

RedBanner

is a revolutionary socialist magazine. We intend to present socialist ideas to as many people as we can, and to develop and apply those ideas to the needs of the struggle for socialism today. We wish to contribute, as far as we can, to ensuring that socialism succeeds in rescuing the world from barbarity.

Red Banner is convinced that the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. As far as we are concerned, socialism means fully supporting the present-day struggles of workers against capitalism, and the ultimate replacement of it by a new, socialist system. We won't be wasting paper with appeals to seek salvation in the election of nice politicians, or in the ascendancy of benevolent dictators.

Red Banner will afford zero tolerance to sectarianism. There are too many on the left who see the struggle in terms of their own narrow organisational success, and not enough whose main concern is the strength and fighting consciousness of the working class. Sectarian squabbles, internal gibberish, and self-advertisement will not find their way into our pages.

Red Banner does not have all the answers. We want the magazine to act as a forum to discuss the ways and means of making socialist revolution a reality. Those who write for the magazine speak for themselves. We have no party line to lay down or adhere to, only the broad standpoint of revolutionary socialism.

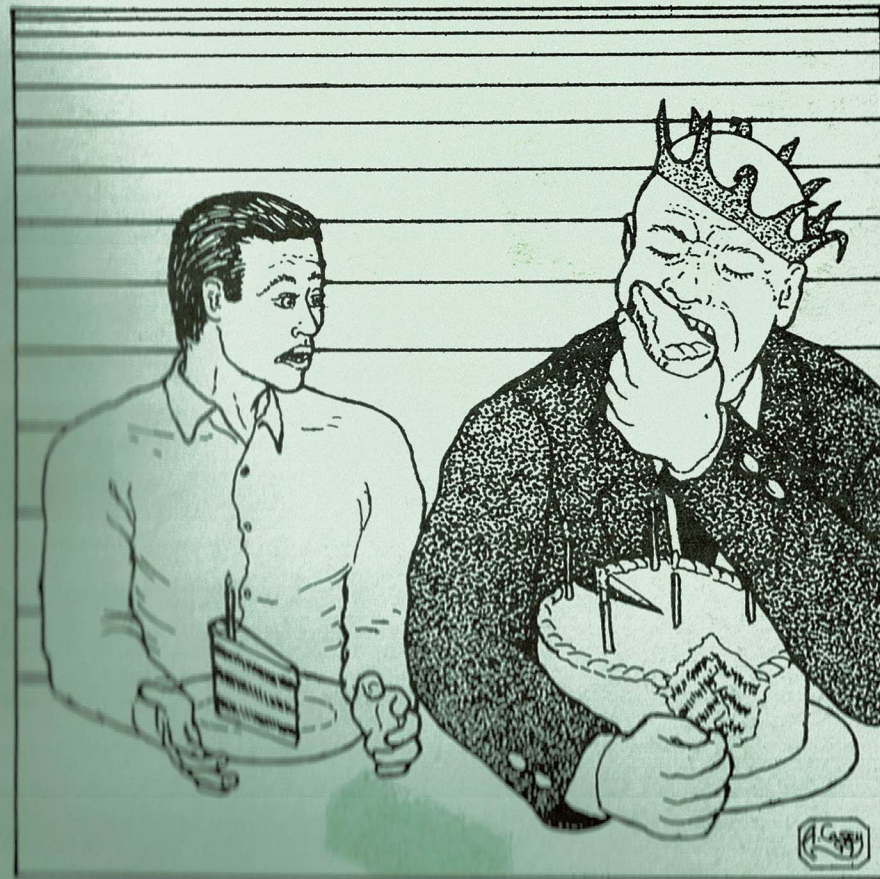
Red Banner depends on its readers being actively involved instead of just passive consumers: writing for the magazine, subscribing to it, selling it, criticising and improving it. Above all, the ideas of socialism have to succeed in the concrete struggles of the working class. It is only as part of that process that *Red Banner* means anything.

RedBanner

a magazine of socialist ideas

ISSUE 7

£2



IN THIS ISSUE:

• **Partnership rules?**

• Alliances on the left • Zimbabwe • George Orwell
• GM foods • Lenin • The Hidden Connolly • Jim Dillon

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RedBanner
a magazine of socialist ideas

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The past few months have been a time of mixed fortunes for socialists in Ireland. The trade union bureaucracy succeeded in sentencing the workers' movement to another term of social partnership, while the state whipped up another round of racism against refugees. On the other hand, our argument that capitalist politics was corrupt to the core received further judicial vindication. The ink was no sooner dry on the partnership deal than cracks started to appear. And on an international scale, the wave of revolt against global capitalism has continued.

In this issue of *Red Banner*, Des Derwin analyses the contest for and against the partnership deal and considers the position now faced by socialists in the unions. John Meehan looks at the trend towards alliances among socialists across Europe. Jonathan Morrison examines the current crisis in Zimbabwe. Tomás Mac Síomóin gives a scientific perspective on the controversy about genetically engineered foods.

Joe Conroy concludes his reassessment of Lenin's life and work. Fifty years after the death of George Orwell, his attitude towards the working class is examined by Maeve Connaughton. Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh reviews the life of a prominent figure in twentieth-century Irish politics. And we continue to unearth

articles by James Connolly that have been left unpublished since his death.

As always, we ask our readers to play a part in *Red Banner*. Whether your views agree or disagree with those expressed here, or just have something to add, they are welcome in the pages of the magazine. Socialist ideas must be exchanged and debated openly if they are to become strong enough to win over the working class.



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The PPF: A done deal soon undone?

Des Derwin

From early in the contest for a new social partnership agreement, Peter McLoone, general secretary of IMPACT and chair of the public services committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, stood out as a fearless champion of the new deal, the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF). Several times he issued a ringing challenge. In February he put it to workers "to ask themselves is there any other process that would guarantee increases of at least 25 per cent over 33 months? The answer has to be no" (*Irish Times*, 8th February). By 24th May, two months into the PPF, as inflation hit 5% (compared to a PPF first phase of 5.5%) he was saying: "Trade union leaders will want to see evidence that the Government is doing something to address the problem. If it doesn't intervene, the Government will have to take responsibility on the wages front for the instability that will inevitably follow" (*Irish Times*, 24th May). So the PPF was no guarantee of wage increases after all, not against inflation anyway. Of course, one of the most basic arguments against centralised bargaining, long before its stretch into three-year spans and its historical development into social partnership, always was that unions and shop stewards should not be tied to agreements that prevented them from responding to the real cost of living.

The answer to Peter McLoone's challenge is actually 'yes!' His *own members*, the nurses, by a process of rejecting each unacceptable offer, culminating last year in *the* strike, pushed the overall wage bill for nurses up by 27%. A process that bettered the PCW, P2000 and the PPF. Before, during and after the ballot free collective bargaining was making similar gains. SIPTU negotiated a minimum of £5 an hour for contract cleaners. In Dundalk ATGWU workers at Heinz gained a substantial rise. The Roches Stores strikers in Dublin achieved a rise in the order of 25%. Dublin Bus workers secured a £15 per week bonus after a one-day strike and went on to up their pay beyond the PPF. Securicor workers secured a 40% increase after a strike of only one day! There's a process—and one that need not wait 33 months to catch up with inflation.

The prospect of inflation outstripping this deal was not just theoretical. When mid-February figures showed inflation at over 4% the Research Department of SIPTU immediately produced an analysis saying this was only a temporary rise. The next inflation hike was announced on 14th March. Inflation was now 4.3%, or 4.6% when measured on an EU basis, cutting the first PPF phase to just off 1%. Peter McLoone warned against trade unionists abandoning a national agreement "to chase after inflation" (*Irish Times*, 15th March). By 24th May, when inflation had climbed *one* more percentage point, he was calling on the government "to address the problem" and warning of "instability" on the wage front if it didn't. Back in March there was no such panic. SIPTU president Des Geraghty said the 4.3% rate was well within the range predicted in negotiations on the PPF and provided no cause for alarm. The government chief whip, Seamus Brennan, said inflation would go down to 3% by early next year.

At this stage (14th March) INTO general secretary and ICTU vice president, Senator Joe O'Toole, pulled one of his rabbits from his hat. He said ("was quick to point out" was the way the *Irish Times*, 15th March, reported it) that if there was "over inflation" Congress would be insisting on a review of the terms of the PPF. Peter Cassells, ICTU general secretary, said: "if inflation stayed above 4% it would trigger a review mechanism to protect living standards" (*Irish Independent*, 15th March). There is, of course, no such provision in the Programme.¹ On 23rd May, finance minister Charlie McCreevy warned in the Dáil that, despite the higher than expected inflation, pay increases negotiated under the PPF must be strictly adhered to. IBEC director Turlough O'Sullivan warned unions and community groups not to ask for too much: "we are at our most vulnerable at this time of unprecedented success" (*Sunday Tribune*, 4th June). Boom or bust, restrain you must!

The response now by the union leaders to the price rises is not to put in claims for more pay, nor even to seek the activation of the review clause (perhaps the print is *very* small). Inflation is a worry because it threatens the deal and social partnership. We can't go back to free collective bargaining, we're incessantly told, because it will cause inflation! So the focus must be on the price side. But the recipe for prices in general includes a proposal most peculiar for trade unionists and certainly most ungreen: reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel. Cut the tax base and this environmentalist crap! Before the ICTU's meeting with government officials on 9th June, Des Geraghty raised the out-of-vogue notion of price controls. What, back to the future?!! Next thing you'll have Ken Livingstone back in charge of London! What Congress put to the officials,

amid alarm for the PPF, was a series of measures to keep down prices in housing, fuel, public transport and the services sector. Maximum price orders seemed to have been mentioned for drinks only, funnily enough. If the “menacing spectre of inflation” (*Irish Examiner*, 22nd March) stalks this deal it also haunts the rationale of them all: if Ireland’s social partnership is a model for Europe, and if these deals keep inflation down, how is it that Ireland has the highest inflation in Europe and is way out in front of the European average? Following the 9th June meeting the inflation figures got to 5.2%, with another climb predicted. The review clause trigger seems to have shot Congress in the foot. The figures brought on something of a national crisis. Inflation was hardly at German inter-war proportions, but it threatened the Ark of the Covenant. A meeting was set up, with the government this time rather than officials, and some measures on house prices were announced. Des Geraghty actually mentioned, at last, that new pay rises might be needed (RTÉ Radio, 14th June).

The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* was accepted at the ICTU special conference, on 23rd March, by 251 votes to 112, or 69% to 31%.² Given that the prospects of a successor were in danger from the twilight of P2000, and that, of all the recent national deals, this time there were several real factors pushing for a defeat or a narrow majority for a new deal, the end result did not live up to the initial hopes of the opponents of partnership. However, the factors making for rejection were outweighed by factors—some peculiar to this time—pressing for acceptance.

The PPF is a glossy 132-page document, launched for the media at Government Buildings. As a picture paints a thousand words, the photograph from the launch which *The Irish Examiner* used on 23rd March captures something of the essence of social partnership, and the sad complicity of Irish trade unionism: bunched together, the troika (or, as one journalist recently called them on RTÉ Radio’s *Vincent Browne Tonight*, the junta that actually run this government) of Bertie Ahern, Mary Harney and Charlie McCreevy radiate their cheesiest smiles. Few—very few—workers will have waded through the whole volume. Most would have concentrated on the pay and tax elements or the—of course neutral—summaries supplied by their unions. The PPF’s pay bones, though heralded as offering 15.75% over 33 months compared to P2000’s 9.25% over 36 months, soon appeared, like its predecessor, to offer real rises from tax concessions alone. In the circumstances it was—on its own—hardly a favourite to win. These dozen-or-so pages of the document (the one section where *one* of the ‘social partners’, workers, *gives* anything: wage restraint) take up an annex to and a bit of one of the five ‘Frameworks’ of the PPF.

Much of the remaining bulk of the PPF is *practically* little more than ecologically unsound wrapping around the pay deal, but, ideologically and politically, a lot more. It’s the copious and spurious ‘social contract’ that exchanges the ‘social wage’ for pay moderation, that draws in ever more strands of the body politic (to such an extent that some backbenchers are, not unreasonably, questioning the usurpation of parliamentary democracy) padded out with already-in-place government plans; that draws in the community, poverty and voluntary sector and makes it a ‘pillar’ in the consensus; that makes ‘the unemployed’ (i.e. the INOU) and ‘the socially excluded’ (i.e. CORI) sell sacrifice to organised workers. It’s also the fine print (as far as the general reader is concerned) that commits the unions to the evolving agenda of social partnership. ‘Framework I.3’ follows on from ‘last season’s dig’ (P2000) and digs partnership deeper into the workplace. ‘Framework V’ develops the national and ideological superstructure of collaboration. A taste: “it is proposed to enhance the role of National Centre for Partnership which will now be called the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCP). The Centre, which will be located within the Office for National and Economic Development alongside NESC and the NESF, will work with IBEC and ICTU in supporting the deepening of partnership...” (page 132, my emphasis; *nota bene* public sector workers). Talk about the ‘military-industrial complex’! ‘Framework IV’ commits all trade unionists in Congress to the Good Friday Agreement. Not a lot of people know that! And sure, why not? Who could be against partnership, peace, love and understanding?

However, in this deal, there is for the public sector a stinger in the haystack. The public sector pay annex includes not just bump but dangerous stuff: it accepts that “change” is “not, in itself, a basis for claims”; introduces “benchmarking” (private sector standards) and ends relativity and analogues; unprecedentedly makes a basic phase of the deal (the third) “dependent on the specific performance indicators having been established”, and commits unions to “agreeing voluntary codes of practice” in “essential services” (despite the assurances on this given at last year’s SIPTU conference following a minor revolt by Dublin Airport members). Then ‘Framework I’ describes as a “key objective” the “implementation of the performance management system in each Department and Office commencing on 1 March 2000”.

So, it cannot be maintained that the PPF was accepted by trade unionists on its inherent benefits. Indeed, uniquely on this occasion, the ICTU were unable to recommend the agreement they had just negotiated! The battle for the PPF was fought out between forces and factors bearing down

on the minds of voters, rather than the logic of voters bearing down on the PPF. (At a glance the polar opposite votes of Mandate and IMPACT, nine to one against and eight to two for respectively, would indicate that more than the 132-page Book of Spells itself was the decisive factor.) Let's look at the field on which the contest was played this time. The single biggest factor infusing the contest (and, indeed, supporting the 'no' side) was that the industrial situation this time was and is one of upturn: workers are more confident, there's that Booming Big Cat.³ *Partnership 2000* was in danger of becoming an irrelevancy as workers got more and free collective bargaining blossomed from the manure of social partnership. Coming up to the PPF ballot new groups—busworkers, junior doctors, paramedics, teachers—were joining the queue to get more, to breach a new agreement, never mind the one already limiting them.

The Booming Big Cat may have had a paw clawing against wage restraint but it also had a more powerful one stroking the rebellious cubs. Social partnership is so valuable to the employers and the government as a means of chloroforming the unions that they endeavoured to (and had the revenue to be able to) make this deal look the most attractive so far. Large tax concessions (our money back, as Charlie McCreevy would say, *and* for which only the workers had to give a quid pro quo) substituted for pay rises, and the government could throw £3 billion at the deal to keep it upright (£1.5 billion in tax breaks and £1.5 billion for 'social inclusion').

At the coalface the same effect: many workers getting more than P2000 with not much more than a bout of professional wrestling, if that, no doubt felt that the 15.75% of the PPF would do nicely, thank you, on top of the 20% or whatever they'd just got! Also, many of those who had to push against P2000 (nurses, for instances, who voted astonishingly highly for the PPF) did not make the connection between the shackles of P2000 and the general shackles of these national deals. Much less did they draw a lasting contrast between their struggle and the ideology of social partnership.⁴ These disputes were accommodated, with creative use of English, within 'the parameters of partnership', or managed, as when the second scheduled Dublin bus strike was deferred until after the ballot with a £15 per week bonus.

Other crises for the deal were successfully managed.⁵ We have referred to the analysis of the inflation figures into a 'glitch', and the conjuring up of a review mechanism. Charlie McCreevy's budget brought great upset early on in the talks. The dominant 'outcry' was over individualisation of tax, that a married waged couple would have two tax-free allowances for the household, but where only one spouse worked for wages, as opposed to

slaving over a steaming nappy, there would be only one allowance. Besides this issue, which was deemed to be a problem for the affluent, was the gross imbalance of McCreevy's tax concessions between high and low incomes. This let out a flood of phone calls to SIPTU Head Office. It seems unusual that the rank and file of SIPTU should get so riled up on this particular issue above many other recent travesties, and that they should concentrate their ire with such precision and timing on Head Office, and even more unusual that the leadership should respond to it with such despatch and display. But some uproar there must have been, as SIPTU, the largest union, summarily pulled out of the talks. Badaboom! Now democratic centralism has its place, and this executive action had the support of all elements and levels in the union, sending a palpable but all too short revolutionary *frisson* through the ranks of SIPTU activists, but the little matter of mandates cannot be completely dismissed. Anyway, this brief blossom soon ended when a commitment from Bertie to 'rebalance' the budget brought SIPTU back to the table. This package of PRSI and health levy exemptions was then claimed by SIPTU as agreed "in the context of" the PPF!

When the results of the ballot coming into the offices of the INTO showed the deal might go down, Joe O'Toole went to Bertie Ahern and got permanent posts for school secretaries and caretakers—conditional on acceptance of the deal. Joe O'Toole announced that if the PPF was rejected in the INTO a ballot for industrial action would have to be taken. That would mean the INTO not accepting a deal voted in by Congress overall. Michael O'Reilly rose to this scaring of teachers by calling Joe O'Toole a "trailblazer". Then Minister Michael Woods threatened to withdraw the 1,500 extra teaching jobs if the deal was rejected. A late and unexpected crisis blew up when both Michael O'Reilly and the great George Lee of RTÉ did some sums and concluded that a 10% tax reduction to all would require not the £1.5 billion spoken of, but £2.6 billion, a figure that would include the concessions of the budget gone by. There was a fair old panic and cries of mischief making (what, Michael O'Reilly?). Eventually the storm was calmed by Bertie declaring that... wait for it... the government accepted as reasonable the judgement the ICTU had made about what the deal meant! At a National College of Ireland debate just after the deal was ratified George Lee said the figures still didn't add up. We'll see what the EU and the European Central Bank eventually make of these tax concessions.

Back in February two matters that had dogged previous deals were deftly cleared from the path of a new one. In the same week bills were

published, or flagged, to give effect to the High Level Group agreement on trade union recognition and to the National Minimum Wage. Both cases constituted the biggest climbdowns since the last time both lifts in Liberty Hall were out of order. The union recognition agreement doesn't deliver union recognition at all. It provides for Labour Court regulation where an employer continues to refuse recognition. Organisation on the ground is not an issue in it. Jack O'Connor, new SIPTU vice president, described it as "little better than useless" (*Irish Times*, 9th June). (Jack O'Connor's disillusioned view of partnership might have made a difference in SIPTU if he had brought it to bear on the PPF.) At Aldi in Dublin another bitter recognition dispute rages between a handful of young people and, like Ryanair, another giant (not a back street gombeen). After two years in which the unions were supposed to be looking for improvements in the National Minimum Wage Commission's report, the inadequacies of the eventual provision, which was enshrined in the PPF, are only now dawning on union activists. The lowest rate (the real minimum) is £3.08 an hour for under 18s!

Because a new deal was not assured, politicians, union leaders and sections of the media campaigned for another one from the beginning. Politicians, even Bertie, and some trade union leaders like Peter McLoone, stepped out in front to bat for the deal. These combined with the Big Cat, a large part of the media and one of partnership's leading legends to drum out the message: 'social partnership created the boom; end it and we're back to "the bad old days" of the 80s'. Although RTÉ gave some excellent exposure to the 'no' side, some newspapers this time surpassed simple bias and ran a straight campaign for the PPF. Some stooped to crass 'reds under the bed' propaganda. In particular, the teachers' temerity in challenging the PPF and Performance Related Pay, and the ASTI's split from Congress followed by a 30% pay claim, launched a sustained newspaper offensive against teachers. The entry into the fray this time of moderate trade union leaders, such as Owen Nulty, Mandate general secretary, the doubts of some mainstream economic commentators about the efficacy of national deals during a labour shortage, the teachers' opposition,⁶ and the determined campaigning this time of Michael O'Reilly of the ATGWU, meant that there was a profile for the opposition on this occasion. But balance, no. The cross-union grassroots campaign, the *Campaign Against a Partnership Deal* (CAPD), got minimal coverage in the print media, except for its teachers' affiliate.

The whole picture of media coverage of the PPF needs proper treatment (as does a post mortem on CAPD). Another time; in the meantime some

samples to give the flavour. Leaving aside reportage (and the slightly different area of education) and looking at openly polemical pieces only, the imbalance is clear. *The Irish Times* carried a half page interview with Des Geraghty, the second such in five months, and large articles by Bertie Ahern, Fr. Sean Healy (of CORI), and Peadar Kirby and Katherine Zappone (which was critical but supportive). But here we must add the element of timing. An 'anti' article, directed at teachers, from Eddie Conlon of the TUI appeared alongside a 'pro' piece by the TUI vice president on 14th March. The TUI ballot papers had to be returned by 16th March. The single straight 'anti' article, by Michael O'Reilly, appeared on 15th March (some SIPTU branches were concluding a four-week ballot the next day). The first letter published in *The Irish Times* on the PPF, except for some discussion on the teachers' specific issues, was published on 16th March. The same correspondent had written four previous unpublished letters on the same theme.

On 12th March Des Geraghty was given the best part of a page in the *Sunday World* for a piece headed 'Why the new deal is good for workers' and sub-headed 'Programme will benefit those on lower income'. Though only days before the two oppositional pieces above, in timing (the weekend before the last full week's voting) and in placing (working class readership) this was the single biggest propaganda coup of the entire campaign. The same day, Peter McLoone got similar space for a similar article in the *News of the World*. At the ICTU conference eleven days later, Des Geraghty, in one of the swipes he went in for during this contest (no sweat: the far left gives out its fair share to the bureaucracy) said that the 'ultra-left' had combined with the right to oppose the PPF. A combination of the PPF's gladiators and the O'Reilly and Murdoch press doesn't seem to have presented any problem.

Des Geraghty might have been taking the (Tony) O'Reilly press too seriously. The *Sunday Independent* in a 'bash the teachers' special edition on 19th March lent its particular viciousness to the task. The paper combined with the terriers among the union leaders to highlight some 'old reliable' smears. There was a certain ferocity in the competition for the teachers' vote. Black propaganda about one of the dissident teachers was distributed in the head office of one union and later submitted to a newspaper. The infamous ASTI document on industrial strategy was leaked to the press and then used in media hysteria about the Leaving Cert being threatened. Friction on this and related issues between the lay and full-time leaderships of the ASTI was portrayed as a split in the union and led to the entire staff working to rule.

The imbalance in the debate was not confined to the mainstream media. Two members of the TUI executive, Eddie Conlon and Mary Friel, took an action in the High Court in February and March arising from the publication of a special edition of *TUI News*. Not alone did *TUI News* fail to give the case against the deal, but a TUI conference had specified that future material on national deals should give both sides of the argument. *TUI News* clearly did not comply with this but objections at the executive and a request that a further, balanced, edition be published were of no avail. To rub it in its publication—claiming the deal offered up to 29%—was hailed in *The Irish Times* as a boost for the PPF in the TUI. The judge did not address the question before him, but instead took a stand on the merits of the PPF! He asked the appellants what their arguments were against the deal! He said the TUI leaders had negotiated an “outstanding resolution” of their members’ pay requirements and the application “made a mountain out of a molehill”. He said he couldn’t see how any teacher could oppose it. He appears not to have made a judgement on the matter he was asked to address: whether *TUI News* had given balanced coverage of the deal and whether the TUI executive had refused to comply with an instruction of the union’s governing body. The case was thrown out leaving the two with a potentially enormous bill. This spurred a terrific swell of solidarity in the TUI: by June a TUI draw and a well-attended quiz had more than covered their £8,000 costs (the TUI executive agreed to pay its own £12,000 costs).

In SIPTU opponents of the deal this time made a direct request to the leadership and the union paper *Newsline* for a level playing field. Though the representatives who signed it included the presidents of three SIPTU branches and the vice presidents of three others, it was worthy of neither a reply, nor a mention in the papers, to which it was circulated. However the practice of including the executive’s recommendation on the ballot paper was discontinued this time.

The danger to the deal was real, as a movement of low paid workers and teachers arose in the unions against the PPF. A wave of opposition went through Mandate (90% against), the CPSU (a swing to 46% against), the TUI (55% against), the INTO (a swing to 49% against) and BATU (seven to one against). A factor also auguring for a ‘no’ vote was the mind-boggling stream of scandals affecting some at the very heart of partnership. Another was that the campaign against the PPF was the most substantial since that against the PESP. While nationally it lacked centralised coordination and (excepting Michael O’Reilly and the teachers) media assertiveness, there was this time a healthy spontaneity⁷ and a leaflet coverage of workplaces that was probably wider than ever before.

CAPD could well have made a greater impact if the left had worked effectively together and if the steering committee had been more effective.

By a coincidence the vote for the PPF in SIPTU was proportionally the same as that at the ICTU conference: 69% for and 31% against. The SIPTU opponents were particularly disappointed, expecting, as they were, at least an increase in the ‘no’ vote (before the count the *Irish Independent* predicted 45% against) and observing the wave against in other unions.⁸

However the PPF is so shaky that at times its acceptance in the ballot seems beside the point. The ink was still wet when the CIÉ workers struck with what all saw as a direct challenge to the deal. With the settlement of the Dublin Bus dispute the deal seems a little less shaky. Not only was the PPF salvaged from it, but also somehow a ‘bonus’ of part-privatisation was added.

But the busworkers lifted their low wages. The ASTI is no longer alone against the ‘early settlers’ terms, and the TUI ballot to reject the 3% as a stricture of the PPF (it’s nowhere mentioned in it) is a major vindication of the vilified two and their supporters. Inflation has wiped out the first phase of the deal, house prices still soar and interest rates are going up. Legitimate questions still remain about the figures providing 10% in tax concessions. Owen Nulty said on RTÉ Radio on 14th June that inflation could push his members into abandoning the PPF. The supporters of social partnership have a lot of defending to do. *Business and Finance* magazine (1st June) seems to concur: “the current partnership agreement is certainly under increasing threat from the twin assaults of inflation and increasingly aggressive trade unions”. Let’s hope the “trade unions” bit promises official backing.

The persistence in SIPTU of the one-third minority against the deals and the one-fifth minority for Carolann Duggan, the election of anti-partnership campaigner Denis Keane as president of the CPSU, the support for Eddie Conlon and Mary Friel in the TUI, and the new rank and file groupings that have emerged, show the base for an alternative movement in the trade unions. Unity and thought are needed to carry it forward.

Notes

- 1 On the other hand, the *employers* have ‘Framework I, annex 1, clause 7’, by which whole industries may plead inability to pay. The PPF has no review clause for *inflation* for workers, but clause 7 provides *employers* against *exchange rate movements*, as well as general commercial circumstances.

- 2 An interesting exercise would be to count the aggregate vote of all voting trade unionists.
- 3 Foreign readers might not know that the term 'Celtic Tiger' is no longer hip here.
- 4 Those who proclaimed that if the nurses won, or if the busworkers struck, it would be the end of partnership were hyping the dialect and displaying a tendency to see the latest, admittedly heated, battle as the one to throw all the reserves into. Social partnership is, after thirteen years, more rooted, resilient and absorbent than that.
- 5 But not them all: with the commitment of Congress to performance and to capping the early settlers, and the consequent withdrawal of the ASTI from the ICTU, it now seems that some union leaders will risk the unity of Congress itself in order to pursue their agenda.
- 6 The roots of the teachers' revolt against the PPF have been the subject of various interpretations, middle class disregard for those included in a social contract among them. On leaked document shows some might leave themselves open to this jibe. The education correspondents seem to place the cause in the loss of status of the teaching profession in recent years. But there were definite reasons why the teachers were opposed to this particular deal: it threatened to introduce performance in relation to pay and capped the 'early settlers' to 3% for keeping to the rules. In this last sense their position *was* going down the ladder and they were defending relativity—an imperfect but respectable instrument of trade union militancy. Is this any more elitist than traditional craft trade unionism? Is it seriously contended that today teacher militancy can be dismissed as petit bourgeois, like higher civil servants, taxi drivers or the IFA?
- 7 SIPTU shop stewards in Tullamore travelled around their local three counties visiting factories; a few individual teachers produced their own leaflets or got on the internet to their own networks.
- 8 SIPTU, crucially, did not ride this wave. The swing went the other way, from 43% against P2000 to 31% against the PPF. John McDonald, SIPTU general secretary, said the members had simply made up their minds after lots of consultation. Well, there was more time for discussion than for the rushed-in P2000. SIPTU members don't live in isolation and the ballot results cannot always be reduced to particular union circumstances. However the new SIPTU leadership carries a certain authority. Its campaign was largely within the union and relatively low key. SIPTU members and activists have been constantly subjected to the promotion of partnership in recent years. Perhaps the heterogeneous membership of the union weighted against certain constituencies, such as the very low paid. Many SIPTU members (and officials) did well in topping up P2000. The propaganda this time was softened if still unbalanced (*The Decision is Yours*) but there was quiet and efficient use of the machine: the work was done on the ground by the officials. They went out with the boxes and in some case held briefing meetings on the job. Some results showed a big 'yes' vote among new memberships.



REVOLUTIONARY LIVES Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (part two)

Joe Conroy

This article is continued from the last issue of Red Banner.

1917

Revolution broke out in Russia again in February 1917. Workers overthrew the Tsar, set up their own councils or soviets, and power was precariously balanced between them and a provisional government that failed to solve the most basic problems of the working people—ending the war, feeding the people, giving land to the peasants, and establishing a democratic system.

From exile in Switzerland Lenin called for the workers to take power through the soviets. Only they could satisfy the basic democratic demands, by breaking with capitalism. At the same time they would have to start bringing the capitalists under their control, implementing socialist measures. The schema of 1905 went out the window: Lenin understood that the fight for democracy and the fight for socialism could only succeed in combination. As he later wrote, looking back on the 1917 revolution:

We solved the problems of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in passing, as a "by-product" of our main and genuinely proletarian-revolutionary, socialist activities.... [Others] were incapable of understanding *this* relation between the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian-socialist revolutions. The first develops into the second. The second, in passing, solves the problems of the first. The second consolidates the work of the first.¹

When Lenin returned to Russia in April his new position met with stiff resistance from the leadership of the Bolshevik party, most of whom wanted to stick to his former position. He replied: "The Bolshevik slogans and ideas *on the whole* have been confirmed by history; but *concretely* things have turned out *differently*; they are more original, more peculiar,

more variegated than anyone expected." The slogan of 1905 was now outdated.²

This kind of argument was a bit jesuitical, to say the least. Lenin's old approach hadn't been proved right in an unexpected way: it had been proved wrong in a very straightforward way. It hadn't passed its sell-by date: it was no good to begin with. Lenin effectively dropped it, but the reorientation of the Bolshevik party would have been clearer and easier if he had openly admitted and corrected his mistake.

While in hiding from the forces of the provisional government during 1917 Lenin wrote *The State and Revolution*. Continuing his rediscovery of the original Marxist teaching on the state, he reiterated that the capitalist state was not a neutral force but an instrument to maintain class rule. The socialist revolution could not take over or reform this state: it had to get rid of it altogether. The working class would have to replace it with a new type of state, that wasn't really a state at all, a temporary rule to defeat capitalist resistance. It would mean "Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force, i.e., exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people".³

As in the Paris Commune of 1871, workers would elect representatives who would be paid no more than a worker's wage and could be replaced at any time. Armed force would be under the control of the working class, not the monopoly of an army separate from them. Bureaucracy would be swept away:

Under socialism much of "primitive" democracy will inevitably be revived, since, for the first time in the history of civilised society, the mass of the population will rise to taking an independent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the everyday administration of the state. Under socialism all will govern in turn, and will soon become accustomed to no one governing.⁴

Even this minimal state would go as soon as its work was done:

Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely crushed, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes... Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realised, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to *wither away*, owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities and infamies of capitalist exploitation,

people will gradually *become accustomed* to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without subordination, *without the special apparatus* for coercion called the state.⁵

The State and Revolution is very much a product of 1917: as the soviets of workers' deputies sprang up and jostled for power, the potential for socialist society was there for Lenin to see as he wrote. He abandoned a planned chapter on the experience of the Russian revolution because "It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of the revolution' than to write about it."⁶

As Lenin went through the experience of the revolution his abilities came into their own. From the early months when he called for the Bolsheviks to patiently explain the need for soviet power, through the times when he had to dampen the enthusiasm of those who wanted to take power before they had the support to keep it, to October when he fought for the Bolsheviks to organise an insurrection before it was too late—Lenin's tactical skill shines through.

None of it would have been possible, though, without him mobilising rank-and-file Bolsheviks, and even workers outside the party, to put pressure on the conservative leadership. The Bolshevik party was itself revolutionised in 1917. It was as much a case of the working class winning the Bolshevik party as the other way round. While the party's traditions played their role, without the *discontinuity* of its development during the revolution, its growth into a mass organisation alive with debate and activity, it would have got nowhere—and neither would Lenin's influence over it.

The rise and fall of the revolution

On 25 October the provisional government was overthrown in the capital and a government based on the soviets, with Lenin at its head, took control. For workers in Russia and throughout the world the October revolution held the promise of real freedom. But even as it tentatively began to fulfil that promise, it came under an onslaught that ultimately proved too strong for it. Within a decade the workers of Russia were once again under the heel of a dictatorship. The death of the Russian revolution remains the greatest of socialism's lost possibilities.

Lenin repeated again and again that the workers' revolution in Russia could only survive if it became part of an international socialist revolution.

Only a few months after the revolution he said: "there would doubtlessly be no hope of the ultimate victory of our revolution if it were to remain alone".⁷ He repeated the point years later:

It was clear to us that without the support of the international world revolution the victory of the proletarian revolution was impossible. Before the revolution, and even after it, we thought: Either revolution breaks out in the other countries, in the capitalistically more developed countries, immediately, or at least very quickly, or we must perish.⁸

The Russian workers were holding on until workers took power in other countries: "We are now, as it were, in a besieged fortress, waiting for the other detachments of the world socialist revolution to come to our relief."⁹ Sacrifices would have to be made in the meantime, but "I repeat, our solution from all these difficulties is an all-Europe revolution".¹⁰

In Russia itself, the strength of the revolution was that it was the creation of the working class itself. In the first weeks of the revolution Lenin stressed that

Creative activity at the grass roots is the basic factor of the new public life... Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves.¹¹

He drove the point home the following day in a proclamation:

Comrades, working people! Remember that now *you yourselves* are at the helm of state. No one will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take into *your* hands *all affairs* of the state. *Your* Soviets are from now on the organs of state authority... Get on with the job yourselves; begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone.¹²

He insisted that "socialism cannot be introduced by a minority, a party. It can be introduced by tens of millions of people when they have learnt how to do everything themselves".¹³

Lenin's faith in international revolution was by no means misplaced. The end of the war saw a wave of revolutionary upheavals from one end of Europe to the other. But when none of these revolutions succeeded, the Russian workers were left high and dry.

Within Russia the working class suffered a serious decline. Hundreds of workers were killed in the civil war, as the world's capitalists tried to strangle the revolution at birth, and in the famine and disease that followed. Thousands of others left the factories to work in the apparatuses of the state, the Red Army, and the Communist Party (as the Bolsheviks had renamed themselves). Even more went back home to the countryside where the chance of eking out a living was slightly easier than in the devastated cities. The industrial working class, said Lenin, "owing to the war and the desperate poverty and ruin, has become declassed, i.e., dislodged from its class groove, and has ceased to be a proletariat... the proletariat has disappeared."¹⁴

Working-class democracy cannot survive where there is no working class; nor can it survive in a single isolated, beleaguered country. The soviet power rapidly declined to a one-party rule, a state that was not withering away but piling on the pounds—the opposite of what Lenin envisaged in *The State and Revolution*. The view that this was due to a lust for power on Lenin's part cannot be supported: the situation arose in spite of his intentions, not because of them. Questions can and must be asked, however, about his reaction to it.

Lenin began to justify the divergence between the theory of workers' power and the reality of Communist Party rule. He claimed that "the dictatorship of the working class is being implemented by the Bolshevik Party".¹⁵ He bluntly characterised the situation: "The proletarian class equals the Russian Communist Party which equals the Soviet state. Don't we agree on all this?"¹⁶ The theoretical excuse for party rule rather than class rule came later: "the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be exercised through an organisation embracing the whole of that class... It can be exercised only by a vanguard that has absorbed the revolutionary energy of the class." This vanguard supremacy was necessary not only in the harsh conditions of Russia but "in all capitalist countries".¹⁷

Lenin at the same time said that "ours is a workers' state *with a bureaucratic twist to it*".¹⁸ It would be closer to the truth to say that, by this stage, it was more of a bureaucratic state with a working-class twist to it, the socialist good intentions of the best Communists keeping some elements of socialism alive. Lenin cursed the bureaucracy of the state incessantly, but put the problem down to bureaucrats inherited from the Tsarist apparatus, who the Communist Party had to bring under control. All the time, the biggest danger lay in the bureaucratisation of the party itself, and increasing its power only added to the problem.

It was further worsened by the silencing of revolutionary opposition. The repression directed against the counter-revolution and those who went along with it was completely justified: no socialist revolution can roll over and allow the capitalists to organise resistance against it. But the repression of those who opposed the Communist Party while supporting soviet power cannot be excused, and in fact weakened the revolution by depriving it of the criticism it needed. The Communist Party itself, which had enjoyed a wide freedom of debate, became increasingly monolithic. "We will not permit arguments about deviations, we must put a stop to this", Lenin told the party congress,¹⁹ and successfully proposed a ban on the right of members to organise against the leadership's policies, with expulsion for those who disobeyed.

International revolution remained the only salvation for the ever weaker revolution in Russia. But this became a much rarer note in Lenin's speeches and writings. By the end of 1920 he was saying that "today we can speak, not merely of a breathing-space, but of a real chance of a new and lengthy period of development". A year later he asked:

Is the existence of a socialist republic in a capitalist environment at all conceivable? It seemed inconceivable from the political and military aspects. That it is possible both politically and militarily has now been proved; it is a fact.²⁰

Lenin never ceased to hold out hope for world socialist revolution. He devoted a great deal of time and effort trying to foster it, by means of the Communist International. But he did begin to hedge his bets when that revolution seemed unlikely to appear.

The last fight

At the end of 1922 Lenin was struck down by illness and forced to take a back seat in the work of government. The distance gave him the chance to consider more thoughtfully what had become of the revolution. Battling against the party leadership's attempts to withhold information from him (for the good of his health, supposedly) he began to realise just how profound the problem was.

He condemned the imperialist way that the Russian state and party bureaucracy treated the non-Russian nationalities. He proposed measures to counteract the growth of bureaucracy. He even tried to get Stalin removed from the power base he had built up for himself. Right to the end Lenin was fighting a rearguard action against the betrayal of the revolution.

But who would put these reforms into effect? The working class was in no fit state. Those in the Communist Party who would oppose the leadership faced marginalisation and exclusion, and Lenin's personal prestige only went so far. In the circumstances, the anti-bureaucracy institutions Lenin proposed could only become bastions of bureaucracy themselves. His reforms seem more and more like shifting deckchairs around on the *Titanic*, when only international workers' revolution could tow Russia away from the iceberg.

A stroke in March 1923 put an end to Lenin's political career. He died on 21 January 1924.

At the Communist Party congress in 1920, some bright spark hit upon the idea of celebrating Lenin's approaching fiftieth birthday. Lenin did all he could to stop it, but soon speakers were rising to laud the great leader of the world's proletariat. He got out of the room as fast as his feet would carry him, and phoned up every couple of minutes to see if all this rubbish was over, so he could return.

Praise is the last thing Lenin needs. He fought to build an effective socialist organisation; for opposition to every kind of oppression; to raise revolution from the ruins of world war; to bring the 1917 revolution to victory; to spread that revolution worldwide. Lenin is praised even if we say nothing.

But it's a poor tribute to say nothing about his mistakes. His own advice is better:

we must drop all empty phrase-mongering and immediately set to work to learn, to learn from mistakes, how best to organise the struggle. We must not conceal our mistakes from the enemy. Whoever is afraid of talking openly about mistakes is not a revolutionary. If, however, we openly say to the workers: "Yes, we have made mistakes", it will prevent us from repeating those mistakes in the future...²¹

Lenin was wrong on many occasions, and was often unwilling to admit it. But "for the most part people's shortcomings are bound up with their merits", as he once noted himself.²² His faults were the faults of one dedicated to the socialist cause, and anyone who engages in real struggle is bound to make mistakes. Lenin's faults, however, shouldn't be overlooked or excused, but criticised and corrected, if his goal of making the world socialist is to be achieved.

Notes

- 1 'Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution' (14 October 1921).
- 2 *Letters on Tactics* (April 1917).
- 3 Chapter V.
- 4 Chapter VI.
- 5 Chapter V.
- 6 *Ibid*, Postscript.
- 7 Speech at Communist Party congress, 7 March 1918.
- 8 Speech at Communist International congress, 5 July 1921.
- 9 'Letter to American Workers' (20 August 1918).
- 10 Speech at Communist Party congress, 7 March 1918.
- 11 Speech at meeting of Central Executive Committee of the soviets, 4 November 1917.
- 12 'To the Population'.
- 13 Speech at Communist Party congress, 8 March 1918.
- 14 Speech at Political Education Departments congress, 17 October 1921.
- 15 August 1919: quoted in Marcel Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin* (London 1975) p 269.
- 16 Note to Nikolai Bukharin, 11 October 1920: quoted in Louis Fischer, *The Life of Lenin* (New York 1965) p 492.
- 17 Speech to Communist Party activists, 30 December 1920.
- 18 *Ibid*.
- 19 8 March 1921.
- 20 Quoted in Liebman, p 370.
- 21 Speech to Communist International congress, 1 July 1921.
- 22 'A Single Economic Plan' (22 February 1921).



Alliances on the far left

John Meehan

Something is stirring on the far left across Europe—and socialists in Ireland should take a long hard look. In several countries far left parties have built united mass coalitions—the results are impressive.

Very close to these shores—in Scotland—several far left parties and individuals disenchanted with Blair's 'New Labour' came together in a Scottish Socialist Alliance, eventually forming the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). The biggest single component of the new SSP is the former Scottish Militant Labour organisation, but other currents participate in this new pluralist party which allows for individual tendencies. The process leading up to the formation of the SSP involved a broad-based discussion on various political issues, especially the national question in Scotland. Tommy Sheridan, representing the SSP, was elected to the new Scottish Parliament: the first ever openly declared Trotskyist to win a seat in a British state legislature. Sheridan took over 7% of the list vote across Glasgow under a new proportional representation system. As part of this process an electoral pact was formed with the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).

In France the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League) and Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle), the two biggest far left parties, formed a common list for the European Parliament elections of June 1999, gained 5.2% of the poll (915,000 votes) and elected five deputies. This revolutionary socialist list won 7-10% support in most working class areas, including the 'red belt' of Communist-controlled towns around Paris. In Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Lille and Clermont-Ferrand it did better than the Communist Party. Elected MEPs include Arlette Laguillier and Alain Krivine.

In Portugal three radical groups formed the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) and elected two deputies in the parliamentary elections held in October 1999. The Bloc is a movement bringing together the PSR (Portuguese Section of the Fourth International) the UDP (ex-Maoist) and many independents. The Bloc won 130,000 votes—the two deputies are

Francisco Louçã ('Chico') of the PSR and Luis Fazenda of the UDP, both elected in Lisbon where the Bloc had its best result, 4.9%.

England, the fortress of far left sectarianism—usually under the 'banner' of 'internationals' which (surprise, surprise) are led from London—may be changing.

Most readers are no doubt familiar with the fight between the British New Labour bureaucracy headed by Prime Minister Tony Blair, and former left wing Greater London Council leader Ken Livingstone. Blair's supporters bureaucratically denied Livingstone the official Labour nomination for the London mayoral election. Livingstone ran as an independent and won by a huge margin. Londoners elected a new assembly, under a proportional representation system, as well as a new mayor. This provided Livingstone with a difficulty: the Labour assembly members are party leadership supporters.

Rather than follow the usual 'go it alone' formula, various far left organisations took what might be called the 'Scottish Road'. A 'London Socialist Alliance' (LSA) stood in the Greater London Authority elections. Candidates included Paul Foot and Mark Steel (Socialist Workers' Party), Kate Ford (Workers' Power) and Greg Tucker (International Socialist Group). Other supporters included the Socialist Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty; individual sponsors included Tariq Ali, Ken Loach, John Pilger, Michael Mansfield, and Mike Marqusee. Some trade union branches affiliated to the LSA, as well as well-known community and anti-racist activists.

The LSA would not have run its own candidates if Livingstone organised his own base. He would not do this, instead calling for a vote for the Greens, who won three out of 25 seats in the new London Assembly. The LSA got a score of 2.9% in the constituencies. In two constituencies their vote reached 6% and 7%.

According to Paul Foot—recently voted 'Journalist of the Decade' by the BBC programme *What the Papers Say*—the London Socialist Alliance "is here to stay". He commented that the LSA's vote was a remarkable achievement for a formation that had only existed for four months. It had taken the Greens about five years to save a deposit.

Why is this happening? It would be foolish to propose an exhaustive or final answer.

In part, this process is a by-product of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the post-second world war

'communist' Eastern European régimes. Electoral spaces to the left of the social democrats, that used to be filled by the Communist Parties, have opened up to the far left. Very small European-based revolutionary groups worked in a very difficult situation for many decades, and had no realistic chance of making any breakthroughs to a mass base. Much creditable work was done—not least, building international support for anti-imperialist causes like the Vietnamese victory over the USA in the early 1970s—but the far left also found it very difficult to avoid turning in on itself. This context started changing in the early 1990s. We have seen some examples in Ireland: they include the election of Joe Higgins of the Socialist Party to the Dáil for Dublin West in 1997, and the big votes gained by Carolann Duggan of the SWP in successive elections for leadership posts in the state's largest trade union, SIPTU.

None of this means that all differences between parties on the far left are an illusion. However it should, at least, be possible to honestly clarify such differences, rather than caricature the views and activities of people on the left with whom you disagree. Sadly, too many of us have gone through the experience of far left groups 'getting in their denunciation first'. Salt is added to the wound when sectarian debating styles and bureaucratic methods are then justified as 'democratic centralism'!

It is time to take the Scottish Road.



Zimbabwe:
Mugabe's last stand?

Jonathan Morrison

Given the current crisis over land in Zimbabwe it can be forgotten that just five years ago the country was being hailed as an African success story. It was the model for a transition from white minority to black majority rule. Indeed, the transitions in Namibia and neighbouring South Africa were very much influenced by the experience of Zimbabwe. This is why the events unfolding there are critical to the stability of southern Africa as a whole. Their repercussions are already being felt. In Namibia there have been similar land occupations, and in South Africa the value of the Rand has fallen dramatically. Because of their similarities, the crisis in Zimbabwe has the potential to upset the political settlements that have been reached across southern Africa.

For the origins of the current crisis over land in Zimbabwe lie in the political settlement which brought about majority rule. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979, which was negotiated between Britain and the African nationalist movement, gave political power to Africans but kept economic power in the hand of whites. This meant that the racial disparities in land ownership, which had been the driving force of the liberation struggle, remained intact. Zimbabwe's new constitution entrenched existing land ownership and explicitly ruled out expropriation. Land could only be transferred on a 'willing-seller willing-buyer' basis. The pace of land reform was therefore based on the market and on the co-operation of existing landowners. Africans were assured that western governments and international financial institutions would fund land reform. However, it soon became obvious that the funds required to fund any substantial land transfer would not be forthcoming. Britain now denies that it ever made assurances on land reform.

In the early years of independence the Zimbabwean government did not press the case for land reform. Indeed, its policies were based on accommodating the interests of the white capitalist class. Robert Mugabe, the first prime minister and leader of the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU), promoted a policy of 'racial reconciliation'. The basic premise of

this policy was that the economic interests of whites would not be threatened if Africans had a free hand in the political arena. To reassure whites there would be continuity in economic policy, Mugabe appointed white ministers to the key agriculture and tourism posts in his first government. In this period, Robert Mugabe had the full support of the west. His regime was a model for southern Africa.

Of course this did not mean that it was a model of democracy. Since independence, Mugabe's government had been taking on an increasingly authoritarian character. Mugabe had already eliminated the 'left' within ZANU in the late 1970s, and in the mid-80s he turned on his allies in the Zimbabwean African Patriotic Union (ZAPU). This party, lead by Joshua Nkomo, had been an ally of ZANU during the liberation struggle and had become the junior partner in the post independence government. It drew most of its support from Zimbabwe's minority Ndebele population. When Mugabe moved against ZAPU, the Ndebele population become a general target for state violence. When the notorious 5th Brigade were sent into Matabeleland to suppress the opposition 20,000 Ndebeles were killed. If this violence demonstrated the lengths that Mugabe would go to consolidate his power, it also exposed the hypocrisy of the west. In contrast to the recent outrage over the deaths of three white farmers, the response to the abuses in Matabeleland was muted. This shows clearly that the west's current concern with Zimbabwe is not motivated by loss of life.

As well as consolidating political power, Mugabe was also promoting the economic interests of the new black elite that had emerged since independence. The motor for the development of this elite was the incorporation of ZANU cadres into the structures of the state, and their control over public resources. As Zimbabwean state officials used their bureaucratic power to enrich themselves, they increasingly came to identify with the interests of the bourgeoisie. This process happened in a number of ways. Firstly, under the process of 'land reform', state officials established private business interests through acquiring large-scale commercial farms. The transfers of land that took place did not benefit the rural poor, but prominent ZANU figures. Beneficiaries included the attorney general, the mines and tourism minister, the speaker of Parliament, two high court judges and a retired general. (In October 1994, the president of the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) claimed that more than half of Mugabe's cabinet were CFU members.) Secondly, state resources were siphoned off for private use. And thirdly, the ruling ZANU-PF party itself engaged in economic activities. This has led to the development of a new African elite which straddles both the state and private sector. Zimbabwe's

leading African businessmen are often high ranking cadres of ZANU-PF. Of course such a system is massively corrupt. This was exposed by the 'Willowgate' scandal of 1989, when it was revealed that several members of the government had been involved in the illegal resale of imported cars. Zimbabwe's current involvement in the war in Congo is in large part motivated by the commercial interests of senior military personnel in the Congolese mining industry.

The consequence of this change in the social composition of the national liberation movement was an increasingly neo-liberal orientation in government policies. They were tailored not to fit the needs of the poor, but the business interests of the new African elite. Evidence of this was the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which aimed at liberalising the economy by privatising state industries, lifting exchange and price controls, and introducing service charges. This programme was welcomed by western governments and international financial institutions. Ironically the current crisis in Zimbabwe which has so concerned the west is due in large part to the consequences of the neo-liberal policies that it championed. They have provoked widespread opposition to the regime, and led to Mugabe playing the land card.

The current opposition movement emerged from the militant 1997-99 general strikes and mass actions by tens of thousands of urban workers, students and unemployed against ZANU-PF's austerity policies. At the forefront of this opposition was the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. Once a loyal government run body, it has transformed itself into an independent trade union federation, and is the bedrock of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

This movement has developed over a relatively short period of time. Its origins were in the ZCTU-backed National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a coalition which brought together 150 civic organisations to press for democratic reform. In an attempt to hijack the constitutional reform process Mugabe proposed his own new constitution. The major claim for the new constitution was that it would facilitate the redistribution of land, yet in reality its provisions would have only entrenched Mugabe's own position. As this new constitution had to be voted on in a referendum, the scene was set for a major confrontation between government and opposition. The outcome would give a clear indication of the extent of disaffection with the Mugabe regime.

The MDC was formed to campaign for a no vote in the referendum. Launched in September 1999 at a 20,000 strong rally, its first congress in

January of this year was attended by 6,000 delegates. The MDC claimed to have an initial membership of 1.1 million. Given that the total population of Zimbabwe is 12.5 million people this is quite an impressive figure. Of course the strength of a political movement cannot be measured solely in numerical terms; what counts is its ability to achieve its objectives. The referendum campaign demonstrated that the MDC does possess that ability. Despite a campaign of intimidation and censorship, it was able to decisively defeat Mugabe's constitution in the February 12-13 referendum.

It was this defeat that was the immediate spark for the current crisis. Facing the most serious opposition to ZANU rule in twenty years, and the prospect of another defeat in the upcoming parliamentary elections, Mugabe launched a campaign of land occupations. Despite the apparent radicalism of this action, it was nothing more than a cynical ploy by Mugabe to stay in power. The occupations were not spontaneous but pre-planned and orchestrated. Led by the National Liberation War Veterans' Association, headed by ZANU-PF central committee member Chenjerai Hunzvi, they have received extensive logistical support from the military. Their primary purpose is to intimidate the opposition, and revive ZANU-PF support amongst its traditional rural constituency. Although the deaths of white farmers have received the attention of the media, it has been black opposition activists that have borne the brunt of violence from Mugabe supporters. Since the beginning of the current crisis, eighteen members of the opposition have been killed and many others beaten and forced from their homes. Farm labourers from whom the MDC gains much of its support have been a particular target. Trade unions have come under attack. For the first time in twenty years, ZCTU had to cancel its May Day parade because of fears of political violence.

Of course, the fact that Mugabe is cynically exploiting the land issue does not negate the need for land reform. When you consider that 4,000 white owned farms account for more than two thirds of the best farming land, and that six million black people live on Zimbabwe's marginal rural lands, the case for redistribution is overwhelming. Yet Mugabe has had twenty years to carry out land reform and he hasn't done it. The transfers of land that have taken place have benefited not the poor but high ranking ZANU cadres. When African peasants have attempted to force the issue of land reform, they have been brutally suppressed by the regime. Two years ago, when squatters occupied white farms they were forcibly removed by police. At the same time Mugabe imposed a two week ban on public demonstrations and strikes after a war veterans' demonstration took place while African-American businessmen were in Zimbabwe for an investment

conference. This is why support for the current state-orchestrated occupations has been limited. The rural African population have grown weary of Mugabe's populist rhetoric and are suspicious of his motives. Time and again he has used populist rhetoric on the land issue, and then drawn back when faced with the hostility of western governments and financial institutions. However, because of the serious threat to his position Mugabe has now gone further than he has before. This is what concerns countries such as Britain. It fears that Mugabe's actions could get out of control and destabilise the whole of southern Africa. With substantial investment and trade bound up in the region, Britain cannot afford for the example of land occupation and expropriation of property to spread. This is why it has been most vociferous in calling for the restoration of 'law and order'.

Mugabe clearly hoped that he could use the current crisis to stay in power, and get over the parliamentary elections in June. However, despite the level of intimidation, the opposition has remained defiant. Caught off guard at the beginning of the current crisis and taken back by the level of violence directed against it, the MDC has since been able to steady itself and hold a number of large rallies. Even in the face of state coercion, which has included the revival of colonial era laws to restrict political activity, it seemed that it may win the majority of votes in the election. While this would not overturn the ZANU majority in parliament (as a quarter of the 120 seats are appointed by the President), it would represent another major defeat for Mugabe. An attempt to fix or cancel the election would be likely to discredit the regime even further and intensify opposition. Whatever the outcome of the June election, the era of Mugabe is coming to a close. At 79 years old Mugabe's political life is in its twilight irrespective of the current crisis. Although he may serve out his presidency until the year 2002, it is unlikely he will be head of state beyond this date.

This raises the question of what will happen in a post-Mugabe era. To a large degree this will depend on the development of the MDC. Although organised labour is its main component, and there are socialists within it, the MDC is not a socialist movement. It is a cross-class alliance of workers, rural poor and a section of the Zimbabwean bourgeoisie. This class composition is reflected in the contradictory nature of its programme. Though appealing to the working class and rural poor, the MDC has adopted overtly neo-liberal economic policies. It has put forward a "100-day stabilisation plan" that commits it to the restructuring of all state-owned enterprises to be ready for privatisation within two years, reducing all "non-essential" government spending, and to negotiate with

the IMF, World Bank and other donors for debt to be restructured. In the longer term, the MDC aims to eliminate all price subsidies, reduce company taxes and income taxes, introduce a goods and services tax by 2001, and privatise a wide range of government activities. The MDC believes it can slash Zimbabwe's budget deficit from above 15% of GDP in 2000 to less than 3% by 2002. It also supports the 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' formula for land reform, and proposes a "social contract" between business and labour.

It would be ironic if the MDC, which was born out of struggles against austerity and for democracy, was to turn around and attempt to impose the same policies. There would inevitably be a reaction to this from its core supporters. Yet these are struggles of the future. The essence of the struggle now in Zimbabwe is for basic democratic rights. This is why most of the left are supporting the MDC. The judgement is that a victory over the Mugabe regime will give confidence to the working class, and create more favourable conditions to build a socialist movement.



Dillon beag

Aindrias Ó Cathasaigh

Maurice Manning, *James Dillon: A biography*. Wolfhound, £25.

Tá an leabhar seo ag iarraidh a áitiú orainn gur pearsa fhíorthábhachtach i stair na hÉireann é Jim Dillon. Marach é, a deir an clúdach linn, “Irish democracy might not be the robust and secure organism which it now is”. Fiú dá mba dhíol molta é an méid sin, is dona a chreidim é. Nuair a chuimhnítear ar na fórsaí agus na daoine a mhúnlaigh saol na tíre seo le linn an fhichiú céad, is beag de bhri é Dillon.

Is fadó ó chuala mé faoin diolúnach seo den chéad uair. An áit chéanna, Bealach an Doirín, is dúchas dúinn beirt. Chaith m’athair tamall ag obair ina shiopa. Tá daoine liom curtha in aon reilig leis. Deir Manning go dtugadh a chairde *James* air i gcónaí i gcónaí, ach níor chuala mise air ariamh ach *Jim* Dillon. Sin agat na ciorcail a mbímse a mheascadh leo, is dóigh.

Ba de ‘theaghlach polaitíochta’ é, agus a athair i gceannas ar lucht an Hóm Rúl. Scuabadh isteach i mbruscar na staire lena pháirtí é. “No political fate could have been more cruel than that meted out to John Dillon in 1918”, a mhaíonn Manning (lch 14), ach ba bheag é ar ghalainn cinniuínt na ndaoine a maraíodh i dtrinsí na hEorpa ar chomhairle a pháirtí. Níor mhaith John Dillon ariamh é don phobal míbhúioch a bhain leas nár cheap sé féin as a raibh bainte amach acu. Ainneoin iarracht a mhic an milleán a bhualadh ar fhearta Dé—“In politics I found what I am convinced I was meant by Providence to attempt” (lch 3)—is dealraíthí liom an míniú a bhíodh ag Máirtín Ó Cadhain: gurbh é Jim Dillon díoltas a athar ar Éirinn.

Más fíor, saol “spartan” a bhí ag na Diolúnaigh i mBaile Átha Cliath, mar ar rugadh é, ach ní shin an focal a shamhlóinn le teach a raibh bean tí, banaltra agus máistreás ag obair ann (lgh 7-8). D’fhillidís ar Bhealach an Doirín, áit a gcaithidís an samhradh “shooting and horse riding” (lch 16). Tá a fhios agam cén spraoi a bheadh ag a gcomhaoiseacha den lucht oibre: cromtha sna páirceanna, ag sracadh leis an bhféar nó leis an móin. Rinne mé mo chion féin den sracadh céanna sa gceantar céanna, ach is rudaí iad

foghlaireacht agus marcaíocht nach ndearna mé ariamh. Na ciorcail mhíchearta arist, arsa tusa.

Oidhreacht ghnó a athar is tuisce a thit ar an Diolúnach: Duff’s, an siopa mór a raibh a shrón san aer chuig Bealach an Doirín ar feadh na mblianta. Cuireadh go Londain agus Chicago é le ceird na siopadóireachta a fhoghlaim, agus níorbh fhada ar ais é ná go raibh na modhanna nua dá gcur i bhfeidhm. D’fhógair Duff’s agus mórshíopaí eile an bhaile laghdaithe pá idir 13 agus 40 faoin gcéad. Nuair a chuir na hoibríthe stailc suas, dúnadh amach iad, agus mhair an t-aighneas ar feadh 1925. “The truth is that this present dispute is no ordinary strike...”, a scríobh Dillon chuig an easpag ina lár, “but part of a deliberately organised plan to take control and management of our business completely out of our hands, and hand that control over to the union.” (Lgh 41-2.) Faraoid nárbh fhíor dó.

Toghadh Dillon ina Theachta Dála neamhspleách i 1932 ach ghabh sé leis na Léinteacha Gorma roimh i bhfad. Tá Manning thar a bheith lúbach anseo. Féacha an inseacht seo ar bhunú na Léinteacha Gorma (lch 64):

From mid-1932, Cumann na nGaedheal meetings were disrupted with increasing frequency... Levels of political abuse inside the House increased in intensity, culminating in Finance Minister MacEntee’s branding of Cosgrave as ‘one of the great traitors of Irish history’, and prophesying that ‘we will have his name spat upon’. Then in August 1932 came the founding of the Army Comrades Association...

Mar sin, thosaigh daoine ag ionsaí agus ag maslú Cumann na nGaedheal, agus ansin tháinig na Léinteacha Gorma ar an láthair le cead cainte a chosaint ar lucht na himeagla. Ach tá an dáta sin, “mid-1932”, iontach doiléir i gcomparáid leis na tagairtí cruinne is nós le Manning. Agus má théann tú chomh fada leis na fonótaí feicfidh tú gur i *mí Dheireadh Fómhair* 1932 a thug Mac an tSaoi faoin gCoscarach, dhá mhí thar éis do Chumann na gComradaithe Airm a theacht ar an saol. Tá ord na n-eachtraí iompaithe droim ar ais ag Manning, ach caithfidh tú na firicí a chúbláil más leat a thabhairt le fios nárbh fhaisistithe iad na Léinteacha Gorma. Ar ndoigh dá mba Fine Gaelach liobrálach mé féin—i bhfad uainn an anachain—bheadh leisce ormsa amhdachtáil go bhfuil craobh fhaisisteach ar ghéaga ginealaigh mo pháirtí.

Bhí Eoin O’Duffy ina fhaisistí cinnte, agus gluaiseacht fhaisisteach a bhí ar a chúl. Maíonn Manning go mbeadh sé “very wide of the mark” faisistí a thabhairt ar an Dufach, cé go raibh “fascist proclivities” aige agus ag “some of his supporters” (lgh 85, 106). Is é firinne an scéil go raibh

conlán láidir faisisteach orthu siúd a chuir Fine Gael ar bun. Níorbh fhaisistí é Dillon, ná go leor eile de lucht Fhine Gael (agus ní frith-fhaisistíocht ach faicseanaíocht Fhianna Fáileach a bhí i gcuid mhaith den chur ina gcoinne) ach bhíodar sásta a ghabháil ag suirí leo. D'iarr Dillon ar an Dufach a ghabháil i gceannas ar an bpáirtí nua, agus níorbh é polaitíocht Uí Dhufaigh ach a neamhfheiliúnacht a thug air titim amach leis níos deireanaí. Níor chuir faisisteachas na Spáinne aon mhairg ar an Diolúnach: "our place is behind Franco" a d'fhógair sé i 1937 (lch 128).

Nuair a thug de Valera dlíthe géarleanúna isteach in aghaidh na bpoblachtóirí rinne Dillon coraíocht phoiblí lena choinsias liobrálach, ach bhuaigh sé air agus thug a vóta don rialtas, fiu nuair a dhiúltaigh Fine Gaelaigh eile (lgh 147-8, 171-2). D'fhág sé seo gur fhéad sé féin a ghabháil go Carna ar saoire, áit a gcoinnítí toitíní ciondálte siar dó sa siopa (lch 179), fad is a bhí na céadta daortha chun fuarghéibhinn ar an gCurrach ar feadh an chogaidh. Bhí siadsan in ainm is neodracht an stáit a chur i mbaol, ach céard a bhí ar bun ag an Diolúnach?

Bhí ag an Saorstát a ghabháil isteach sa gogadh ar thaobh na gComhghuaillithe, dar leis. Níl aon amhras ach go raibh sé in aghaidh na Naitseach go macánta agus gur mhian leis a dtreascairt. Níor mhian leis aon dúradán a fheiceáil i suíl an taobh eile, áfach: "on the side of the Anglo-American alliance is right and justice" (lch 166). Ach cén chóir nó ceart a fuair an Ind uathu? Nó Éire, go deimhin? Ní fhéadfaí cearta daonlathacha a chosaint trí ceart na hÉireann chun neamhspleáchais a ghéilleadh, rud a dhéanfaí dá dtroideadh an tír ar thaobh Shasana agus i dár gcoinneáil críochdheighilte agus faoi chois. Giolla Shasana agus Mheireacá an jab a bhí in áirid d'Éirinn i scéim an Diolúnaigh: "we should ascertain precisely what co-operation Britain and the US may require... and as expeditiously as possible to offer to the US and Britain that co-operation to the limit of our resources" (lch 165).

Cé gur fhoilsigh sé an polasaí seo i bpaimfléid mhídhleathacha (lgh 161, 169), agus go raibh sé ina dhá chuid déag le hambasáidí Mheireacá agus Shasana (lch 162), in árasán teolaí i gCearnóg Mhuirfean a chaith sé an cogadh seachas i gcampa géibhinn. Níor fhreagair sé ariamh an cheist a cuireadh go minic: más ag troid ar thaobh na Breataine ba dhual d'Éireannaigh a bheith, tuige nach ndeachaigh sé féin isteach in arm na Breataine, fearacht na mílte eile? Ní fhreagraíonn Manning ach an oiread í, ach is suarach an t-ionadh é. San am i láthair tá Fine Gael ar an téad chéanna faoin neodracht: ag iarraidh Éireannaigh a liostáil do chogáil Mheireacá agus na Breataine, ach ag coinneáil a gcolainneacha uaisle féin

i bhfad ó láthair an áir. Ar bhealach níos glíce atá Fianna Fáil a imirt an chluiche chéanna, 'deile.

Bhí Dillon ina aire talmhaíochta 1948-51 agus 1954-57, agus tá go leor dár dhúirt sé sa seanchas i gcónaí. Bhagair sé ar Shasana go Crúisteifeach: "We will drown you in eggs" (lch 236), agus go ceann i bhfad ina dhiaidh tugadh "Dillons bheaga" thiar ar na scalltáin a mhol sé in áit na seanchearc. Chuir sé scéim ar siúl le talamh a thabhairt chun míntíreachais, ag fógairt go gcaithfeadh sé clocha Chonamara le farraige. Ba é an talamh an chúis ba ghairé dá chroí: "I felt it to be my mission in public life to make that land yield to small proprietors a decent standard of living" (lch 229).

Ba é mórán cainte ar bheagán cúise é. Ba ghearr go raibh an iomarca uibheacha ar an margadh gan aon duine dá gceannacht. Sa méid gur tháinig aon fheabhas ar an talmhaíocht—agus déanann Manning áibhéil air—is beag den chreidiúint atá ag gabháil don Diolúnach. Bhí borradh ar an mbealach ar aon chuma thar éis an chogaidh. Agus airgead an Marshall Aid ina phóca aige, cheapfa go ndéanfadh Dillon tuilleadh, nó go nbainfeadh sé den spleáchas ar mhargadh Shasana. Ní dhearna a chuid polasaithe tada le meath na mionfheilmearaí a chosc. Idir an dá dhaonáireamh i 1946 agus 1961, thit líon na bhfeilmearaí 15%. Thit an sciar acu a bhí faoi bhun 30 acra ó 49% go dtí 40%. Níor thada í imirce na gcloch le hais imirce na ndaoine. Theip ar mhisean an Diolúnaigh.

Is deacair a chreidiúint a dhaille is a bhí sé ar an scéal, áfach: "we see ourselves surrounded by every evidence of a rising standard of living", a scríobh sé i 1951 (lch 252). Taobh thiar de liathmhúir dhúshlánacha Duff's, níor léir dó na scuainí ó Bhealach an Doirín agus áiteacha nach é ag déanamh ar an mbád bán chomh tréan is a bhí iontu ar feadh na gcaogaidí. Nuair a thóg sé aird den imirce, cháin sé na daoine a raibh sé d'éadan acu imeacht sular rug an t-ocras orthu. Ba mhéantar dó: £1,500 sa mbliain a bhí sé a fháil mar aire nuair a vótáil sé in aghaidh leathlá saoire d'oibrithe talmhaíochta (lgh 282, 257).

Ba é Dillon "Ireland's foremost parliamentarian", a deir Garret FitzGerald ar an gclúdach. A chead sin a bheith aige, muis; ach éiríonn duine bréan den pharlaiminteachas atá ina leannán ar an leabhar seo. Caitheann Manning trí leathanach ag cur síos go mion ar nósanna imeachta an Oireachtais (lgh 109-12). Thóg sé "two parliaments" air an leabhar a scríobh (lch ix): ní i mblianta a chomhaireann sé imeacht an ama, dála an chuid eile againn, ach i b'parlaimintí'. Sa méid go bhfuil an andúil chéanna i dTeach Laighean acu beirt, tá beatháisnéisí a dhiongbhála faighte ag an Diolúnach i Manning.

Costello, Cosgrave, FitzGerald, Reynolds, Bruton—is deas iad na tíuilipí ar thug Páirtí an Lucht Oibre cois i mbois chun cumhachta dóibh. Déanann Manning amach go mbeadh Dillon—ceannaire Fhine Gael idir 1959 agus 1965—ar an liosta freisin marach gur pholasáí leis an Lucht Oibre sna seascaidí fanacht glan ar chomhrialtas. Ná habair nach ndearna siad fónamh éicint d’aicme oibre na hÉireann! Thuig Dillon cá raibh cairde le fáil ar an taobh eile, áfach: in áit a shean-naimhdeas do na ceardchumann, mhol sé mar “highly responsible” iad, dá n-iocfaidís tuarastal ní b’airde leis na hoifigigh (lch 379).

Ba éagóir ar an Diolúnach é a chur síos mar dhuine a chosain pribhléidí an lucht rachmais agus bochtanas an lucht oibre. Bhí go leor gnéithe den chaipitleachas nár thaithin leis ar chor ar bith. Ba chóir, a dúirt sé, “to abolish the slums and to count the cost afterwards”, seachas “individual wealth existing side by side with destitution and misery” a fheiceáil (lch 127). “Bad as socialism is, it is better than a monopoly in the hands of private capitalists”, a chreid sé (lch 139), agus bhí sé sásta tionscail a náisiúnú dá mba ghá: “I believe in private enterprise and individual initiative, but I do not believe in rapacity and exploitation” (lch 260).

As deireadh na cúise ba shiopadóir tuaithe é Jim Dillon, agus intinn an tsiopadóir tuaithe aige. Bhí amhras aige ar na caipitlithe móra, ar na hoibrithe a bhagródh ar an saol ab ansa leis, agus ar na bailteacha móra ab fhearann dóibh araon. Is éard a bhí uaidh, go mbeadh chuile fhear ag saothrú a ghiodán féin talún, nach mbeadh aon duine acu róbhocht ná róshaibhir. Thiochfaidís isteach chuig Duff’s uair sa tseachtain, áit a bhfreastalófaí go hionraic ar a riachtanais mheasartha. Bheadh fios a ngnaithe agus a mbéasa acu, agus thoghfaidís é féin chun na Dála le aire a thabhairt do na ceisteanna móra a rachadh thar a dtuiscint. Ba shin é an t-oideas Diolúnach le deaphobal measúil suaimhneach a chaomhnú in Éirinn. Ba scorn leis an idé-eolaíocht: “I believe in attacking the forest of practical problems tree by tree... I believe that neither requires us to move to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead” (lch 317). Ach bhí idé-eolaíocht aige, ’deile, má ba i ngan fhios dó féin é. Leas an fheilméara láidir, leas an tsiopadóra, a rinne sé, agus é cinnte dearfa ó thús deireadh gurbh ionann é agus leas mhuintir na hÉireann. Ní raibh sé in ann a ghabháil thar laincisi intinne a aicme féin, agus más daor an méid sin a thógáil air, is daoire fós ligean dá aicme greim a choinneáil ar a gcumhacht agus seasamh sa mbealach ar ár saoirse.

Tá Duff’s ina fhothrach ó bhásaigh Dillon i 1986, ach athchóiríodh a theach le deireanas, le péint bhuí gháifeach i gcaoi is nach mbuailfeá faoi san oíche. Siod é an áit a dtagadh na Diolúnaigh le n-éalú ó stró na

polaitíochta: “There was about Ballaghaderreen a sense of secure and unchanging values” a deir Manning. Chuirte pléascóga ar an mbóthar iarainn le fáiltiú roimh a dtraein abhaile (lch 15-16). Cén áit ab fhearr a roghnódh an rialtas le haghaidh a gcéad chruinniú ariamh taobh amuigh den phríomhchathair, 19 Eanáir seo caite? Glanadh chun siúil na fir a bhí ag oscailt ar an mbaile le córas nua séarachais a chur isteach agus rinneadh baile Phoitéimcin de Bhealach an Doirín. Thiochfadh na hairí go teach an Diolúnaigh, chraithfidís lámh leis na dúchasaigh, bhronnfaidís deontais orthu, agus tharlóidís fómhar na vótaí ag an gcéad toghchán eile.

Fuair siad pléascóga rompu, ceart go leor. Shlóg na céadta feilméaraí agus iad ag cosaint a mbeatha ar na comhlachtaí feola agus na cúirteanna. Na daoine a raibh sé de mhisean ag an Diolúnach iad a shábháil, ba sheo iad ag cur léigear ar a theach. Tugadh na céadta gardaí breise isteach faoina gcomhair, agus b’éigean d’oidhre an Diolúnaigh sa Roinn Talmhaíochta téaltú amach an cúldoras. Níorbh é cosúlacht na socrachta ná na neamhathraitheachta a bhí ar an mbaile an lá sin. Bhí leide le fáil, don té a bhraithfeadh é, ar an gcumhacht a d’fhéadfadh a bheith ag an lucht oibre i mBealach an Doirín. Oibrithe Shannonside, Dawn Meats, Villiger agus eile—dá dtuigfidís an chumhacht sin, dá gcuirfidís i ngníomh í, thiochfadh an tuar faoin tairngreacht a rinne Jim Dillon i 1925: bhainfeadh plean eagraithe smacht a ngnaithe dá aicme lena chur i lámha na n-oibrithe. Ní fhéadfaí a shárú sin de léirmheas a dhéanamh air.



The gene is out of the bottle: The menace of genetic engineering

Tomás Mac Síomóin

As I write, today's newspaper reports that thousands demonstrated, and 20 were injured, in Genoa yesterday in protests against genetically manipulated foods. No less than 5,000 policemen were deployed in a tiny area of Genoa to ensure that a "Biotechnical Fair" sponsored by 60 companies in this sector, passed off without incident. The same reporter tells us that although one out of every two Italians hasn't an iota as to what biotechnology signifies, a majority would express itself as being "cautious" regarding the application of such knowledge to the creation of new agricultural products. Isn't that what spokespersons for the genetic engineering sector tell us: that opposition to their project and consumer rejection of their products is based on romanticism, groundless fears and irrational technophobic attitudes—sad anachronisms as more and more areas of social life submit to the dictates of technological rationality, the ideological bedrock of the coming millenium?

A range of transgenic supercrops to solve the world's nutritional problems is one of the many tempting prospects held out by genetical engineers—and yet the transgenic crop field trials are destroyed by eco-protesters. Biotech partisans hold that genetically altered animals and micro-organisms hold the key to the cost-efficient production of many substances of crucial medical and nutritional importance. Opponents hold that methods used to achieve these goals pose unacceptable risks to the health of this and future generations. Worried consumers pressurise for the removal of transgenic products from supermarket shelves. Genetic ID, a US company, reports that more than half of the maize samples analysed in its laboratories contain transgenic contamination (today's newspaper again!). Transgenic seed stocks are destroyed as biotech share prices plummet. The Human Genome Project offers the prospect both of the elimination of hereditary disease, and of eugenic planning. The O J Simpson trial put DNA tests firmly in the public domain. The ethical debate around the issue of human clonation runs and runs...

No wonder the average punter, and not only in Italy, is confused! The gut feeling of socialists would be that they are 'agin' field trials and commercial release of transgenic crops and seeds, for example, if only because of the enormous economic leverage and power over (especially) Third World farmers that exploitation of genetic engineering technology places in the hands of a handful of multinationals. This is, of course, a point worth reiterating, although many may feel, subliminally, that this is a price worth paying in view of the alleged fabulous benefits genetic manipulation can bestow on humankind.

The now well established scientific Achilles heel of the whole genetic engineering enterprise is seldom stressed leaving the propaganda initiative with 'experts' who assure us soothingly that their meticulous trials and tests ensure that all possible risks are identified and eliminated before transgenic organisms are released for commercial exploitation. So the industry can respond to critics by presenting them as latter-day Luddites, born-again Flat-Earthers etc., straining, Canute-like, in their attempts to stem the tides of (inevitable) scientific progress. After all, they reason, genetic modification is simply the latest in a continuum of biotechnological innovation that has been going on since the year dot. Its possible benefits to mankind are limitless.

Food, for example. Today 800 million people go hungry and 82 countries neither grow enough food nor can afford to import it. In India alone, 85% of children under five suffer from malnutrition. The global population now needs to consume per annum over 2 billion tonnes a year of cereals and other crops, according to the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome (World Bank Report) and, with current demographic trends, this production will need to be doubled over the next 30 years. Given the limited technical and other resources of the Third World, how is this goal to be achieved? Plainly high-yield disease- and pest-resistant crops with high nutritional value and zero environmental impact would be a highly desirable step in the right direction.

And that's where genetic engineering comes in.

By that is meant a set of techniques for isolating, modifying, multiplying and recombining units of genetic information, known as genes, from different organisms. Genes play a key role in the determination of the form of organisms, each gene being associated with the expression of one particular characteristic. The uniqueness of each organism is a reflection, then, of its own unique gene pool or genome. Using biotechniques, a gene from one organism can be attached, for example, to a virus with its pathogenic genes removed, which can then be made to infect other

organisms, inserting the foreign gene into the host organism genome. So, by cutting and joining bits of viruses, or other genetic entities that can move from cell to cell or organism to organism, appropriate vectors, or carriers, are made which can transfer genes from a donor species even to recipient species that do not naturally interbreed with it. Thus, fish genes could be incorporated into sugar beet genomes, for example, or human genes into those of pigs or plants.

Or, to return to the less exotic, using these techniques crop plants can be genetically modified to increase yield and nutritional value, and to enable their cultivation in currently inhospitable environments. Such crops can be tailormade to resist pests and diseases and, moreover, to thrive on reduced inputs of pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers.

The root of the problem is that certain assumptions of pre-1970 molecular genetics, on which genetic engineering practice is based, have been invalidated and superseded by advances in the science over the last ten to twenty years. And evidence accumulating over the same period leads to the inevitable conclusion that the methods used to genetically manipulate organisms not only subject public health to unacceptable and, in practice, unknowable long term risks but are bound to cause incalculable damage to the delicate fabric of existing ecosystems on which all human life ultimately depends. To better understand this position, look at the invisible terrain of DNA, the gene, the chromosome and the vector, as seen by the commercial genetical engineer!

You and me, for example, are made up of billions of such units. Ultimate control of cell activity and form is located in their organising centres or 'nuclei' in structures known as chromosomes. The nuclei of human body cells, for example, contain 46 chromosomes. Each individual cell trait is determined by a specific section of a chromosome called a gene, as defined above. The gene is made of DNA, whose chemistry encodes instructions needed to enable the gene to carry out its specific role. The chromosomes of a cell are thus seen as long linear sequences of genes which constitute a comprehensive set of commands that determine precisely the chemical nature and form of the cell environment and, by extension, that of the whole organism.

One of the main functions of genes is to organise the synthesis of protein molecules, enzymes, each one of which catalyses specifically one of the many thousand chemical reactions in the body that, in summation (the metabolism), make up the life process. More specifically, DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the genic substance, 'makes' RNA (a chemical relative of DNA) and that RNA in its turn 'makes' enzyme proteins, each

of which by virtue of its chemistry, enables a specific chemical reaction in the cell, which would not otherwise occur. Enzymes are the agents of DNA policy, as it were.

Thus, the story goes, by determining the enzyme complement of a cell, nuclear DNA controls its chemical/metabolic activity in a rigidly deterministic way and, thence, its form which is the visible expression of its chemical activity. This model postulates strictly one-way information (or command) flows outwards from chromosomal DNA. Reverse flow is not envisaged; i.e. proteins cannot alter RNA nor can RNA alter the information encoded in DNA.

A basic assumption underlying this picture is that genes are stable, apart from random mutations, and are passed on unchanged to succeeding generations (hence the constancy of species form across the generations). Another is that each gene expresses itself independently of the others; a gene transferred from one genome into another will behave in its new environment exactly as it behaved in its original one.

Each of these assumptions has been invalidated. For example, reverse information flow has been demonstrated to occur in many different ways and, indeed, current research would identify it as being the norm. And it is a matter of recorded observation that not only can genes be altered by environmental stimuli, but such altered genes have been transmitted to offspring.

But, most alarmingly, genes in nature are now known not only to hop from chromosome to chromosome within their own genome and migrate across generations within their own species, but have been shown to roam throughout the biosphere across species and even kingdom (the animal, plant and microbial domains) boundaries. Thus genes for pathogen or herbicide resistance introduced by genetic engineering techniques into crop plants, say, can be expected, and indeed have been shown, to migrate both into the genotypes of relatives and even non-relatives—creating 'superweeds', for example, with inevitable disruption of nutritional webs that underlie the delicate balance of the ecosystems within which they are located. Field trials have shown, for example, that such gene migration has taken place from herbicide-resistant transgenic Brassica napa to a number of its wild relatives, rendering the latter herbicide-resistant also. A very recent German report based on a four-year study of an herbicide resistant gene in rape detected this gene in the intestinal bacteria of bees. The zoologist who headed the study, Hans-Heinrich Kaatz, warns that his finding could have grave implications for human health. And, indeed, an earlier German report indicates clearly that genes for antibiotic resistance

in pig gut have wound up in humans. We will return below to the significance of such gene transfers.

Furthermore, scientific observation showing us that the expression of a given gene can be various, depending on the particular genome in which it is located, has invalidated the assumption that genes express themselves independently of each other. In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult to define and delimit a gene as the expression of each gene is ultimately connected to that of every other within an organism's gene pool or 'genome'. The old idea of one-to-one relatedness between gene and specific function in all circumstances is oversimplistic and, hence, exact prediction of the full effects of introducing a foreign gene into a genome is impossible.

Thence, single gene transfers have inevitably led to unexpected changes in host organisms. Toxins and allergens have arisen unexpectedly as 'side-effects' in transgenic plants and microbes, hideously deformed animals have resulted, again unexpectedly, from single gene transfer, underlining the oversimplicity of the 'one gene:one character' postulate and the unpredictability of this procedure. Not surprisingly, a human death has been recently reported in the US following 'gene therapy' among allegations that other such occurrences may have been subject to cover-up.

In short, the tenets on which commercial genetic engineering is based have been invalidated by a wealth of scientific observation and experiment that has been accumulating, with gathering momentum, over the last couple of decades, data that are conveniently—and irresponsibly—ignored by proponents of 'easi-fix' genetic cure-alls. The claim that gene manipulation can solve our food, medical and even social problems can only be true if by identifying a gene we can with certainty relate it to a corresponding trait, by changing the gene we change that trait only, and by transferring the gene we transfer that trait only. Such assumptions are no longer valid, but they still inform genetic engineering—which explains not only why this practice cannot fulfil its promises but why it creates such unacceptable health and ecological hazards.

Failure to recognise that genes migrate promiscuously across species and even kingdom boundaries is the basis for probably the greatest hazard that genetic engineering poses for the biosphere, including the human component of it. Geneticists have linked the emergence of pathogenic bacteria and of antibiotic resistance to such transfer of genes to other bacteria and even to unrelated species.

For example, the bacterium *Escherichia coli* is a normally harmless inhabitant of the intestine of all human beings and many other mammals. In

1982 a new pathogenic strain, *E. coli* 0157:H7, emerged, which causes severe haemorrhages of the colon, bowel and kidneys in human beings. Since then many outbreaks have occurred all over the world with increasing frequency. An outbreak in Japan in 1996 affected 9,000 and claimed the lives of twelve children. A series of outbreaks in Scotland in 1997 claimed 20 lives and made hundreds ill. Scientific evidence indicates that *E. coli* 0157:H7 arose recently and appears to have acquired the ability to manufacture toxins associated with the pathogenic bacterium, *Shigella*, most probably by gene transfer from the latter organism. Antibiotic resistance genes have been shown in nature to cross species, genera and kingdoms.

The last ten to fifteen years have seen a dramatic increase in virulent infections and antibiotic resistance in Europe and America, some of which can be undoubtedly attributed to overuse of antibiotics in medicine and intensive farming; antibiotics not only stimulate target organisms to develop resistance to them but can actually increase gene transfer ten to 100-fold. For example, some countries in Europe have suffered a 20-fold increase in salmonella infections over the last ten to fifteen years—and since the early 1990s, resistance to a wide range of antibiotics has evolved in one of the strains of the bacterium responsible for the infections. The fact that such alarming increases have coincided with the development of commercial-scale genetic engineering serves to focus attention on the fact that artificial gene transfer vectors or carriers, by their very nature, are bound to accelerate gene transfer across species boundaries.

The most common vectors used in genetic engineering to infect target organisms are a recombination of natural genetic parasites from a variety of sources, including cancer-causing viruses and other diseases in plants and animals, with their pathogenic functions neutralised. These are routinely attached to antibiotic genes so that cells transformed by the vector can be harvested. Exposure to the relevant antibiotic in a mixed culture simply zaps untransformed cells that have failed to incorporate the vector, leaving the genetic engineer with a pure culture of vector-infected cells. Released into the biosphere, these cells—apart from carrying out their designated functions—can serve as a source of antibiotic resistance genes for other organisms.

Furthermore, many such vectors are specifically designed, and used, to break down species barriers and to neutralise cellular mechanisms that attack foreign DNA so that they are enabled to broadcast genes across a wide spectrum of organisms. More simply, these artificially created vectors smuggle foreign genes into cells that would reject them in the normal

course of events. Thus, they can infect many animals and plants and in the process pick up genes from viruses of all these species to create new pathogens. And bestow their antibiotic resistance genes randomly on a wide range of other species, including pathogenic ones, when current antibiotic resistance levels in the biosphere are already the cause of serious medical concern.

Would that the story of the migrating gene were science fiction! According to a German report published in 1996, and referred to above, the antibiotic streptothricin was administered to pigs in 1982. By 1983, streptothricin resistance genes were found in pig gut bacteria. This had spread to the gut bacteria of farm workers and their families by 1984, and to the general public and pathological strains of the bacterium the following year. The antibiotic had to be withdrawn in 1990; yet prevalence in soil of the vector carrying streptothricin resistance genes remained high in 1993, pointing to the tenacious survival of gene-carrying vectors in the environment.

A 1996 report shows that a mobile genetic element, mariner, originally found in the fruit fly, is now found in humans, where it leads to a neurological wasting disease, the Charcot-Marie-Tooth syndrome. The same element has been incorporated by genetic engineers into 'anti-malarial' mosquitoes, holding out the real possibility that the disease has spread from transgenic mosquitoes to human beings.

The dangers posed by vector-mediated gene migrations don't stop there. The nuclei of higher organisms contains much more DNA—up to 99% in some genomes—than is necessary to code for all the proteins their cells need. Part of this excess or 'junk' DNA is known to contain endogenous proviruses, the partial genomes of viral pathogens of the recent or distant past, that became permanently incorporated into host species genomes, having lost the genes that would enable them to undertake autonomous action. However, they may be reactivated by combination with appropriate gene sequences carried by the 'benign', i.e. non-pathogenic, vectors of genetic engineering technology. Thence, the real possibility of the re-emergence of major diseases of the past and the creation of new highly virulent pathogens with high levels of antibiotic resistance.

In fact, as provirus sequences are found in all genomes, recombinations between the genetic material of introduced vectors and endogenous proviruses are bound to occur. 'Murphy's Law', that says that the disaster that can happen will, pithily encapsulates this very unfunny statistical inevitability. So, not surprisingly, there is now a number of reports of observations that directly relate such recombination to pathogenesis—

though not, as yet, to human pathogens. So far! However, some, at the very least, of the 30 new diseases, including AIDS, Ebola and Hepatitis C, that have appeared over the past 20 years, according to the 1996 WHO Report, along with the worldwide re-emergence of diphtheria, cholera, tuberculosis and other old infectious diseases, will have been caused undoubtedly by gene transfers and recombinations. Accelerated development and dissemination of supervectors on the part of the genetic engineering industry can only serve to further facilitate a process whose potential for undermining public health and destroying the stability of the biosphere on which we depend is limitless.

Scaremongering? Continually accumulating scientific evidence shows us that the dissemination of genetically modified organisms gives us the best of reasons to be scared. And the best of reasons for all who share a concern for the environment and for the health of this and future generations to battle against the reckless irresponsibility of profit-driven biotech multinationals who would pollute the biosphere, the patrimony of all, with deadly genetic litter for centuries to come.



The Hidden Connolly

What is a Scab?

[*Workers' Republic*, 10 July 1915]

The question seems rather superfluous. We will be told that everyone knows what a scab is. In Dublin the idea of being called a "scab" rightly awakens horror in the minds of all honest workers be they men or women. No one likes to be associated with the creature who, when the rights of Labour were in the balance of conflict, when the dignity of Labour was attacked, when the liberties of Labour were in peril, basely abandoned his fellows and "sold the pass" on his comrades. And yet, as simple as it seems the question involves more than can be answered without a good deal of thought.

What is a scab?

A scab is a worker who in the course of a strike or lock out helps the employer to keep his business going—to dispense with the aid of the men or women he formerly employed. To understand what a scab is we must first understand what constitutes a striker. A strike is an attempt to obtain certain concessions from an employer or group of employers by stopping his business, and thus stopping the flow of profits. If a body of workers are on strike the question of whether they are winning or losing is settled in the long run by their success in stopping their employers' business. If they succeed in stopping that business they win, if they do not succeed they lose. If their Union is able to pay Strike Pay for a year or two years they would still lose if the business can go on without them; nay, if the Union could pay a Strike Pay greater in amount than the weekly wages they had earned they would still lose if the employer's business was going on without them. But if the business cannot go on without them then they win. Hence, and this is the pivot of the whole question, whosoever enables the employer to continue his business without the striking workers is scabbing upon those workers.

Now let us imagine a practical illustration of this case. The labourers in the shops and yards of certain Dublin railway depots are on strike for an increase in their miserable wages. The work of these labourers consists mainly in helping or attending certain skilled tradesmen. If the Companies can get men degraded enough to do it they will bring in men to do the work formerly done by the men on strike. These men will be scabs. But

what will be the skilled tradesmen who will accept the help of these scabs, who will instruct them in their duties, and work side by side with them in the effort to enable the Companies to defeat the strikers?

Many of the skilled tradesmen have already signified their attitude. All of them have stood firm in their refusal to do other work than their own. On Saturday, July 3rd, six engine drivers on the Midland and Great Western Railway were asked and agreed to wash out the boilers of their engines. On Sunday the local branch of their Union held a meeting and strongly repudiated their action. On Monday the Company requested the attendance of a deputation to discuss the matter in the office. The deputation attended and stood firm in their refusal. The United Smiths are equally firm, as are the Boilermakers.

But looming in the background is the threat of the Companies to get scabs to help the tradesmen. On the Dublin and South Eastern some few scabs have already been obtained. These scabs first worked a coal boat, and then went into the workshops to attend the skilled men as helpers.

As a result these skilled men are already face to face with the question we are treating in this article.

If a labourer who goes into work on a dispute is a scab, what is the skilled tradesman who accepts him as a helper?

We know how our readers would answer the question, we know how the Transport Union has always acted when another Union had its members on strike from the same employment as our members were engaged in, we know what honour and wisdom would dictate, but—

What will the skilled Trades do? How will they answer the question, "What is a scab?"¹

Militarism

[*Workers' Republic*, 21 August 1915]

Every day gives fresh proof of the gravity of the danger facing the workers of this country from the ever-increasing power of the military. In Belfast the military have been employed to do ordinary labouring work at salvaging in the docks. One of the docks was the scene of a great fire, and members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union were afterwards employed to do the salvage work in sorting out the burnt goods and rescuing any material that could be saved. As these men naturally held out for proper wages they were informed one day last week that they would have to go, and next morning they found the military in their place. The soldiers did not want the job. They had not enlisted to scab upon their

brother workers, but they found out that what they fancied they had enlisted for, and what they were really used for were two different things.

Would it be a fair question to ask if such military interference with Labour does not do more to discourage recruiting than all the anti-militarist speeches we could deliver?

In Barrow, in Glasgow, on the Tyne, in short in every great industrial centre, the same tale is being told. All trade union rights are assailed, all trade union liberties are denied, the working class is everywhere menaced by an unscrupulous master class in alliance with a military power in the hands of men who have grown up in hatred of democracy, and with a contempt for the class from which the private soldiers are drawn.

More than ever it is necessary for Labour to spring to arms in defence of its birthright.

Protect Your Women

[*Workers' Republic*, 11 September 1915]

This is the slogan, the war cry of all the press to-day. Protect your women! To that rallying cry many thousands of this nation have responded; with their blood set on fire by the lying hysterics of a lying press thousands of young men, and men not too young, have left home and kindred and marched forth to foreign lands to battle under a flag they have detested all their lives; marched forth to battle in the belief that their battling was in some mysterious way serving their women.

And whilst they battled and shed their blood abroad what was happening to their women? In the latest exploit of Dublin Capitalism we have the answer. There is in Dublin a firm known as Williams and Woods, manufacturers of preserves, pickles, sauce and confectionery. This firm employs a large number of girls and women.

Their industry is scheduled under the Trade Boards Act as a Sweated Industry. Under the provisions of this Act there is established what is known as a Minimum Wage Board, which has the power to fix the minimum rate of wages in any industry scheduled under the Board. Upon this Board there are representatives of the Employers, of the Workpeople and of the Board of Trade. It is therefore not a wildly democratic or revolutionary body. And it is well known that before fixing wages this Board takes into account the present state of prices, and makes allowance for a "reasonable" profit. In fact every care is taken of the interest of the employer.

The industry of Messrs Williams and Woods came under the notice of this Board. A meeting was held at which the employers were represented,

and at which the workers were misrepresented by a creature of the employers, and at this meeting the wages of women and girls in the employment were fixed at—

10/10 for Female Workers of 18 years and upwards, and 22/9 for Male Workers of 22 years and upwards. For younger workers the rates begin for Girls at 5/- per week, and for Boys at 6/-, proceeding by yearly increases to the amount stated for workers at 18 years.

These wages you will say are small enough in all conscience. They are! But small as they are Messrs Williams and Woods refuse to pay them. And in order to evade the law and to continue sweating their women workers, despite the law, this firm of loyal, God-fearing, Christian philanthropists have

Served Notice of Dismissal upon 150 Women
and Girls over 18 years of age,

and are making ready to take in a number of young persons to fill the places of the people they are discharging. Some of these women under notice have served the firm loyally for ten and fifteen years, and even longer, and now this firm, with less bowels of compassion than a tiger in a jungle, is preparing to cast them out to starve. What an evil name Dublin is getting because of its greedy, soulless, unscrupulous employers! Philanthropists, every one of them. Kind, charitable beings, who contribute to charity freely, giving away to charitable societies with one hand as much as a farthing in the pound out of the money they have stolen from the workers with the other.

Oh, let us march out to battle, and fight and die in Flanders or the Dardanelles in order that we may protect our women! And whilst we are fighting and dying abroad our women will be sweated, rackrented, dismissed in hundreds and turned out to starve by kind, loyalist firms like Messrs Williams and Woods.

Protect our women! Protect them at home! Protect them from dismissal, from hunger, from oppression. We call upon all our readers to warn their women and girls against entering the employment of this firm unless these notices are withdrawn. Down with Sweating.

PROTECT YOUR WOMEN!

Some Irish Slaves and Slavishness

[*Workers' Republic*, 25 September 1915]

At last meeting of the Dublin Trades Council the secretary of a small affiliated body, the Brassfounders, wrote in intimating the withdrawal of his society from the Council. The reason alleged was that the Council had

instructed their representatives on the Technical Education Committee of the Dublin Corporation to oppose the loan of some valuable and delicate machinery to the Government for Munitions Work. The Council and, as it transpired, the majority of the Technical Education Committee took the view that the machines would be rendered useless for the delicate work of the school by such employment, and that a Government that can spend about five millions a day on the war could easily afford £2,000 in buying these machines from the Corporation. If the Government really needed the machines, let them buy them as they buy horses, mules, or provisions at top prices from farmers or merchants.

Surely no more reasonable offer was ever made! In the Technical Schools of England there are hundreds of such machines, and in no one case have these been even asked for on the same terms as these machines were asked for in Dublin—indeed nowhere has an English Technical School been asked to do or give anything without payment. In this as in all others greater sacrifices are asked from Irishmen than from Englishmen, and unfortunately it would appear from the letter spoken of at the beginning of this article that there are Irishmen slavish enough in spirit to deem it right that it should be so.

But the men who ordered this letter written, and the men in the Technical Education Committee who supported the proposal to give away the property of the citizens of Dublin should be made to understand in what company they belong.

What is that company? When a foreign invader plants himself in a country which he holds by military force his only hope of retaining his grasp is either that he wins the loyalty of the natives, or if he fails to do so that he corrupts enough of them to enable him to disorganise and dishearten the remainder.

The chief method of corruption is by an appeal to self-interest. To illustrate: At one time in the history of Ireland the presence of an English garrison in a city or territory was a hateful thing in the eyes of Irishmen, and ever and anon some Irish chief and clan would swoop down upon that garrison and exterminate it, and all who had dealings with it. But gradually with the growth of the capitalist system the English garrisons found Irishmen who for the sake of the gain in gold they would make by supplying the garrison with food and supplies were anxious to see garrisons amongst them and over them. Hence we have seen the spectacle of Irishmen posing as patriots actually petitioning the English Government to establish military garrisons in their districts. Willing that a foreign army should be in a position to coerce them, that their sons may be lured into its

bloodstained service, and their daughters ruined by its lustful military—willing to help all this iniquity along if only they were allowed to make a profit by selling something to the army that stood between their country and its freedom.

By such means the invader tightens his hold upon the country. The profit of the merchant supplying the garrison is followed by the jobs and pensions of that portion of the natives which sells itself to assist in administering the laws of the invader, and that again by the smaller jobs and more pitiful pensions of those who sell themselves as bludgeon men in the police or hired assassins in the army which holds the natives down and prevents them ruling and owning their own country.

If you throw a stone into a pond it will make a small ripple upon the smooth surface, but gradually the ripple spreads, ring follows ring until the effect is felt upon the farthest shore. So with the spread of corruption in a subject nation. Corruption sends out its waves over the souls of the people, and evil begets evil until its loathsome effects are all pervading.

The Trade Union that secedes from the ranks of the Labour Movement because that movement scorns to aid the invader in his murderous conspiracy against a free nation, the trade union that exults in the prospect of being allowed to prostitute its skill in the furtherance of the work of making weapons of murder which may first be used on its own fellow citizens, the trade union that rushes in to proclaim that Irishmen should sacrifice more for the British Empire than Englishmen should—that trade union is a worthy descendant of those who in the past in the armies of the invader saw not the assassins of their country's liberty, but only prospective customers from whom an Irish slave might derive a slave's profit.

We do not believe that the members of the Brass Founders Society ever were consulted before their officials rushed in to proclaim their baseness to the wondering world.

In fact we know they were not consulted. What are they going to do about it?

Notes

- 1 The employers agreed to an increase of 2s a week for the railway labourers on 14 August.



Orwell and the working class

Maeve Connaughton

Socialism didn't come naturally to George Orwell. As he famously described it, he came from "the lower-upper-middle class", a "shabby-genteel family" concerned above all with "keeping up appearances". As a boy he was warned off playing with working-class children and taught that "*The lower classes smell*". "So, very early, the working class ceased to be a race of friendly and wonderful beings and became a race of enemies." (RWP 113-19.) Even when he affected a socialist attitude in his teenage years this outlook endured:

I was both a snob and a revolutionary.... I loosely described myself as a Socialist. But I had not much grasp of what Socialism meant, and no notion that the working class were human beings. At a distance, I could agonise over their sufferings, but I still hated them and despised them when I came anywhere near them.... I seem to have spent half the time in denouncing the capitalist system and the other half in raging over the insolence of bus-conductors [RWP 130-32].

The five years he spent as an imperial policeman in Burma gave him a real hatred of oppression. He left the job, but felt the need for a fuller escape: "I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants." The working class began to enter his consciousness, but only, he admitted, as "the symbolic victims of injustice". His ignorance meant that he turned, not towards industrial workers, but towards "tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes.... 'the lowest of the low'": by living as one of them, he thought, "I should have touched bottom, and part of my guilt would drop from me". During his time as a tramp—described in his first book *Down and Out in Paris and London*—he was accepted for the first time by people of another class; but he soon realised that this was not the typical life of the working class: "unfortunately you do not solve the class problem by making friends with tramps" (RWP 138-43).

Orwell's political position was frankly confused, then, as he struggled in his early thirties to make a living as a writer. He hated exploitation, felt guilty about the part he had personally played in it, and yearned for some way of ending it. Barriers of class, prejudice, ignorance and misunderstanding stood in the way of throwing in his lot with the working class. So when his publisher commissioned him in early 1936 to write a book on poverty in the industrial north of England, it could hardly have come at a better time. As well as seeing and exposing the reality of mass unemployment, it would allow him "to see the most typical section of the English working class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism." (RWP 113.)

A sort of honorary proletarian

The months Orwell spent in working-class areas of northern England left him with profound admiration and respect for the workers he met and lived with. "I have seen just enough of the working class to avoid idealising them", he wrote, but he came away thinking their lifestyle superior to his own:

There is much in middle-class life that looks sickly and debilitating when you see it from a working-class angle.

In a working-class home—I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes—you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages—an 'if' which gets bigger and bigger—has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man.

A working-class home "is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted" (RWP 106-8).

This was where Orwell had a problem. For all the help and kindness he received, he told his diary, "I cannot get them to treat me precisely as an equal" (CEJL I 199).

For some months I lived entirely in coal-miners' houses. I ate my meals with the family, I washed at the kitchen sink, I shared bedrooms with miners, drank beer with them, played darts with them, talked to them by the hour together. But though I was among them, and I hope and trust I was not a nuisance, I was not one of them, and they knew it even better than I did. However much you like them, however interesting you

find their conversation, there is always that accursed itch of class-difference, like the pea under the princess's mattress [RWP 145].

The differences between him and the workers he met were real, and couldn't be wished away: "it is no use clapping a proletarian on the back and telling him that he is as good a man as I am"; what was needed was "a complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life" (RWP 150).

Orwell had abandoned the position of his own class and was committing to the position of the working class. He was too brutally honest to pretend that this transition would be painless. Most people who would have counted for middle-class back then have since been swept into the working class, and habits and lifestyles have converged to a large extent across the broad span of working people. But in the 1930s there was a huge gulf between industrial workers and the likes of Orwell. His journey to the working class was a real leap, and he was under no illusion that that leap could be avoided by a bit of slumming, or by letting on that there was no leap to be made.

At the same time, he did make too much of the difference. True, the snobbery he was reared with had to be eradicated, he had to see and treat workers as equals. But there was no need to abandon the harmless aspects of his middle-class heritage. To understand the world from a working-class point of view and to fight accordingly—this was essential. But drinking tea from a saucer or eating peas with a knife had nothing to do with the essence of the working-class struggle. The unemployed miner who showed him round Sheffield, who accepted him in spite of his background, had a sounder attitude: "he told me at the very start I was a bourgeois and remarked on my 'public school twang'. However, I think he was disposed to treat me as a sort of honorary proletarian" (CEJL I 221).

Middle-class versus working-class socialism

Orwell's agonising over the issue was not entirely personal. Many socialists of a similar background to his own, he felt, only stood with the working class in the abstract: "most middle-class Socialists, while theoretically pining for a classless society, cling like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige". Their adherence to socialism didn't stop them preferring the company and manners of their own class to that of the workers. At the root of this was their conception of socialism itself: "The truth is that to many people, calling themselves Socialists, revolution does not mean a movement of the masses with which they hope to associate

themselves; it means a set of reforms which 'we', the clever ones, are going to impose upon 'them', the Lower Orders." (RWP 162, 167.)

Orwell's attack on middle-class socialists in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, where he damned them all as cranks, went way over the top. And anyway, the lessening of the gap in the meantime has left elitist left-wingers with less of a height from which to look down their nose. But such creatures do exist: the 'socialist' whose contribution to the cause is attending a fundraising cocktail party for Ruairi Quinn; who counts the silver after the man has come to fix the washing machine; who wants to bestow blessings from on high upon an ignorant proletariat. Even on the real left, a far more benign version of the problem sometimes manifests itself. Differences of income, education, status lead to differences of attitude which are no less real for being unconscious. Who can deny the persistence of the type of thing Orwell heard from participants at a socialist summer school: "working-class people were annoyed by patronizing airs put on by some of the others" (CEJL I 244)?

However, Orwell didn't hold out much of a prospect for working-class socialism either. While he wrote that the working-class socialist "is one of the finest types of man we have" (RWP 152), he was none too impressed with the "sheeplike crowd" at a left-wing social: "I suppose these people represented a fair cross-section of the more revolutionary element in Wigan. If so, God help us." (CEJL I 207.) Socialist theory meant nothing to the workers:

Socialism in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle class... a working man, so long as he remains a genuine working man, is seldom or never a Socialist in the complete, logically consistent sense... To the ordinary working man, the sort you would meet in any pub on Saturday night, Socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter hours and nobody bossing you about... no genuine working man grasps the deeper implications of Socialism.

A working-class socialist, like a working-class Catholic, had no understanding of the doctrine, "but he has the heart of the matter in him" (RWP 161-4, 206).

All this was meant as a compliment. For the intellectual, Orwell is saying, socialism is only a theoretical proposition for a rational re-arrangement of society; for the worker, it is a heartfelt commitment to justice and freedom. But what about the workers who believed in socialism

heart and soul, but also had a theoretical foundation to underpin it? Most of the workers who showed Orwell round were socialist activists, who took a conscious part in trying to change their conditions, and had read their Marx and other left-wing literature. Orwell wrote that he was "surprised by the amount of Communist feeling here" (*CEJL* I 201), which can only be put down to a mixture of ignorance and preconception. And so he was left with a dichotomy between "the warm-hearted unthinking Socialist, the typical working-class Socialist" on the one hand, and "the intellectual, book-trained Socialist" on the other (*RWP* 169). The warm-hearted, thinking working-class socialist doesn't appear to have existed for him.

Working-class suffering and working-class consciousness do meet up, however, at one point in Orwell's journey. He sees a young woman trying to unblock a drainpipe, a woman whose face has

the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that 'It isn't the same for them as it would be for us', and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her—understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe [*RWP* 15].

The *us* and *them* of this passage are coming together: the socialist from a middle-class background looks at a worker contending with poverty, and realises that the two of them are at one on the matter. Orwell saw this incident while walking along a back alley near the beginning of his stay in the north, but in *The Road to Wigan Pier* he sets a different scene: he sees the woman from the train as he is returning south. What he takes away with him is the potential of an alliance with the working class, but also a mindfulness of his status as an outsider.

The air of equality

That alliance was finally forged—albeit temporarily—in Spain, where Orwell went at the end of 1936 to fight Franco. His description of revolutionary Barcelona is justly celebrated: "It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle." People treated each other as equals, as comrades, and the ruling class seemed to have disappeared. The situation was "queer and moving" to Orwell; "There was much in it I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I

recognised it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for." (*HC* 2-3.)

As a soldier in a revolutionary militia he was on terms of equality with workers, living, working and fighting together with them in a way that refigured a socialist community:

one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism. One had breathed the air of equality.... For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like [*HC* 83-4].

The personal comradeship he established with workers broke down the old barriers that had haunted him. He paid tribute to the "essential decency" of the Catalan working class, "their straightforwardness and generosity". Amid the confusing infighting on the anti-fascist side, a new-found instinct led him in the right direction: "I have no particular love for the idealised 'worker' as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on." (*HC* 10, 104.)

He came back a different person, confirmed in his socialism. "I have seen wonderful things", he told a friend, "& at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before." (*CEJL* I 301.) The experience made "my desire to see Socialism established much more actual" (*HC* 84). Orwell finally believed in socialism fully when he finally became a part of the working class in revolution.

Workers and theorists

It would be fair to describe Orwell's politics in this period as revolutionary socialist. Although this was no longer the case a couple of years later, he retained a resolute opposition to the Stalinist perversion of socialism, and clung to the idea that socialism was about freedom for the working class. He traced these two divergent conceptions of socialism to two divergent elements of the socialist movement: "the word 'Socialism' means something quite different to a working man from what it means to a middle-class Marxist" (*CEJL* I 371).

He saw this distinction in the membership of the British Communist Party. The socialism of its middle-class leadership "amounts simply to

nationalism and leader-worship in their most vulgar forms, transferred to the U.S.S.R." Stalinism provided them with a religion to believe in after their traditional middle-class values had disintegrated. On the other hand, "it is possible to respect" the working-class Communists, who "cannot always be rigidly faithful to the 'line'" (CEJL II 175). These rank-and-file members supported the party "without necessarily understanding its policies" (CEJL I 563).

Again, Orwell is with the real socialism of the workers against the fake socialism of the intellectuals, but this working-class socialism is premised on political ignorance. He is prepared to welcome workers' rule, but sees such rule being based on morality instead of political analysis:

My chief hope for the future is that the common people have never parted company with their moral code. I have never met a genuine working man who accepted Marxism, for instance. I have never had the slightest fear of a dictatorship of the proletariat, if it could happen, and certain things I saw in the Spanish war confirmed me in this. But I admit to having a perfect horror of a dictatorship of theorists, as in Russia or Germany [CEJL I 583].

While placing his hope in the workers, he sees their fight as an unconscious one. "The struggle of the working class is like the growth of a plant", he wrote: "The plant is blind and stupid, but it knows enough to keep pushing upwards towards the light" (CEJL II 299).

Spain had brought Orwell face to face with even more politically-conscious workers. He had no excuse for denying that working-class socialists and socialist theory could go together. But the heated political arguments in the trenches appear to be the one aspect of the Spanish revolution that left him cold—until Stalinist repression left him with no choice but to come to grips with them. Orwell was never one for the theory of socialism: it was good enough for him that the world was wrong, and that socialism could put it right. The argument that theoretical work was needed to achieve that didn't convince him—perhaps because it often came from those who had abandoned that necessary commitment to justice. When he adopted a faith in socialism, and in the capacity of the working class to achieve it, he seems to have transposed his own anti-theoretical, ethical approach to them.

Some animals are more equal than others?

Orwell's classic fable *Animal Farm* (1945) is relevant here, as it is essentially the story of a workers' revolution betrayed by its leaders. Why, exactly, are the leaders, the pigs, able to subvert the animals' revolution, setting up a tyranny of their own in place of the old tyranny of the humans? T S Eliot gave one answer when rejecting the book on behalf of his publishers, an answer that enjoys some currency much further to his left: "Your pigs are far more intelligent than the other animals, and therefore the best qualified to run the farm.", he wrote. "What was needed (someone might argue) was not more communism but more public-spirited pigs." (Shelden 403.)

At first sight this reading seems plausible. After all, right from the beginning, even before the revolution, "The work of teaching and organising the others fell naturally upon the pigs, who were generally recognised as being the cleverest of the animals." The faithful horses "had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves, but having once accepted the pigs as their teachers they absorbed everything that they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments" (AF 9-11). So, on the face of it, the educated leaders have to do the thinking on behalf of their stupid followers.

But before leaping to denounce a libel on the working class, readers would do well to remind themselves that Orwell is writing a satire. He tells the tale in a deliberate tone of naive, deadpan innocence: every betrayal of the pigs is related as they themselves would relate it, in a sort of official report. When the pigs keep the milk to themselves, when they drive out Snowball, when they start to trade with humans, the book tells us that the animals at first thought something was up, but soon saw that such measures were of course necessary. To claim that this pig's-eye view is Orwell's view—that to him some animals are indeed more equal than others—is like reading *A Modest Proposal* and concluding that Jonathan Swift favoured the eating of children.

This is clear, for instance, from the matter of animal literacy. The pigs learned to read and write perfectly before the revolution; the horses managed a few letters of the alphabet, but couldn't form words; and most of the animals couldn't get beyond the letter A. This is not because the pigs are naturally gifted and the other animals (by implication, the working class) naturally thick. Socialists shouldn't need telling that illiteracy results from a deficient educational system, not a lack of intelligence. That the pigs cultivated the ignorance of the other animals can be seen from the

ironical observation that, despite their illiteracy, "The reading and writing classes, however, were a great success." (AF 20.)

The revolution that fails in *Animal Farm* is not actually a revolution of the working class for freedom, the thing Orwell hoped for, but the thing Orwell feared: a revolution of leaders who care nothing for justice, and use the workers to bring themselves to power. From the word go, the pigs are in the driving seat:

The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership.... It was always the pigs who put forward the resolutions.... It had come to be accepted that the pigs, who were manifestly cleverer than the other animals, should decide all questions of farm policy [AF 17, 19, 31].

The other animals had accepted the pigs as their natural superiors, and that was their undoing. In the same way, Orwell is saying, the workers should rely on themselves and be wary of all leaders. He even spelt it out:

I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job.... What I was trying to say was, 'You can't have a revolution unless you make it for yourself; there is no such thing as a benevolent dictatorship.' [Shelden 407.]

However, the chances of a revolution made by the masses themselves is lessened by a belief, such as Orwell's, that it would be based on morality without theory. Repeatedly, the animals twig that things have gone wrong; what they lack is the framework to conceptualise their feelings:

Several of them would have protested if they could have found the right arguments.... Once again the animals were conscious of a vague uneasiness.... If she [Clover, the horse] could have spoken her thoughts, it would have been to say that this was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to work for the overthrow of the human race.... Such were her thoughts, though she lacked the words to express them [AF 36, 43, 58-9].

This lack of theory leaves a vacuum that treacherous leaders can fill; the way to stop them is for the workers to fill it themselves.

Hope in the proles?

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949) is also the story of a failed rebellion, Winston Smith's rebellion against Big Brother and the Party. He seems to put his trust in the working class. "If there is hope," he says several times, "it lies in the proles." (NEF 72.) But the proles, to him, are a herd of unthinking animals:

They needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies.... people who had never learned to think but who were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world. If there was hope, it lay in the proles!... Out of those mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come [NEF 73, 229-30].

He sees the proles as rebellion-fodder, not human beings, as explosive material to blow up the system, suppliers of brawn not brain.

Winston's own contact with the proles is non-existent, unless we count his distasteful encounter with a prostitute. When he hears an argument in the street, he imagines the revolution dawning, only to dismiss it as a meaningless row over a shortage of pots. He goes on what is virtually an anthropological field trip to the prole part of town, and gets talking to an old man. The man remembers the things that interest him—including a socialist meeting, and his anger at upper-class arrogance—but Winston is disappointed, because the man has failed to fill in his preconceived verbal questionnaire for him.

Winston never understands that dissatisfaction over shortages could lead on to something bigger, or that the reminiscences of the old man might contain germs of class-consciousness.

even when they became discontented, as they sometimes did, their discontent led nowhere, because, being without general ideas, they could only focus it on petty specific grievances. The larger evils invariably escaped their notice.... They were like the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones [NEF 75, 96-7].

Instead of taking the present position and attitude of the proles as his starting point, he demands that they should adopt his own starting point—and dismisses them when they don't. His belief in them is only theoretical: "if there was hope, it lay in the proles.... When you put it in words it

sounded reasonable: it was when you looked at the human beings passing you on the pavement that it became an act of faith." (NEF 89.)

A facile but stubborn trend in Orwell criticism insists on identifying the author with his central characters. Not only does this overlook the fact that Orwell was a writer; in the case of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it stands in the way of understanding his politics. Orwell's scepticism over the theoretical potential of the working class is an awful long way away from Winston's patronising view of the proles as noble savages. His attitude is that of the type of middle-class intellectual Orwell had been criticising for years: "Nationalistic loyalty towards the proletariat, and most vicious theoretical hatred of the bourgeoisie, can and often do co-exist with ordinary snob-bishness" (CEJL III 424). For one brief moment it occurs to Winston that the proles are human beings, but—a bit like Orwell as a teenager—his feeling for them never gets the better of his contempt for them. Because hope really does lie in the proles themselves, and not in those who would lead them by the nose, it is little wonder that he ends up loving Big Brother.

Worth fighting for

The underlying feature of Orwell's socialism—both its good and its bad sides—is that he understood the indissoluble link between socialism and the working class. For him, socialism was a movement of the workers to create a decent and free life for themselves, or it was nothing. This is why he saw his own journey to socialism as a journey to the working class, why he was determined to get to know them and their lives, why he unnecessarily agonised over the barriers between him and them. This is why his involvement in the Spanish revolution, when the workers were briefly in the saddle, influenced him so profoundly. This is why he fought with all his might against those who saw socialism as something other than the liberation of the working class.

The big shortcoming of Orwell's socialism is his opposition to theory. His unwillingness to see socialist theory among workers had nothing to do with underestimating the mental capacities of the working class, and everything to do with underestimating the need for theory in the fight for socialism. He had seen and heard so many on the left propounding socialist theory *in opposition* to the ideas of justice and equality, that it never occurred to him that a socialist theory could *support* the ideas of justice and equality. Without such a theory, his socialism could only be revolutionary as long as revolution seemed an immediate prospect. When revolution did present itself, as it did in Spain, he embraced it with open arms. For those

working to elaborate and spread a theory of workers' revolution fifty years after his death, Orwell's reaction to Barcelona can apply to our opinion of his socialism. There is much in it we cannot understand, in some ways we cannot even like it, but we should recognise it immediately as a kind of socialism worth fighting for.

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