

IRELAND

REVOLUTION AND THEORY

by

Michael Connolly

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Discussion Article

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I. NEW WAVE OF REVOLT, NEW QUESTIONS FOR IRISH FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Ever since the death of Bobby Sands on May 5, after 66 days on hunger strike in the "H-Blocks" of Belfast's Long Kesh prison, a succession of outpourings have focused the attention of the world on the struggle for freedom in Northern Ireland. The days that followed his death saw not only youth throwing petrol bombs at British troops, but a Belfast funeral procession of some 100,000 -- one of the largest demonstrations in Irish history. In cities around the globe as distant as Melbourne, Mexico City, and Berlin, sympathy marches descended on British embassies.

The sickening attempt by Ulster police ten days later to "kidnap" the body of a second IR hunger striker, Francis Hughes, was shown on TV worldwide. In their attempt to prevent another massive show of opposition to the Northern Ireland police state, police thus insured a turnout of 20,000 in Hughes' hometown in rural South Derry. Similar huge crowds accompanied hunger strikers Raymond McCreech and Patsy O'Hara to their graves in Armagh and Derry City. The fact that O'Hara was a member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, rather than the IRA, was not a point of division.

In Derry City, youth took to the streets in a general attack on Ulster police and British troops, shouting their protests over the brutal murder of two Derry youths on Easter Sunday. In what was officially termed a "traffic accident," two Army landrovers plowed into a group of youths at high speed, then stopped and reversed over the injured, killing two and injuring at least four others. Indeed, every brutality, every intransigence by British Prime Minister Thatcher and her government has brought out new forces in the present crisis, especially among the youth.

The National "H-Blocks/Armagh" campaign has meant the involvement of thousands of new teenagers in house-to-house organizing and discussions. And those discussions have not alone been limited to the demands of the hunger strikers for political status for Irish freedom fighters in British prisons, but have extended to all the conditions of life and labor in Northern Ireland today.

Those conditions are certainly oppressive ones. The six-county police state of Northern Ireland, torn from Ulster at the time of Irish partition in 1921, is based solely on the most vicious Orange (Protestant Loyalist) sectarianism, and maintained today only with the presence of layer upon layer of military technology and fascist thuggery. The 12,000 regular British troops, armed with the latest in "anti-insurgency warfare" training, are backed up by more than 2,000 members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary -- Northern Ireland's nearly entirely segregated (Protestant-only) police force -- and by the part-time soldiers of the Ulster Defense Regiment. Add to these forces the proliferation of secret and not-so-secret fascist terror organizations, from the Ulster Volunteer Force through the Ulster Defense Association to the Red Hand Commando. For a full decade they have devoted themselves to the murder of Left activists and civil rights movement workers.

Behind the military and its helpers lies the fantastic special court system now called the "Northern Ireland Emergency Powers Act." Nothing better gives the lie to Prime Minister Thatcher's constantly repeated contention that Irish Republicans are "common criminals" than the provisions of that Act. In Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland alone, offenses with "political motivations" are set off from all others and heard in non-jury courts under special rules of evidence. The burden of proof is shifted from the prosecution to the defense; the right to remain silent is removed; a conviction is acceptable on the basis of a disputed confession alone. In fact, 85 percent of convictions in the special courts have been obtained on the basis of such "confessions," often after torture. In this manner were the "H-Blocks" of Long Kesh and the Women's Prison in Armagh filled.

The entire apparatus of repression directed at the Catholic population of Northern Ireland serves to maintain a complex system of segregation in which the Protestant population does receive some relative benefits, in jobs, housing and treatment by the state. It is not, however, the Protestant working class, politically attached as it is to Orange politics, that is the pillar of Northern Ireland's perverse system. Rather the real pillar is international (mainly British) capitalism, which for decades has enjoyed in Belfast, Derry and other Ulster cities, the employment of workers at poverty wages unheard of in the rest of Western Europe outside Portugal.

It is that same international capitalism that praised the "labor peace" in the factories, by which they meant that the union movement was crippled by not only divisions between Protestants and Catholics, but by a real unemployment rate which often exceeded 30 percent of the workforce. The truth is that throughout Northern Ireland, job and housing segregation has intensified, not lessened. This, despite the 13 years since the civil rights movement began. Far from the recent years of struggle having opened new paths between Protestant and Catholic workers, the daily reality of life in 1981 has meant fewer and fewer contacts of any kind.

At the same time, however, the stone wall of intransigence erected by British Labor and Tory governments alike, and supported by the Irish government in Dublin, is beginning to show serious cracks:

* The Drixton Rebellion in April, the latest in a rising tide of actions by a Black Britain determined to endure British racism, poverty wages and unemployment no longer, has given even the most diehard Tories the feeling that their "way of life" is under attack from both sides of the Irish Sea.

* A poll sponsored by the Labor Party revealed 59 percent of the British people in favor of troop withdrawal from Ireland. Only 29 percent felt that Britain should keep control of the Six Counties. There is now an open split in the Labor Party on troop withdrawal.

1. Since this discussion article was written on May 28, 1981, the revolt of Black Britain as seen in Drixton in April has been extended in July both nation-wide, in every city from Southampton to Dundee, and from Black Britain to the white youth of Britain, themselves unemployed and sick of police harassment. (See reports in News & Letters, July and Aug.-Sept. 1981.) Interviews with many of those in the streets of Liverpool, London and Manchester revealed an open affinity between British youth and their counterparts in Belfast and Derry. What is also crucial to see, however, is the affect that Black Britain's new stage of struggle will have on the course of the Irish freedom movement. Will the relations forged between Black youth and white make an impact on segregated Northern Ireland?

6. In Dublin, Prime Minister Haughey was forced to call elections for June 11, elections in which not only will his close association with Thatcher on Northern Ireland be a central issue, but so will the Republic's 11 percent unemployment and 20 percent inflation rate.

There is no doubt that new openings have begun for the Irish freedom struggle. The question that then faces all activists and thinkers in that movement is how to develop these openings. How can we help to break the antagonism between the Catholic and the Protestant working class people of Northern Ireland? How can the struggles of Northern Ireland against its police state and workers in the Republic against its status as a minimum wage preserve for the multi-nationals be united? What relations can be established between Irish freedom fighters and all the forces of revolt in Britain -- the Black movement, the workers, the youth, women's liberation?

That these questions require the most serious relationship between theory and activity is powerfully indicated in a recent letter from a British Marxist-Humanist, Dick Abernethy:

The news of Bobby Sands' death reached me in a most distressing way. I arrived at work to hear people saying that he was a terrorist thug who got what he deserved, and if Britain hadn't abolished hanging there would be no problem with hunger strikes.

British public opinion is pretty clearly in support of withdrawal from Northern Ireland, but this is overwhelmingly frustration at an unwinnable war, and very few are sympathetic to the Irish liberation movement. The level of ignorance is colossal. Several people informed me that Sands was a "convicted murderer." In fact he had been sentenced to 14 years for illegal possession of firearms. I got a fairly heated and irrational reaction when I argued that the real problem in Northern Ireland was Orange sectarianism upheld by British troops. One guy even rolled up his trousers, pointed to a bandaged leg, and said, "I got that fighting for my country in World War II." In other words, the general attitude is emotional and unreasoning chauvinism, but also pessimism.

Also, there is a revulsion at IRA atrocities, which would be legitimate if these were seen in the context of the mess created by British rule and Protestant supremacy. I feel more "out on a limb" on the subject of Ireland than on any other issue. People who are generally quite radical fall right into the chauvinist swamp as soon as Ulster is mentioned

Unlike the U.S. experience with the Vietnam War, Britain's war in Northern Ireland has not (yet) given rise to any mass protest or led many people in Britain to question the nature

2. In the June 11, 1981 election in the Irish Republic, Charlie Haughey was voted out of office. By the slimmest of margins, Garret Fitzgerald's Fine Gael/Labour coalition took over the government, but not before two Republican prisoners had been elected to the Dail.

of the society they live in. The movement for withdrawal is rather small and ineffectual. It is based on the Irish community in Britain, plus the revolutionary Left, plus the pacifists. There is also a small group of Army veterans who now oppose the war...

However great the changes in Ireland since Marx's time, his views are still powerfully relevant. Today we still face the task "to awaken the consciousness in the English worker that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is no question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment, but the first condition of their own social emancipation."

For one thing, this means that as we participate in the struggle against nuclear weapons -- which is a vigorous and popular movement -- we must insist on breaking down the separation from opposition to the Irish war. Britain's atrocities in Ulster have done much to further militarization of the mind.

At the same time, a rigorous critique of Irish Republicanism is necessary. Support for the Irish freedom struggle does not equal uncritical acceptance of its presently dominant ideological and organizational forms. The question of the border is not what is paramount. A war of assassinations does not point the way to a new society....

In the light of the new questions now being raised for the Irish freedom movement, and for those in Britain and elsewhere who offer solidarity, let's take a look, however, briefly, at "Ireland: revolution and theory" in three historic periods: (1) the Fenian movement of the 1860s and Karl Marx; (2) the Uprising of 1916-21 -- Connolly and Lenin; and (3) today's movement, from its origins in the Ulster civil rights protests of the late 1960s until today. We will do so not because such a re-examination can directly offer a program for today's Irish struggle, but because the tracing of a revolutionary relationship to Irish freedom historically can illuminate perspectives for our age.

II THE FENIAN MOVEMENT AND KARL MARX

When Marx arrived in exile in Britain in the fall of 1849, as the counter-revolution in Germany intensified, Ireland was already more than three years into the famine. The whole of the country was wracked by starvation and exile in unprecedented numbers. At the same time Marx was witness to the collapse of the "Young Ireland" movement, a gentry-led national movement which, at the height of the famine, toured the countryside urging the peasantry to get ready for revolt, yet refusing to allow them to feed themselves at the expense of the landlords. Such "leaders" as William Smith O'Brien even refused to allow peasants to build barricades across the roads without getting permission from the landlords who owned the trees. In the aftermath of such a debacle, British socialists in the 1850s ignored Ireland and its "backward peasantry" entirely.

Such was not the case with Marx. In April 1856, he wrote to Engels: "The whole matter in Germany will depend upon the possibility of supporting the proletarian revolution with a sort of second edition of the peasant war. Then the thing will be excellent." That very same month he urged Engels to take a trip to Ireland, and to report fully on the conditions he observed in the rural areas there. Engels' report vividly describes Ireland a decade after the beginnings of the famine:

Ireland may be regarded as the first English colony and as one which because of its proximity is still governed exactly in the old way, and here one can already observe that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies.... The whole of the west, but especially in the neighborhood of Galway, is covered with ruined peasant houses. I never thought famine could have such tangible reality. Whole villages are devastated, and there among them lie the splendid parks of the lesser landlords, who are the only people still living there, mostly lawyers. Famine, emigration and clearances have accomplished this....

The country has been completely ruined by the English wars of conquest from 1100 to 1850 (for in reality both the wars and the state of siege lasted as long as that.) It is a fact that most of the ruins were produced by destruction during the wars. The people itself has got its peculiar character from this, and despite all their Irish nationalist fanaticism the fellows feel that they are no longer at home in their own country. Ireland for the Saxon! That is now being realized³

Again and again in the 11 years between Engels' trip to Ireland and the publication of *Capital*, Marx returned to not only the question of the true nature of the depopulation of Ireland, but as well to the social forces unleashed by that depopulation. Far from Ireland's famine and emigration being "natural phenomena" (the description then popular with many English social scientists), Marx looked to its relation to British capitalism. He castigated even those Irish writers who rejected "natural" explanations for Ireland's plight, yet insisted that the mass evictions were for the purpose of further colonizing Ireland with Englishmen. Instead Marx viewed 1846 as an historic turning point, even if the British themselves did not understand it as such:

What the English do not yet know is that since 1846 the economic content and therefore also the political aim of English domination of Ireland have entered into an entirely new phase, and that, precisely because of this, Fenianism is characterized by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by the fact that it is a lower orders movement. What can be more ridiculous than to confuse the barbarities of Elizabeth and Cromwell --

3. Engels to Marx, May 23, 1856.

who wanted to supplant the Irish by English colonists (in the Roman sense) -- with the present system, which wants to supplant them by sheep, oxen and pigs!... The clearing of the estate of Ireland is now the one idea of English rule in Ireland

The depopulation of Ireland had indeed been enormous in scale. From 8.2 million in 1841, the population had fallen to 5.5 million in 1866 -- the same number that had lived in Ireland at the turn of the century in the census of 1801. In 20 years, Ireland had lost fully one-third of its people. That Marx chose to take up this precise question at the conclusion of his chapter in Capital on "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" sheds light on not only his intense interest in Ireland; but in the way Marx viewed all the "latest data" with an eye to subjects of revolution.

Thus Marx follows the waves of emigration to the USA, and the consequences for Irish laborers left behind. Far from being freed by emigration from the category of "relative surplus population," Marx shows, "wages are just as low; the oppression of the laborers has increased; misery is forcing the country toward a new crisis. The reasons are simple. The revolution in agriculture has kept pace with emigration. The production of a relative surplus population has more than kept pace with the absolute depopulation."

What is crucial to grasp is that Marx's view of Ireland is far from being alone a story of misery. Consider how he chooses to conclude the whole chapter on "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation":

The accumulation of the Irish in America keeps pace with the accumulation of rents in Ireland. The Irishman, banished by the sheep and the ox, re-appears on the other side of the ocean as a Fenian. And there a young but gigantic republic arises, more and more threateningly, to face the old queen of the waves.

Even before Marx's conclusions on Ireland appeared in print, the British government launched a series of mass arrests calculated to destroy the Fenian movement. Prime Minister Gladstone refused to recognize political status for any of those arrested. Marx entered the struggle for their release, and castigated government spokesmen: "Those revolting swine boast of their English humanity because they do not treat their political prisoners any worse than murderers, footpads, forgers and sodomists." And no sooner was Capital safely on the presses than the attention of all Britain and Ireland focused on four prisoners sentenced to death for an alleged attack on a prison van. Marx led the International Workingmen's Association in an unsuccessful campaign to free them. After they were hung he wrote, "The political executions at Manchester remind us of the fate of John Brown at Harpers Ferry."

At the same time, Marx denounced the Fenian bombing of a wall around London's Clerkenwell prison, an act which killed 12 and wounded hundreds in

4. Marx to Engels, Nov. 30, 1867.

5. Capital, Vol. I, p. 862. Vintage/Penguin edition.

6. Capital, Vol. I, p. 870. Vintage/Penguin edition.

a workingclass neighborhood, pointing out that it served only as an obstacle to British workers' support for Irish freedom. --Indeed, throughout the period of the Fenian movement, Marx's support for Irish freedom was never equated to support for what he called the "empty conspiracies and small coups" to which Irish nationalism was prone.

Thus, Marx had to fight both within the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association against those tendencies who opposed the Irish movement on the grounds of an abstract formulation of "workers' unity" or as outright British chauvinists, as well as against those in the Irish movement who constantly hatched plots without ever involving the Irish masses. Marx refused to separate the struggle for Irish independence from the need for an "agrarian revolution" in Ireland.

By 1869, Marx's involvement in the ongoing Irish struggle, on the one hand, and his continuing research into everything from land-holding patterns to Irish workers' wages in England, ^{on the other}, led him to write a "confidential circular" for the IWA. So fully did Marx consider this statement a re-organization of all past understandings of the Irish struggle, that in a stream of letters to friends in the socialist movement, Marx pointed out that the conclusion he had now reached was "unexpected" even to himself. Here is how Marx summarized the new perspective in his famous letter to Meyer and Vogt:

After occupying myself with the Irish question for many years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the English ruling classes (and it will be decisive for the workers' movement all over the world) cannot be delivered in England, but only in Ireland

Owing to the constantly increased concentration of farming, Ireland supplies its own surplus to the English labour market and thus forces down wages and lowers the moral and material position of the English working class. And most important of all: every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working-class population divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself.... The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own coin. He regards the English workers as both sharing in the guilt for the English domination in Ireland and at the same time serving as its stupid tool

To hasten the social revolution in England is the foremost object of the International Workingmen's Association. The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent.

Hence the task of the "International" is everywhere to put the conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with Ireland. The

7. See the minutes of the General Council of the IWA, Nov. 1867.

special task of the Central Council in London is to awaken a consciousness in the English workers that for them the national emancipation of Ireland is no question of abstract justice or human sympathy but the first condition of their own emancipation.

So began a new type of "campaign" by the International, both agitation in Britain and other countries for the release of Irish political prisoners, and the posing of a challenge within the Irish national movement to all elements that held back its development. Thus Marx's daughter, Jenny, wrote for the French newspaper *Marseillaise* (under the pen name of Williams) such stinging articles on British treatment of Irish political prisoners, that Gladstone was soon forced to free most of the imprisoned Fenians, even including O'Donovan Rossa.

It is important to underline that Marx's perspective was not limited to the agitation within Britain and against the British government. No, the organizational ramifications that flowed from Marx's new analysis in the crucial years 1869-71 included the establishment and growth of branches of the IWA in Ireland -- in Dublin, in Cork, and in several smaller cities.

For Marx what was crucial there was: (1) opposition to the lawyers, and merchant politicians, with their rhetoric; (2) opposition to the priests, who had proven again and again their betrayal of the Irish freedom movement; and (3) support for the agricultural laboring class in their ferment for an agrarian revolution, including revolution against Irish native landlordism. In the months after the Paris Commune, when a hysteria against "Communists" was unleashed, the IWA branches in Ireland came under attack from priest-led mobs, urged on by such as Bishop Moriarty who had previously declared of the Fenian Brotherhood: "Hell was not hot enough nor eternity long enough to punish such miscreants."

The Irish IWA branches were not able to withstand the persecution. Indeed, the whole of the independence movement was eclipsed for nearly a decade. But in the last years of Marx's life, a new movement suddenly arose in the West of Ireland -- the Irish Land League. Heedless of the confines of the timid "home-rule" movement, and attacking priests and native landlords as well as the English domination, the Land League quickly spread throughout rural Ireland. By 1882, a "Ladies Land League" had organized itself to defend evicted tenant farmers, and to secure rights for women to land and property.

Marx did not enter organizationally into this struggle. But as he studied the works of the new anthropologists, 1880-82, including Sir Henry Maine's work on Ancient Law (Roman, Irish, German), he pointed out that under ancient Irish rule, women had some power over their own property, whereas under English rule the "blockheaded Judges" expressly declared such powers illegal. At the end of Marx's life, what characterized his attitude toward the Irish freedom struggle was what had driven him to study the Russian mir and the activity of Black American ex-slaves -- his ever-deepening relationship to subjects of revolution, to his philosophy of revolution.

8. Marx to Meyer and Vogt, April 9, 1870.

9. See Raya Dunayevskaya's article "The Relationship of Philosophy and Revolution to Women's Liberation: Marx's and Engels' Studies Contrasted," News & Letters, Jan.-Feb. 1979. Dunayevskaya's study of Marx's Ethnological Notebooks will be seen in full in her forthcoming book Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution.

III CONNOLLY, LENIN AND THE IRISH UPRISING OF 1916-21

In the same way that the German Social Democracy adopted a portion of Marx, while ignoring the totality of his work, so the British Social Democratic Federation (SDF) calling itself "Marxist," wasted no time distancing itself from Marx's legacy on Ireland. So completely and swiftly did its leader, Hyndman, capitulate to British imperialism's attitude to the Irish masses, that by 1900 he actually tried to convince the Paris Congress of the Second International that no Irish delegation to that Congress should be seated, since Ireland was part of Britain.

It was James Connolly's newly-formed Irish Republican Socialist Party that was the object of Hyndman's attempted exclusion. And it was Connolly, who, in breaking with the policies of the SDF, recalled the battled Marx had to wage within the General Council of the IWA against such blinding patriotism. Hyndman knew of those battles as well, but to him Marx's views on Ireland and the relation of the Irish struggle to British revolution, were considered "not essential" by a British socialist organization only 17 years after Marx's death.

It was against this perversion of Marxism that ^{James} Connolly directed much of his writings on the subject of socialism and Irish independence. Not that Connolly was ever any sort of narrow nationalist. Indeed, his 1897 work, "Socialism and Nationalism" still haunts the Charlie Haugheys and Garrett Fitzgeralds who govern the 26 counties today, so prophetic is it of the fate of "independent" Ireland:

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 through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs¹⁰

Every organizational effort in which Connolly joined from 1898 through the 1916 Uprising was one which refused to separate national liberation from the perspective of full socialist revolution. That was true whether it was the founding of the Irish Republican Socialist Party or the establishment of the Irish Citizen Army from within the rank-and-file of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. But what is so crucial to see today is that Connolly's organizational efforts were tightly tied to his theoretic ones, especially as he carved out, from 1910 to 1916, a theoretic path to revolution, a path to the barricades of Easter Week, 1916.

That path extended from his 1910 work, Labor in Irish History, through the polemic Labor, Nationality, and Religion to his 1915 essay, The Reconquest of Ireland. Throughout this period, Connolly's writings spring at once from his relationship to the Irish liberation movement -- its history and its present -- and from his relationship to the work of Marx. In a period when Irish nationalist organizations were again growing, and sentiment rising for action against English rule, Connolly's Labor in Irish History views the long trek of Ireland's struggle and reveals the working class as

10. James Connolly, "Socialism and Nationalism," in Shan Van Vocht, Jan. 1897.

the bearer of Irish freedom. Thus one sees again and again the betrayal of the liberation struggle by the native landlords, by the merchants, by the anti-socialist intellectuals, by the clergy. At the same time, this tracing of history illuminates the creativity of the Irish working class and the peasantry. Here it is Connolly, who, for the first time since Marx's death, grasps the relationship in Capital between the struggles of the Irish working class against the ever-worsening conditions of labor, and the rise of the Fenian movement.

An integral part of Connolly's work in this period was his polemic against the anti-socialist clergy. Indeed, it was through his response to the slanderous attacks on socialism by Father Kane in 1910 that Connolly deepened his study of the history of the Irish working class. Labor, Nationality and Religion exposes so totally the historic capitulation of the Irish Church to British domination that to this day its presence on literature tables in Irish political gatherings is a source of controversy, with some saying that it is "divisive," and should therefore be excluded.

On the eve of the 1916 Uprising, and after the mass strike of Dublin workers of 1913, came Connolly's 1915 essay, The Reconquest of Ireland. Those among the socialist movement in Ireland and in Britain who were shocked to see Connolly in the leadership of the 1916 Uprising must never have studied this work. For it is here that Connolly is most deeply committed to eliciting all the social forces to create a new Ireland -- and to eliciting them through the process of revolutionary action. Here is the total opposition to any scheme for the partition of Ireland, or for a concept of "home-rule" by the native bourgeoisie. Here is the full expression that only in a workers' republic, as part of a world movement for revolution, would true Irish independence be possible.

And here, precisely here, is Connolly's insistence on woman as a central Irish revolutionary subject. It is not alone his assertion that "the worker is the slave of capitalist society; the female worker is the slave of that slave" that is central here. Rather, it is that in experiencing the militant role of women workers in the 1913 strikes, Connolly suddenly is led to see the women's struggle in a very different way than his socialist co-workers:

None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their soul and bodies the fetters of the ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour."¹¹

Less than one year later, Connolly was to lead the Easter Rising of 1916 from the Dublin General Post Office, and be executed by the British in the yard of Kilmainham Jail.

Seven weeks before the Rising, Lenin was completing, from Swiss exile, and in the midst of the slaughter of World War I, his Theses on the "Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination."¹²

11. See Chapter VI of The Reconquest of Ireland, entitled simply, "Woman."

could not have known that the Irish liberation organizations were preparing, in secret, for the rising. But in sharp contrast to his colleagues in the socialist movement who did oppose World War I, but who nevertheless attached to that opposition an abstract condemnation of all "nationalism," Lenin felt that that sort of unity -- unity based on conclusions alone, and which masked the wide differences in the process of coming to those conclusions -- was the "greatest danger" to the movement.

What may have seemed like an abstract discussion became a life-and-death concrete one as soon as the Irish Rebellion of 1916 took to the streets in Dublin. The truth is that, within the socialist movement, the Rebellion came under greatest attack from within the Left, from anti-war socialists like Karl Radek, who dared to title his article on the Rebellion "A Played-Out Song," and analyzed it as nothing more or less than a "putsch." Forecasting the "end of Irish nationalism," Radek described the Rebellion as a "purely urban petty-bourgeois movement which, notwithstanding the sensation it caused, had not much social backing."¹²

It is precisely in answer to Radek and other anti-war socialists that Lenin's greatest formulations on the national question emerge as he took the debate up again in July 1916. Not that Lenin had illusions about the breadth of the Irish movement in 1916, or about its class character -- but in answering Radek what leaps out is the concreteness of Lenin's relationship to revolution:

Imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landlords, the church, the monarchy, against national oppression, etc. -- to imagine that means repudiating social revolution

The dialectics of history is such that small nations, powerless as an independent factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the real power against imperialism, to come on the scene, namely, the socialist proletariat.

We all know how the Irish Revolution, far from being a "played-out song," did use the involvement of Britain in World War I as its opportunity to fight for freedom in its war of independence, 1916-21. The tragedy, however, of that struggle is that it was fought without a James Connolly, without either the leadership of a workers' movement for socialist revolution in practice, or the reconnection with Marx's philosophy of revolution in theory. Thus, the 26-county state that became the Irish Republic was the product of the most unfinished of bourgeois national revolutions. So

12. Karl Radek, "A Played-Out Song," was printed in the Berner Tagwacht, May 9, 1916.

13. V.I. Lenin, "The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed Up," July 1916. For more on the relationship of Lenin to the Irish Rising of 1916, see Raya Dunayevskaya's Marxism and Freedom, Chapter 10.

limited was even the break with England that it was not until after World War II that British corporations ceased to be the overwhelmingly dominant factor in the economy of the Republic -- and then the difference was only that the economy was controlled more "plurally," by the USA, Germany, and other enterprising foreign investors seeking low wages.

And for the IRA, who did not accept the Treaty of 1921, and continued armed struggle against it, all became reduced to the question of the border, the partition imposed by Britain. Questions of full social revolution, of the workers' struggle, of the farmers' movement, or of the women's rights campaigns, were excluded from the "agenda," or relegated to the period after the partition was abolished. Today we have to ask whether the IRA, in accepting the ground of British imperialism, in narrowing the issue to the border, does not break up the unity of philosophy and revolution, and thus pose a genuine obstacle to revolution in all of Ireland.

IV. TODAY'S IRISH FREEDOM STRUGGLE: 1968-72; 1972-81

In our own age, and within our own Marxist-Humanist history, the subject of "Ireland: revolution and theory" has included a study of Marx's writings and work on Ireland at several points in the period since World War II. Even a brief look through the Marxist-Humanist Archives reveals that Raya Dunayevskaya has again and again returned to Marx on Ireland. It is true that that return has not so much been to offer a perspective on the Irish freedom struggle today, as to help illuminate a subject that might seem very far distant from Ireland -- the Black Dimension in the USA and in Britain.

One can trace this study from Dunayevskaya's articles on "Marxism and the Negro Problem" written in 1944 and 1946, in the wake of the Harlem and Detroit rebellions, to her 1968 letter to the Scottish Marxist-Humanist Group on "British racism, Powellism and the workers."¹⁴ The impact of that letter on today's Black rebellion in Britain can be seen in the timeliness with which it was reprinted by the British Marxist-Humanists in their newspaper during the Brixton Rebellion this April.¹⁵

That 1968 letter also coincided with the date of a turning point for Ireland -- the rebirth of a mass Irish freedom movement demanding "civil rights." That movement arose, not from the South, the Republic, but from within Northern Ireland's police state itself. In 1968 and 1969 civil rights organizations sprang up everywhere across the North, in Belfast and Derry, in Armagh and Newry. The speed with which they grew and the spirit of "impudent confrontation" they developed stunned everyone, from the Unionist government of Northern Ireland through the police and the judges to the politicians of the "responsible" Catholic opposition. Even the organizers

14. See the Guide to the Raya Dunayevskaya Collection: Marxist-Humanism 1941 to Today -- its Origins and Development in the U.S. (Available from News and Letters for \$1.00)

15. Marxist-Humanism, May/June 1981, is available from the British Marxist-Humanists, Box NL, Rising Free, 102 Upper Street, London N1, England. The same issue includes a discussion article "On the 20th anniversary of Frantz Fanon's Death" by Nigel Gibson, which relates the thought of Fanon, Marx and Lenin to the ongoing struggle for Irish freedom.

were constantly reporting that everything from housing actions to discussion groups on socialist ideas "organized themselves."

The spirit of independence, the fresh air of new ideas, that swept across Northern Ireland led the new civil rights activists to challenge all the conventional concepts of what kind of politics was possible in those six counties. They demanded abolition of the pervasive religious discrimination and segregation in housing, in jobs, and in treatment by state agencies. They devised new ways to bring together Protestant and Catholic workers in opposition to the entrenched Unionist political machine. In protests against slum housing quite a few Protestant families were willing to join demonstrations sponsored by organizations widely regarded as "Catholic," like the Derry Housing Action Committee.

New political groups emerged among the youth of Northern Ireland, groups which took an interest in an independent understanding of politics, and began to debate what those concepts meant concretely in the slums of West Belfast or the Dogside. At the same time, both within Northern Ireland and from the Republic came the formation of Irish Women's Liberation groups. So ubiquitous was the sexism they organized against that they refused to recognize the border, and maintained links for action between Dublin and Belfast. They confronted not only the governments, but the Left and nationalist movements, exposing the chauvinism in their organizations. They declared that the reality of the situation was -- "Irishwomen: chains or change?"

With the emergence of the mass civil rights movement came also the prominence of one woman as its greatest activist and leader -- Bernadette Devlin. It was she who not only stood up to the Stormont establishment, but sharply differentiated their movement from any "Green Toryism" (cultural nationalism). It was she who insisted on linking Ireland's freedom struggle to the Black movement in the USA and in Africa. Yet when Devlin came to sum up her experience in her 1969 book, The Price of My Soul, she steadfastly refused to draw any theoretical conclusions from the movement. Indeed, she downplayed theory, including Marxist theory, entirely, as "impractical" or "sectarian," as though "Marxism" was contained in the positions of the various Trotskyist or Maoist groups, rather than in the genuine philosophy of revolution created by Karl Marx.

From 1968-71 what characterized the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland was activity, and more activity. It was often very creative activity. But nowhere was the upsurge in the movement accompanied by a serious attempt to transcend in theory all the old, failed ideas of the Irish Left and the Irish nationalist organizations that the new generation of activists had rejected in practice.

Included among those old organizations which the civil rights movement activists criticized was the IRA. The fact is that at the start of the new activity in Northern Ireland in 1968 and 1969, the IRA was not involved. Many IRA leaders even scorned the new marches and demonstrations as attempts to "reform" Northern Ireland, insisting that only the abolition of the border be the focal point of the struggle. Neither the Stalinist nor the narrow nationalist elements (later to split into two organizations) in the leadership of the IRA welcomed the openings that Ulster's youth had created.

What tested all the organizations in the Irish movement, whether old or new, was the introduction of the hated policy of internment without trial by the British on August 9, 1971. Immediately, Northern Ireland erupted in near-civil war, blockading off whole sections of the cities of Belfast and Derry, under the slogan: "Man your barricade; don't let them take any more." Mass organizations were created literally overnight in the barricaded areas. Citizens' committees assumed all the needed functions of "government." In Derry, where the struggle reached its highest point, fully half the population lived in an area they proudly called "Free Derry," off-limits to the British army. Not even the British army's slaughter of 13 marchers in Derry on "Bloody Sunday," Jan. 30, 1972, could stop the mass resistance and self-organization.

The ground for the ultimate destruction of Free Derry and other "no go" areas, however, was laid by the policies of the IRA provisionals, who followed Bloody Sunday with a campaign of random anti-people bomb attacks in the downtowns and the Protestant areas of Northern Ireland's cities. The resulting mood of disgust and revulsion, not alone among the British population, but as well among the Republican masses in the North, created the climate that allowed the British army to bulldoze the barricades of Free Derry and re-assert their control. In the process, the IRA bombing campaign ended, at least temporarily, all prospects for Protestant/Catholic working class organization, all prospects for a movement for a socialist Ireland against religious sectarianism. In short, many of the new openings created by the civil rights movement 1968-72 were suddenly closed.

The new generation of activists was not able to seriously oppose the usurpation by the IRA of the movement's new direction. The failure to ground the creativity in practice with a new relationship to revolutionary theory so crippled many of the best organizers that what resulted under the impact of the Provos' bombing campaign was a splintering of the movement into a dozen different Left groups, each with a competing "program" for Irish liberation whether based on Trotsky or Mao.

What then began was a period of nine long years, 1972-81, in which the whole of the Irish freedom struggle became subsumed under the guerrilla campaign. Not only were joint Catholic/Protestant housing actions ended, but there soon were neither neighborhoods where Protestants and Catholics met, nor jobs on which they worked together. As for women's liberation, under the IRA, it became reduced from women as independent thinkers questioning the direction of the movement and pointing the way to a fuller uprooting, to women as "national heroines," as prisoners at Armagh.

Today's generation of youth activists have, in the last six months, developed a new mass movement in Ireland, not through the continuing military engagements with the British army, but through the campaign to gain political status for Republican prisoners in Long Kesh's "H-Blocks" and in Armagh. The hunger strikes on the one hand, and the vicious anti-human policies of Margaret Thatcher on the other, have mobilized hundreds of thousands in Ireland North and South. They in turn have posed far deeper questions for the freedom movement than political status for the prisoners alone, questions that do not stop either at a refusal to accept the border British

16. For more on the events of 1971-72 in Ireland, from internment through Bloody Sunday to the fall of Free Derry, see News & Letters, Nov. 1971, March 1972, and Aug.-Sept. 1972. (Subscriptions to N&L are available for \$2.50 per year.)

imperialism created. Instead, within the massive crowds that have been seen at the funerals of each of the hunger strikers, within the youth fighting British troops in the slums, within the ranks of the unemployed or underpaid workers in the Republic, voices are being raised for a total change in society, for a revolutionary transformation on both sides of the border.

To meet the challenge arising from this new movement what is needed is a far fuller working out of theory for the Irish revolution than that land has known since Marx's death. There is indeed no way forward for Irish freedom under the "presently dominant ideological and organizational forms" in which the liberation struggle is imprisoned, no matter how intensive the activity in the period ahead.

With this discussion bulletin, and with the ongoing work of the British Marxist-Humanists for revolution on both sides of the Irish Sea, an attempt to meet the challenge of the movement has begun. All readers are invited to join in the discussions and help work out perspectives for "Ireland: revolution and theory."

-- May 28, 1981
Detroit, Michigan

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