolitionist case in his trenchant letters to the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher. […] In the essential work of disservering the case for Irish independence from theories of humanitarianism and universalism. […] Even his views on negro-slavery have been deprecatingly excused, as if excuse were needed for an Irish Nationalist declining to hold the negro his peer in right. […] The right of the Irish to political independence never was, is not and never can be dependent on the right of the admission of equal rights in all other peoples”.

His anti-Semitism was long-standing: “The Three Evil Influences of the century are the Pirate, the Freemason, and the Jew” (United Irishman, 23 Sept. 1899): “(In) all countries in all Christian ages he has been a usurer and a grinder of the poor … The Jew in Ireland is in every respect an economic evil. He produces no wealth himself – he draws it from others – he is the most successful seller of foreign goods, he is an unfair competitor with the rate-paying Irish shopkeeper, and he remains among us, ever and always alien.” (The United Irishman, April 23rd 1904.) [3]

In fact the Irish Parliamentary party, whilst no friends of Larkin, had a long running feud with William Martin Murphy going back to his pro-British anti-Parnell stance and so took a more neutral position. As the Padraig Yeates explains: “The Irish Parliamentary Party, whose members were mostly middle-class and drew their support from the farming community, was hostile to the strike. Even those who felt sympathy for the plight of the striking workers feared that the strike and lockout would distract attention from what, to them, was the much more serious struggle with Carson’s Ulster Unionists. John Dillon, Redmond’s second-in-command, expressed the party’s exasperation with the Lockout when he wrote: “Murphy is a desperate character, Larkin is as bad. It would be a
blessing for Ireland if they exterminated each other”. [4]

And what effect did the strike have on the radical petty-bourgeois leaders of Irish nationalism: Yeates again: “Murphy would have broken the tramway strike relatively quickly except for two things. One was Bloody Sunday (31 August 1913), which enraged liberal as well as socialist opinion in Britain, as well as Ireland, and the other was his determination to break the ITGWU through the use of the Lockout tactic. There were many unintended consequences of this strategy. One of the most paradoxical was that the aid from Britain and the interference that came with it propelled separatist tendencies within the Dublin trade unions. Another was that radical nationalists, already becoming disillusioned with the Redmondite project, saw the behaviour of the nationalist ruling elite in waiting as confirming all their worst fears. Far from being repulsed by Larkinism they sympathised with it. W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw and AE (George Russell) all sided with the workers, as did every signatory of the 1916 Proclamation.

The power of the Catholic Church, demonstrated by the ruthlessness with which it suppressed the Dublin Kiddies Scheme, gave Southern Unionists a foretaste of what Home Rule would be like. The outcome of that battle gave fair warning that the rights of parents and children would be secondary to those of the Hierarchy in an independent Ireland. [5]

The course of the strike

The beginning and course of the strike is well known and we will only sketch it in outline here from by Padraig Yeates: “Shortly after 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 26 August 1913—the first day of the Dublin Horse Show, one of the city’s busiest events—drivers and conductors stopped their trams and abandoned them in protest. About 700 of the 1,700 Tramways Company’s employees went on strike. The city was filled with tension on the days following. Strikers resented the workers who continued to operate the trams, and fights often took place between them. Workers who usually distributed the Irish Independent—[owned by Murphy] though not employed by Murphy—refused to handle it in protest. Messrs. Eason and Co., the large city newsagents, were asked by Larkin not to sell the paper. They refused. As a result, dock-workers at Kings-town (Dún Longhaire) refused to handle any Eason and Co. goods from England or addressed to England”.

Murphy, also appealing for support, issued a statement on behalf of over 400 employers that repeated his opposition to the ITGWU. The employers drew up a pledge for workers, which stated that they were not, and would not become, members of the proscribed Union: “I hereby
undertake to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers, and further, I agree to immediately resign my membership of the ITGWU (if a member) and I further undertake that I will not join or in any way support this union”.

Those who refused to sign would be dismissed. Angered by this document, thousands of workers refused to sign. Many who were not even members of the ITGWU, could not sign it in conscience, even though they had no dealings with Larkin or his Union. James Connolly wrote of one such case: “A labourer was asked to sign the agreement forswearing the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union, and he told his employer, a small capitalist builder, that he refused to sign. The employer, knowing the man’s circumstances, reminded him that he had a wife and six children who would be starving within a week. The reply of this humble labourer rose to the heights of sublimity. ‘It is true, sir’, he said, ‘they will starve; but I would rather see them go out on in their coffins than I should disgrace them by signing that’. And with head erect he walked out to share hunger and privation with his loved ones. Hunger and privation—and honour. Defeat, bah! How can such a people be defeated? His case is typical of thousands more”.

**Chronology of the Strike and Lockout**

26 August 1913. The strike began. Tram workers deserted their vehicles in protest when William Martin Murphy forbade employees of his Tramways Company to be members of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. 28 August. Larkin and other labour leaders were arrested on the following charges: seditious speaking and seditious intent to break the public peace, and to spread hatred towards the Government. They were released later that day.

29 August. Official proclamation issued prohibiting the proposed meeting in Sackville St (now O’Connell St) on 31 August. Great meeting in Beresford Place. Before 10,000 people, Larkin burned the Government proclamation prohibiting the gathering.

30 August. Police issued a warrant for Larkin’s arrest for using seditious language inciting people to riot and to pillage shops. Riots in Ringsend, Beresford Place, and Eden Quay, during which the police baton-charged the crowds and injured many protestors. James Nolan, caught in the riots, died from injuries received from police.

31 August. Although warned by the police not to attend the planned mass meeting, Larkin appeared in the window of the Imperial Hotel, in disguise, to address the huge crowd assembled. He was immediately arrested, and a riot followed. There were riots throughout the city that night.

2 September. The Dublin Coal Merchants’ Association locked out members of the ITGWU. Two tenement houses collapsed in Church Street, causing the immediate death of seven persons and serious injury to others.

8 October. Serious riots occurred in Swords, Co. Dublin when striking workers tried to prevent farmers bringing cattle to market. Police and civilians were injured.
14 October. In response to the Commissioners’ Report, the Employers’ Federation announced that they would end the Lockout only if the ITGWU were completely reorganised, under new leadership, and that they would not promise to reinstate every worker because they would not fire workers who replaced those on strike.

16 October. A crowd of about 4000 striking workers marched through the city to protest at the employers’ statement.

20 October. Archbishop William Walsh condemned the plan to send children of strikers to England for the duration of the strike.

21 October. The first group of children set sail for England, amidst loud protests from angry crowds at the ports.

12 November. Labourers in Dublin port stopped work.

18 December. Representatives of workers and employers met again to try to reach agreement but discussions ended two days later because of disagreement about the reinstatement of workers who had been on strike.

December 1913 & January 1914. Striking workers gradually began to return to work and the Lockout ended by degrees. [6]

Connolly after the Lockout
And how did the Lockout affect James Connolly? Together with Larkin he was inspired by the support for the strike by the rank and file of the British trade union movement, who sent tons of food and took sympathetic strike action when they could. Connolly’s political education came in the Socialist League, a split from the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Eleanor Marx was a member and Frederick Engels was their mentor. He was also secretary of the Scottish Labour Party, affiliated to the Independent Labour Party (ILP) led by Kier Hardie. Connolly moved to Dublin with his family in 1896 and founded the Irish Socialist Republican party and published the Workers Republic. He immigrated to the US from 1903 to 1910 (a move he later regretted) and fell under the influence of Daniel De Leon and the Industrial Workers of the World, a revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist group.

He read what little of Karl Marx’s works were available in English, he certainly understood the Labour Theory of value, for instance. He it was that tried to meld the theory of the socialist revolution led by the working class to the fight against British Imperialism in Ireland and recognised the need for an insurrection to overthrow British and capitalist rule in Ireland. In that sense, he had developed a version of Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution, not only must any revolution today be led by the working class to be successful but also that revolution must
be a socialist revolution; Connolly’s Workers Republic.

True he had not developed theory to the level of the revolutionary Marxist movement in Germany and Russia at the time but he was far in advance of any British self-declared revolutionary with the possible exception of Scotland’s John McLane. He did tend to identify the national question and the socialist revolution as the same thing which was a weakness in regard to the Irish capitalist class, whom he accused of essentially being a foreign imposition. He meant literally that “the cause of labour is the case of Ireland” as well as its corollary, “the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour”. Neither Connolly nor Larkin were atheists but both were strongly anti-clerical in that they recognised the baneful influence of the Bishops on the Irish workers and made strong propaganda against them. Neither can be regarded as Marxists but their subjective revolutionary instincts in those years were unparalleled although Larkin drifted to the right in the period of reaction in Ireland following the counterrevolution led by Collins, Griffiths and the ‘free staters’ in 1922-23 and after. [7]

Conclusion

Larkin had been very successful in building his new union from 1908 to 1913 and this success forced the hand of his greatest enemy, William Martin Murphy, the leading capitalist in Dublin who began the Lockout himself on 26 August 1913 when he decreed that no ITGWU member could work for his Tramways Company. Eventually some 25,000 workers were in battle against 300 employers led by Murphy. Five strikers were killed and thousands injured in the brutal confrontations with scabs and the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

Connolly co-founded the Irish Labour Party with Jim Larkin and William O’Brien in 1912 as the political wing of the Irish Trade Union Congress. The latter had been founded in 1894 as a consequence of the British TUC continually ignoring Irish issues, even those pertaining to craft unionism. The new organisation was called the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC). However, the body remained dominated by craft unions that were mainly Irish branches of British-based unions, with the bulk of these located in the north. To maintain unity political issues were never discussed. Only with the arrival of Larkin and Connolly’s participation did the balance of power shift in this uncomfortably compromised organisation from the craft to the industrial and service and from the north to the south. This advance was apparent in the ITUC programme adopted in 1914 for, “the abolition of the capitalist system of wealth production with its inherent injustice and poverty.” Syndicalism was the means to accomplish this aim. It was to be a short-lived victory; the conservative craft unionism could not be defeated by syndicalism; it reappeared in 1916 in Sligo when Congress President Thomas Johnson had delegates standing in respect for those who had died in the Rising and in “foreign fields”. An ominous indication of its future role in Irish society was the fact that it took no part in the Lockout; Connolly and Larkin were left to fight without official backing for fear of alienating craft unionism, overwhelmingly Loyalist.
The Lockout ended in defeat for the striking workers but the ITGWU continued to fight and gradually the men and women rejoined the union and it grew rapidly again. The employers had no stomach for another lockout so the result was really a draw, in James Connolly’s words: “The battle was a drawn battle. The employers were unable to carry on their business without men and women who remained loyal to their union. The workers were unable to force their employers to a formal recognition of the union and to give preference to organised labour. From the effects of this drawn battle both sides are still bearing scars. How deep these scars are none will reveal”.

James Connolly and Jack White, an ex-British officer, founded the Irish Citizen Army (ICA) in 1913 in response to police violence against the Lockout. This was the first and only armed workers’ militia in Britain and Ireland, reflecting the revolutionary spirit of that age in Ireland. Although numbering a few hundred they remained intact after the defeat of the Lockout and adopted as their goal an independent and socialist Irish nation. This was the vehicle which propelled Connolly into the 1916 Easter Rising, Connolly had become convinced that England’s difficulty was Ireland’s opportunity and that an armed uprising for a Workers Republic was only possible during the war. He was bitterly disappointed with the betrayals of the German and British trade union and Socialist leaders in particular who had abandoned all their previous opposition to war and pledges to turn the war into a civil war and voted war credits and entered war cabinets to support their own capitalists in slaughtering other workers similarly betrayed by their leaders.

Notes

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
Socialist Fight has been asked, what is our position on the Scottish Referendum due on 18 September 2014? And on the national question in Spain, Britain and Ireland? Ireland and Spain are very different; Ireland remains a semi-colonial country and Spain is an Imperialist country. Both Catalonia and the Basque country are economically very advanced parts of Spain, Ireland, particularly the south, was an economically exploited part of the British Empire, forcibly maintained in economic backwardness for the benefit of Whig and Tory landlords during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The north of Ireland was allowed to develop economically in the linen and shipbuilding industries as part of the markets controlled by the British Empire because of its majority Loyalist population. John Bull used the difference to divide and rule and imposed the Orange state in 1920 to continue and deepen that tactic. Marxists demand full political and economic separation of the whole of Ireland from Britain and national unity, which must involve the defeat of reactionary Loyalism and the destruction of the Orange state.

It would be economically and politically disastrous for the Spanish working class if Catalonia and the Basque country totally separated; there are clear reactionary forces in the political ascendancy in Catalonia right now. There is a better situation politically in the Basque country with more leftist implantation in the national movement but reaction is clearly very much to the fore in that land also.

Recognising the right to self-determination and that these are historic nations does not oblige us to advocate full separation. We should advocate the Hispanic Socialist Federation (including Portugal). Full separation would leave these nations as pawns of other Imperialist powers (the right-wing nationalists in both the Basque Country and Catalonia make no bones about that) and would tend to weaken class solidarity with workers in Castile, Andalucía, Galicia, etc. On the other hand, not recognising the right to self-determination would appear to workers like supporting the repressive central apparatus of the reactionary central Madrid state against them.

The Basque country of northern Spain and southern France has a stronger claim to separation, or at least far more autonomy, given its history of severe repression under the dictator Franco and the continuing struggles of its liberation movement ETA and the numbers of political prisoners held in Spain and France.

In that sense, it is more like Ireland than Scotland or Catalonia. But it is not an economically oppressed nation like Ireland was and now obviously still is with the onset of the recession and austerity to pay the debts of foreign and native bankers. Both demands for separation therefore have an overtone of a rebellion against subsidising the poorer and more oppressed regions of Spain and keeping more of their wealth for ‘themselves’.
This is a con game, in reality the ruling classes in Catalonia and the Basque Country wish to ally with the US and other European Imperialists the better to exploit their own working class and poor. And similar profit motives rule in the Scottish and Welsh bourgeoisie’s desire for independence.

We would liken the situation in Spain to Scotland within the UK. As a nation, it has the right to self-determination but we should oppose total separation and counterpose a Socialist Federation of Britain – excluding the north of Ireland which is legitimately part of the Irish nation. There is a British nation, is there not? There can never be a ‘British Isles’ nation because of the history of national oppression in Ireland and its reflection in the consciousness of the Irish working class and poor farmers. This is a fate not shared in the same degree at all by either Scotland or Wales, despite the obvious discrimination imposed on Scotland by the Thatcher administration, via the Poll tax (first try it out on the Scots). Historically these unions (Wales in 1536 and Scotland in 1707) were voluntary acts of the ruling elites in the main, despite some opposition in Wales and considerably more in Scotland.

Wales had been ruled by England without opposition since the defeat of Owain Glyndŵr’s uprising (1400 – 1415). The union was a consequence of the victory of the Lancastrian, Henry VII, in the Wars of the Roses (1455-87). Wales had been divided into the northern Principality which was Lancastrian and the southern border Marches which were more dominated by England and were Yorkists. Henry VIII, a descendant of both houses, passed the act of union in 1536 as part of the battle against papal and therefore feudal landlord and ecclesiastical control of the region and in England (dissolution of the Monasteries 1536-41, etc.)

The Scottish union in 1707 was from a very different and in a later historical period. It was facilitated by the failure of the colonial ambitions of Scotland in the Darien Scheme. This colonial adventure in Central America bankrupted a whole section of the Scottish ruling class and demonstrated that Scotland on its own was incapable of becoming a colonial power. The union was very unpopular with the ordinary people; riots broke out and there was almost universal condemnation of the loss of sovereignty.

Daniel Defoe, who was hired to spy for the English, claimed that “A Scots rabble is the worst of its kind,” but admitted that, “for every Scot in favour there is 99 against”. Robert Burns referred to the union thus: “We’re bought and sold for English Gold,/ Sic a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation.”

The Union may have been forced on the majority in Scotland but the opposition was diverse. There was a growing influ-
ence of the Jacobites who wanted to return to feudal times and values – as the reactionary Walter Scott later rimed in The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805):

Old times were changed, old manners gone, /A stranger filled the Stauros’ throne; /The bigots of the iron time/ had called his harmless art a crime. /A wandering harper, scorned and poor, /He begged his bread from door to door; /And tuned, to please a peasant’s ear, /The harp, a King had loved to hear.

Economic necessity and security dictates forced the hands of both the English and Scottish ruling classes. The result benefitted Scotland greatly. The later support for Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1746 came from the Catholic Highlanders and from the lowland Catholic gentry, Scottish Episcopalians and from the nonjur- ing Anglicans in England and Wales who refused on principle to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary. These latter formed the ideological basis of the British Tories, the very name of which is taken from the outlawed supporters of James II in Ireland. [2]

Economically both nations benefitted greatly from their connection with the Empire; the south of Ireland suffered the opposite fate, disastrously declining in the nineteenth century as seen particularly in the decline of Dublin from the second city of the Empire in 1801 when the Act of Union became law to appalling pov- erty-stricken Dublin of the 1913 Lockout. The industrial devastation imposed on Scotland and Wales via the defeat of the miners’ strike of 1884-5. was similarly endured in the North East, Yorkshire, South Wales, Kent etc. We do not want to weaken that class solidarity by full separation as opposed to a Socialist Federation. We will therefore call for a “no” vote in the referendum in 2014 and argue for a Socialist Federation.

The solution advocated by Trotsky for Spain does seem to us to be the correct Marxist position and does take into account all the factors at play in 1931. We would say that the essential class structures remain the same in Spain today, despite the enormous numerical and economic advance of the working class. The recession will bring these questions to the fore once more, and in the immediate future, we are sure.

Finally, a large part of our opposition to total Scottish separation is based on an assessment of the dangers of the rise of English nationalism. We are totally opposed to an English parliament for this reason. England is at the heart of an Imperialist nation; English nationalism is a very nasty beast indeed if taken to its logical conclusion as the fascist groups like the BNP and the EDL do. It is constrained within a British parliament, despite the West Lothian question. [1] In trade union matters leaders from the ‘Celtic fringe’. Ireland, Wales and Scotland, tend to be more militant leaders of trade unions. Scottish-based union branches and regional bodies frequently give a lead to the whole British working class.

**Trotsky on Catalonia**

This is part of Trotsky’s message on Spain (Leon Trotsky: The national question in Catalonia, 1931). [3]

Once more on the subject of the timely questions of the Spanish revolution:
1) To permit petty-bourgeois nationalism to disguise itself under the banner of Communism means, at the same time, to deliver a treacherous blow to the proletarian vanguard and to destroy the progressive significance of petty-bourgeois nationalism.

2) What does the program of separatism mean? – the economic and political dismemberment of Spain, or in other words, the transformation of the Iberian Peninsula into a sort of Balkan Peninsula, with independent states divided by customs barriers, and with independent armies conducting independent Hispanic wars. Of course, the sage Maurín will say that he does not want this. But programs have their own logic, something Maurín doesn’t have.

3) Are the workers and peasants of the various parties of Spain interested in the economic dismemberment of Spain? Not at all. That is why to identify the decisive struggle for the right to self-determination with propaganda for separatism means to accomplish a fatal task. Our program is for Hispanic federation with the indispensable maintenance of economic unity. We have no intention of imposing this program upon the oppressed nationalities of Spain with the aid of the arms of the bourgeoisie. In this sense, we are sincerely for the right to self-determination. If Catalonia separates, the Communist minority of Catalonia, as well as of Spain, will have to conduct a struggle for federation.

4) In the Balkans, the old pre-war Social Democracy already put forward the slogan of the democratic Balkan federation as the way out of the madhouse created by the separated states. Today, the Communist slogan in the Balkans is the Balkan Soviet Federation (by the way, the Comintern adopted the slogan of the Balkan Soviet Federation, but at the same time it rejected this slogan for Europe!). How can we, under these conditions, adopt the slogan of the Balkanization of the Spanish peninsula? Isn’t it monstrous?

Notes

[1] The West Lothian question refers to the debate in the United Kingdom over why members of parliament from outside of England – from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – can vote on matters that affect England only.

[2] Tories, from the Irish word tóraidhe meaning “the pursued”, i.e. outlaws.

The unionists allege that the reduction in the number of days that the Union Jack hangs over Belfast City hall to a total of 17 in all is a concession to Sinn Fein and to the Catholics. Reading David McKitterick in the English Independent on 10 January on the ongoing Loyalist protest in the north of Ireland over the flag issue drove me to the conclusion that the Loyalist youth and workers have lost ‘their empire’ and their jobs in shipbuilding and engineering but what they haven’t lost is their anti-Catholic, anti-Irish bigotry and their anti-immigrant racism and their thuggery against Polish, Indian and Pilipino workers.

Their days of supremacy over their Catholic neighbours and their so-called ‘right’ to march wherever and whenever they like throughout the six counties while hurling racist and sectarian abuse at Catholic, while attacking their homes, shops, churches and schools those days are gone forever. Good Friday or no Good Friday Agreement croppy won’t lie down anymore.

Perhaps it’s time the Loyalists woke up and smelled the coffee. Because after all it was British Imperialism and British capitalism that destroyed their jobs and put them on the dole and it was not the Catholic working class or immigrant workers. The only hope for the Loyalist working class if they are to escape from economic and political going nowhere is to break from their reactionary racist and bigoted ideology and get rid of their illusions in the Union Jack and monarchy and join in with the Catholic working class and all workers in Ireland (their only real allies) in bringing about a new Socialist Ireland where all their needs are met and their problems solved because the bourgeois politicians north and south
have no answer to the huge problems being faced by the Irish working class including the Loyalist workers.

The working class has to fight for its own class interests independent of all other classes and groups in society. Only the working class organised in its own party can free itself from poverty, immigration, unemployment and injustice. Only socialism in an international basis can bring about a new world society free from poverty, disease, exploitation, oppression, wars of conquest and famine. In such a society need and not greed will be the driving force and a society where co-operation and solidarity between nations will replace the anarchy and madness of the market and competition. “from each according to their talents, to each according to their needs” will be the motto of such a society.

And talking of flying the Union Jack, the butcher’s apron. The Union Jack is the flag of British Imperialism and was the flag of British colonialism and the British empire. It is the flag of the British ruling class, the capitalist class. The flag of the British working class is the Red Flag and our anthem is The International.

The many war crimes and acts of terrorism committed by British Imperialism in the heyday of British colonialism and the British empire, the slave trade which took 28 million Africans to work in slave plantations in the West Indies and America, north and south, the “famines” in Ireland in the 1740s and in 1845-47, the “famine” in India in the 1870s perpetrated done under the Union Jack. Similarly, the wars of conquest by British Imperialism in Ireland, India, Aden, Cyprus, Malaya, North Yemen, Oman, Kenya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya to name but a few where wars were all fought under the Union Jack in the name of civilisation and British democracy, names that hid theft and plunder.
Ireland, the state of the nation: Burying the truth by Gerry Downing. 09/03/2017

How the Brexit crisis reveals in four great social and political corruption scandals the illegitimate nature of both states that were founded in the early 1920s in Ireland.

Melanie Philips, the Zionist bigot, wrote a column in The Times of London on 7 March saying that “the claim to unite Ireland is tenuous since Ireland itself has a tenuous claim to nationhood, having seceded from Britain as the Irish Free State in 1922.” Ireland as a modern nation has existed since 1798 at least, there are two states in Ireland, both of which are illegitimate because the Irish nation has not yet been able to assert right to self-determination in the whole Island. Of course, now, as back in in the early years of the last century, the question of the relations with global imperialism is of the first importance, but that we must leave to a later article.

The four scandals are:

1. the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal, the ‘Cash for Ash’ scandal in the north of Ireland. Only the latest of a series of appalling corruption scandals engulfing the ruling Democratic Unionist party (DUP). The main concern of the UK government is to prevent exposure of all these scandals and the emergence of the political conclusion that this is an illegitimate state. The scandal was a supposed ‘green energy’ subsidy scheme which resulted in, for example, one supporter of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) getting a payment of £1 million simply for heating an empty barn. Some £490 million were or will be lost in this way. It is impossible to conclude that this was a ‘mistake’ but Arlene Foster, the leader of the DUP, who refused to resign as First Minister until Martin McGuinness, her deputy and leader of Sinn Fein resigned, forcing the collapse and the new elections. The outcome left the DUP on 28 seats and Sinn Fein on 27, with the looming crisis of the exit from the EU, where the south of divided Ireland will remain in hanging over all this.

Previous DUP First Minister, Peter Robinson, was continually mired in scandal after scandal. His wife, Iris, had an affair with a teenager and it was claimed he knew Iris got £50,000 from two de-
velopers for her lover in exchange for contracts. A police investigation found him innocent of all wrong doing, natural-ly. Then TD (south of Ireland member of parliament) Mick Wallace alleged he had benefited financially from the National Asset Management Agency (Nama) properties sale from corrupt speculators seized by the Irish government following the 2008 financial crisis.

Allegedly payments were made to him and others from ‘US investor’ who mopped up the properties with their political assistance. Again, the missing millions were explained away by a less than rigorous inquiry. He eventually went in January 2016 amid all these scandals to be replaced by Arlene Foster, who was almost immediately embroiled in her own corruption scandal.

On 30 December 2012 two senior officers visited him in his home in Cavan and directly instructed him to cease his criminal investigations. Wiki tells this all resulted in 1. the resignation of Garda Commissioner Martin Callinan in March 2014. 2. the vindication of Gemma O’Doherty, the journalist fired by the Irish Independent for her pursuit of the story. 3. the resignation of the justice minister Alan Shatter in May 2014 and 4. The Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Enda Kenny has conceded that he will resign over the next few months as a consequence of the cover up. Again, the continuing cover-up is a determination to limit the fallout to prevent any questioning of the legitimacy of the state itself revealed in these corrupt practices and the state cover-up that followed.

2. The Garda (Irish police) Sergeant Maurice McCabe (above), ‘whistleblower’ scandal ongoing from 2012 in the south. He was a station sergeant in Bailieborough, County Cavan

Basically, this blew up from a realisation by McCabe that there was widespread corrupt practices in the Gardai including the scrubbing of points from driving licences for speeding and other traffic violations of those who were politically ‘important’ or who were prepared to pay. Attempts to stop the practices landed McCabe in an increasing desperate cover-up that went right to the top of force and thence to the top of the Irish political establishment. He was hounded and victimised, false allegations, including an entirely false one of child rape, were fabricated against him to shut him up.

The Catholic order of Nuns, the Bon Secours Sisters Mother and Baby Home scandal; between 1925 and 1961 in Tuam, County Galway they illegally buried of up to 1,000 babies, many of whom did from malnutrition, in a septic tank in the grounds. Women who had babies out of wedlock were sent there by the Church with the families, the babies were taken off them and they were often confined as slave labour in Magdalene Laundries for the rest of their lives. It is rumoured that many of the babies were
sold to childless couples in the USA. Many died through ill treatment and malnutrition, in fact murdered, and were buried in the grounds of the homes, in the Tuam case, in a disused septic tank, without official death certificates or their families being informed.

This is only the latest of scandals involving the Catholic Church in Ireland and internationally. The attendance at Sunday Mass has dropped dramatically, even in rural Ireland, over the past few decades and the ‘vocations’ to the priesthood have almost ceased – an increasing number of African priests are moving to Ireland to take up the slack. Their attitude to women and children, was and still is, truly shocking and this is no longer acceptable in modern Ireland.

Most notorious among many paedophile priests was Brendan Smyth, born in Belfast in 1927 whose abusing spanned 40 years and involved at least 143 children in Belfast, Dublin and the USA. The Roman Catholic hierarchy were aware of his activities and shielded him, thus ensuring he continued to abuse over the most of those latter years. The Irish government fell in December 1994 as a direct result of the case.

The social attitude of the Catholic Church to women were not confined to that organisation as the Kerry Babies case which became known in 1984 showed. Joanne Hayes had a child out of wedlock, who died in childbirth. She concealed the body. A second dead baby was discovered in a beach close to her home. The Garda Síochána charged her with killing the baby on the beach, assuming without evidence it was hers. It was not the evidence proved but the Gardaí now attempted to prove she had killed her own baby, again without any evidence but the Kerry Babies Tribunal supported the false allegation. Left wing journalist Nell McCafferty wrote a book about the case called A Woman to Blame and John Barrett co-authored My Story with Joanne Hayes, all blaming the Gardaí for their appalling treatment of Joanna. But the judges got in on the act of defending the corrupt state, they found for four Gardaí and a settlement was forced on the authors of €127,000. Both cases, and what obviously lay behind them, contributed to the secularisation of Ireland and the marginalisation of the malignant influence of the Church on the Free State in the south and north of Ireland.

There are fourteen such mother and baby homes in Ireland, all of whom may have their own pits full of the bones of children murdered by these ‘holy women’ with the assistance of Bishops and Cardinals, and the Irish government’s main concern now is to prevent all these homes being investigated and the murderers prosecuted.

Daniel McConnell and Fiachra Ó Cionnaith in the Irish Examiner report 20 January 2017: Garda Commissioner Nóirín O’Sullivan (below) has removed the final roadblock to publish-
ing two key HSE reports into the ‘Grace’ foster abuse sex scandal. The HSE has for several years refused to publish two expert reports detailing what happened and who was responsible, with the decision resulting in a year-long delay to a promised State inquiry. The refusal to publish was, it said, on foot of a request from gardaí who said that releasing the reports could jeopardise ongoing investigations.

4. The physical abuse and rape of a mentally disabled young woman, “Grace” scandal for over 20 years. She was lodged in a foster home in 1975 and was physically abused and raped continually for over 20 years there, despite consistent reports to the authorities of what was happening from 1981. She was one of a great many other victims and the main efforts of the Irish government now is to prevent all the other cases being exposed.

On 2 February 2016 Enda Kenny apologised to all the families of the abused mentally disabled people: “The question is, in ticking its boxes, was the system blind, was the system deaf, did the system possess so little awareness, so little accountability, that it could become a stone to Grace, to her abject experience, to her desperate need?” The Health Service Executive Director General Tony O’Brien also apologised and revealed that at least 47 families were involved in this whole affair. And he pledged as the Journal.ie reports:

When asked if anyone involved in the case was still working with children, O’Brien said:

“I would not ‘make his life easier’ by publishing the reports that would prevent any convictions in the future. I will not give them a get out of jail free card by putting these reports out in the public domain… the reports are horrendous. Nobody will get convicted, nobody will get disciplined… I have to hold the line on that and take criticism here today because of it. I will not do it, if the consequence is there will be no accountability. I just won’t do it.”

It is obvious from this, that like the three other cases, here there is an ongoing investigation and in the end, no one will be prosecuted and jailed for the most horrendous of crimes, because it is not in the ‘interests of national security’ to bring these criminals to justice. But due to the dogged persistence of whistleblowers and campaigning journalists these cases were forced into public consciousness and the resistance of the clerical, administrative and political establishment was overcome.

In the case of Ash for Cash the constant political campaigning of ‘dissident’ republicans and leftists groups like Eirigi and People before Profit forced the hand of Shin Fein to protect their republican and radical base. In the McCabe case it was the determination of the man himself and Irish Independent journalist
Gemma O’Doherty, whose persistence cost her her job.

In the Bon Secours Sisters scandal in Tuam from 2012, historian Catherine Corless documenting the deaths of 796 babies and toddlers there from infectious diseases and marasmus-related malnutrition; i.e. small babies were not kept clean and allowed to starve to death. That is called murder. On 7 March 2017, the President Michael D Higgins commended Catherine for exposing the scandal. She was practically on her own in 2012 and Higgins nowhere to be seen or heard.

On the physical abuse and rape of the mentally disabled young woman, “Grace” it was explained that there were three levels of authority in the HSE, the primary and secondary levels regularly reported the abuse of Grace and many others. The top level routinely binned their reports. These are more criminally responsible than the abusers themselves and should serve very long prison sentences. We will not hold our breaths awaiting that outcome. And this is not history, this is now or only the recent past.

These four scandals are only the most public and latest of a long series of similar affairs which continually attest to the truth that the states that emerged in 1920 and 1922 were and are equally illegitimate and the imposition on Ireland of a neo-colonial status following the defeat of the Republican forces in the Civil war in 1923 was a vicious counterrevolution which led Ireland to this sorry state. Melanie Philips, and many of the commentators on her diatribe, have no idea what a nation is and how it differs from a ‘country’ and a ‘state’. Ireland is a country and a nation but it holds two illegitimate states, neither of which represent the ‘nation’.


Tommy McKearney’s 2011 book takes us through the Troubles in the north of Ireland from their inception in the mid 1960s to the general election in the south in 2011. It is enthralling as a coherent narrative and ties up many issues for the reader in the overall picture he paints so well. I certainly understood many things in their context much better after reading it.

But this review will concentrate on the politics he espouses in the book with which we found many disagreements. The first are found at the start of the book in the preface on page x where he tells us he will be using the term ‘Northern Ireland’ throughout and the generic term ‘Catholic’ instead of ‘Nationalist’ or ‘Republican’.

He thereby signals he accepts the legitimacy of the border imposed by Britain in 1920 and accepts the ‘sectarian’, i.e. religious nature of the conflict, of which more later.

On p. 208 in the Chapter A New Republic and a Relevant Republicanism he sets out his solutions. ‘At Easter 1916, the Irish Republi-
can Brotherhood and the Irish Citizen’s Army prevented John Redmond’s party finding an Irish settlement within the British Empire. In a later era, Provisional IRA tenacity was a crucial element in undermining the Orange state.’

Do we have to point out that the Republic proclaimed in 1916 was never achieved and that the 1922-23 counterrevolution by the agents of British imperialism in Ireland CONSOLIDATED the domination of the British Empire over a miserable 26-county neo-colony and an even more reactionary 6 county Orange state? And, as he himself points out many times, the result of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was to win over the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin to a defence of the border and the establishment?

He tells us that the Orange state is gone and it has been replaced by a ‘sectarian state’ but we might be excused for thinking that, like the Police Service of Northern Ireland/RUC, this state was still the old Orange state accepted/defended by former Republicans as well as Nationalists now.

His prospects for the future involves a very vicious condemnation of present day ‘dissident’ Republicans. He says (p 204):

‘Single-issue Republicanism focusing exclusively on a unitary Irish state has shrivelled because it has finally accomplished as much as it was able to achieve. The reality is only a small handful of people within Republican ranks promoted a semi-spiritual and Nationalist vision of the ‘Irish Republic’.

There is no mention of or defence of the political or even human rights of hold-out Republican prisoners in Maghaberry or anywhere else.

He takes issue with Bob Purdy [1] and states unequivocally that reform of the state was not possible and Purdy was wrong to suggest it was unlike the Civil Rights movement in the US (unqualified success?) because discrimination was less ‘intense and blatant’ and if ‘the liberals in the North had been able to win a constitutional option for reform’ and the ‘NIRC managed to sustain its initial hegemony’ reform might have been possible. (pp4-5).

The obvious conclusion from that is that the defensive revolutionary armed struggle was necessary. The bulk of the book is then devoted to a critique of the methods of the offensive armed struggle employed by the Provisional IRA. Blatantly missing from this is a revolutionary critique of the IRA methods or any suggestions that such a revolutionary option ever existed in anything other than ‘a semi-spiritual and Nationalist vision of the ‘Irish Republic’. He says (p. 3),

‘From our perspective the Northern Ireland state (and for other reasons the government in London) could not simply concede to the civil right demands in spite of the fact that they were indeed, by any standards on any contemporary ‘normal’ bourgeois democratic government, straightforward. Yet, founded upon partition, which was in reality a partition of the population and society in Northern Ireland than a geographic division of the island, the Northern state could not deliver the usual passivity of most liberal democratic states in the post war, let alone post-1920s) period.’

His understanding of the centrality of partition is wrong, his understanding of the INEVITABLE posing of that problem in ever serious struggle in Ireland is wrong and his separation of the national and socialist question is wrong. So while he goes into great detail in accounting for and analysing the actions of the IRA and Sinn Féin there is absolutely no account of or real analysis of
the Irish Republican Socialist Party or Éirigi, both relegated to two passing references.

Whatever the political weakness of Seamus Costello and his comrades (on bombings etc.) at least they understood that the revolutionary task in Ireland combined both anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism and therefore the border was the central question that divided these questions in Ireland. And for that reason the deep state expended much more effort and resources in subverting that organisation and its military wing than it did the IRA at certain points.

So it is not a question of the ‘partition of the population and society in Northern Ireland’ but the partition of Ireland that requires the overthrow of both British imperialism and Irish capitalism, north and south; its direct colonial agents in the North and its no less loyal neo-colonial agents in the South, both installed in the terrible counter-revolutionary years of 1920-23.

James Connolly was correct in his analysis, which McKearney obviously rejects. In his article Labour and the Proposed Partition of Ireland, published in the Irish Worker on 14 March 1914, he made the following commentary:

‘And now that the progress of democracy elsewhere has somewhat muzzled the dogs of aristocratic power, now that in England as well as in Ireland the forces of labour are stirring and making for freedom and light, this same gang of well-fed plunderers of the people, secure in Union held upon their own dupes, seek by threats of force to arrest the march of idea and stifle the light of civilisation and liberty …

Such a scheme as that agreed to by Redmond and Devlin, the betrayal of the national democracy of industrial Ulster would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, 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. To it Labour should give the bitterest opposition, against it Labour in Ulster should fight even to the death, if necessary, as our fathers fought before us.’

McKearney tells us that even though ‘Northern Ireland’ became a ‘militarised society’ nonetheless it had ‘an indelible democratic hue’ (p. 4) and then goes on to sympathetically evaluate the views of pundits O’Dowd, Rolston and Tomlinson on what was the differences between ‘Northern Ireland’ and ‘other bourgeois liberal states’ (p.6) and ‘most other liberal states’ (p. 7) in apparent disregard that this is precisely what ‘Northern Ireland’ was not and is not. It was and is an illegitimate, artificial state, like colonial Algeria, Rhodesia and South Africa were and like Israel and some of the southern states in the USA like Alabama and Mississippi still are; states that are not nations but created artificially to defend the privileges of a religious of racial colonial minority thereby dividing the working class along those lines. As he outlines so well that is precisely what ‘Northern Ireland’ is and why it should be referred to as ‘the north of Ireland’ or the ‘six north-eastern counties of Ireland’ to reject the British imposition.

He is therefore profoundly wrong to conclude in his introduction: ‘If we were to argue, for example, that we will forever let our differences about the ‘Border’ (why do we need these inverted commas?) divide us, then prospects for a properly developed opposition to neo-liberalism will be hopeless’ (p.19). The total opposite is the case. We cannot develop a proper opposition to neo-liberalism, now enforced by Sinn Féin in alliance with the DUP, without workers’ equality and, given that the border is still there, that ensures Loyalist supremacy and
continuing working class inequality and division.

Kearney is simply wrong about the growing equality that he claims is now happening because of the GFA. In reality the Loyalist and Nationalist middle class are doing well out of it but the working class Republicans and Loyalists have got nothing but austerity. And the Nationalists have got more austerity; they are still significantly more unemployed than Loyalists and the Housing Executive is notorious for hiding its results but what happens in North Belfast in gerrymandering and discrimination in housing just cannot be hidden. And the Loyalist working class still blame the ‘Catholics’ for their oppression not their own ruling class—because of the border!

The ‘Flags’ confrontation and ‘Peace Walls’ as clear evidence of a growing far right movement amongst Loyalist workers, whose Orange Lodges welcome all types of far rightists and fascist from Britain and Europe and whose youth attack immigrants far more than the Nationalist community. The ‘Border’ is not alone physical but it is a political and ideological weapon against workers’ unity. It is a priority to demolish it in the course of the struggle defeat British imperialism and to overthrow capitalism north and south.

This error is reinforced by the assessment of Britain’s reasons for opposing democratic rights for Nationalists (pp 59-60). He implies Britain would have conceded to the NICR but for the cold war with the USSR; its NATO allies viewed remaining in Ireland as a strategic asset that had to be kept within the Western alliance.

This understanding is profoundly one sided and therefore incorrect. It follows from this that the collapse of the USSR in 1991 should have removed that cold war threat and by the time of the GFA Britain would have been supported Irish unity.

Britain and Irish political leaders North and South opposed the mass movement that the NIRC sparked from 1969 to the 1971 introduction of internment and the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre, and the mass movement around the hunger strikes ten years later because they were movements of revolutionary proportions which threatened both Irish capitalism and British imperialism and therefore the partition of Ireland.

And here we note the other great error, the wrong analysis of the relationship between the struggle in Ireland and the class struggle of the British working class. In his chapter on The War in England (p. 127) he speculates:

‘The IRS’s English campaign certainly made a powerful point, reminding Britain that its war in Ireland was not a cost-free exercise. Whether in the long run it was the best option for Republicans is another question. Might a different approach to a British working class battered and embittered by Thatcherism have paid higher dividends? Might it have been possible to create a firm political alliance with sections of Britain’s alienated and marginalised population that would have put real pressure on Westminster? We cannot know.’

We can and do know the answer to that question and its came during the great miner’s strike of 1984-5. As we wrote in Class Consciousness and the Revolutionary Party:

‘The struggle itself had made the miners and their communities open to political ad-
Advances in all areas as shown by the struggles of the Women against Pit Closures, the Lesbian and Gay support groups etc. The Irish and Black support was reciprocated. But it needed a real revolutionary party to concretise those advances in terms of new cadre for the revolution. This largely did not happen, few miners actually joined far left groups but there was a huge influx into the Labour Party. Here the obvious opportunity to qualitatively develop class consciousness on vital issues for the British working class – racism and Ireland – was criminally rejected by the WRP and many other left groups to maintain unprincipled relations with Arthur Scargill. Their ‘united front’ with the NUM was unprincipled and one sided, it amounted to an opportunist rotten bloc with Scargill and the opportunity to win miners to revolutionary politics was lost. This was a major factor in the break-up of the WRP and other left groups after the defeat of the strike. However, it would be wrong to conclude that all is now lost from that strike. The heightened class consciousness still lives on even in the Labour party and in the trade unions. [2]

However, despite its proximity to the hunger strikes, the IRA/Sinn Féin leadership had no such orientation. And none, apart from individuals and small groups like Workers Power, had this orientation in Britain then. Learning from 1920 and early 1921 [2] the appeal should have been to the British working class ranks and file and that fight should have been conducted within the unions against the pro-imperialist leaders of these unions. Many did sterling work within the unions on Ireland but the IRA tactic of the bombings of civilian areas in Britain and the north of Ireland made that unity very difficult to achieve. McKearney sees the solution as a ‘new and different republic – one that is not merely independent but a republic that is socialist.’ (p.208). But not one achieved through revolution (p. 209): ‘it is logical therefore to argue that ending the current constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom would be a positive step towards ending sectarianism and replacing it with normal class politics – a vital step towards building a socialist republic’.

One wonders what makes that former IRA prisoner and hunger striker, Marxist of sorts, leading member of Congress ‘86 and Forthwrite magazines, different to the Officials/Workers Party who slipped away from opposition to British imperialism and Irish capitalism under the cover of ‘Marxist’/Stalinist/Michael Collins two stage theories (‘a vital step [ing stone] towards building a socialist republic?’) to embrace ‘normal (reformist) class politics’.

Notes