

Marxist Perspectives on Irish Society

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Edited by

Micheal O'Flynn, Odette Clarke,
Paul M. Hayes and Martin J. Power

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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BRIDGING MARXISM: ACADEMIA AND THE IRISH LEFT

MICHEAL O'FLYNN, ODETTE CLARKE,
PAUL M. HAYES AND MARTIN J. POWER

The origins of this book lie with a reading group that was established at the University of Limerick at the beginning of 2010. This grouping intended to do no more than provide an opportunity for students, academics and non-academic staff, to come together once a week to consider the work of various Marxist writers and their relevance to developments in the contemporary world. It was unusually successful. It revealed a latent but widespread desire to question the capitalist system as a whole (its systemic transformations and its human consequences). The readings were an eclectic mix. However, no matter what the material, one particular concern arose again and again: the very obvious difference between what happened in this extra-curricular environment and what happened in formal academic life. For many it appeared that universities were becoming politics-free zones (i.e. accepting of the dominant 'neo-liberal' parameters of thought and activity). The very existence of the group had revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with the increasingly conservative ethos of academic life, which appeared to dampen critical thinking precisely in areas where it is most needed.

The uncritical nature of teaching, learning, research and dissemination generally raises only very limited objections within the academic setting. This lack of criticism persists at a time when the true exploitative nature of the capitalist system is being revealed daily to all, when the working population and poor are under attack from the same social groups that bare the greatest culpability for producing and/or exacerbating the latest economic collapse. Though the contemporary world can only be understood in the context of capitalism, mainstream academia still systematically avoids anything more than superficial observations of the system that produces the conditions it deals with. This apparent absence of critical thought among professional intellectuals may be partly due to the cutting of public funding and their subsequent dependence on private

funds. Neo-liberal parameters of knowledge confront scholars at every level and from all sides. Academic disciplines are in fact underpinned by a very deep conservatism, finding expression in the respective methodologies and concepts, which are more often than not, developed within the confines of what the ruling class considers safe. The pressure on academic staff and students to operate within such parameters appears to be increasing; for many there appears to be no option but to conform, but for many others the hegemonic neoliberal ethos produces the opposite inclination; attempts to replace critical thinkers with careerists or sycophants invariably generates resistance. To some extent this potential was revealed at the University of Limerick; there was a wide welcome for a new space that was openly Marxist, and where distinctions between undergraduates, professors and non-academics were of no greater importance than the colour of their socks.

The above concerns motivated the reading group to bring Marxist scholars and activists together for a two-day conference; this took place in October 2010 at the University of Limerick. Although we realised the necessity, we were still quite surprised at the amount of messages of support we received from all across the university (including from some very unlikely sources). Though organised on a shoestring budget, and on a bank holiday weekend, the conference still attracted 160 people over the course of the two days. The event highlighted a broad and growing desire to take the ideas of Marx, Engels, and others, seriously again. We considered ourselves privileged to play some small part in the apparent resurgence of Marxism in Irish academia.

For students the conference represented an opportunity to make a distinction between academic caricatures of Marxism and attempts to actually apply the Marxist way of thinking to events of the day. It was also a welcome opportunity for both staff and students to exchange views, and to test their ideas against the knowledge of trade union activists, community groups and leftist political organisations. The one disappointing absence from the conference was a feminist critique. This is perhaps not surprising, for as universities have increasingly focussed on economic development, gender together with class and 'race' have become politically decentred. The popular discourses of personal choice and self-improvement help to obscure the continuing prejudices and discrimination experienced by many women. Terry Eagleton has recently reminded us that the first 'proletariat' were lower class women in ancient society and today the typical proletarian is not the stereotypical blue-collar male, it is still a woman (Eagleton, 2011: 169). It can only be hoped that a critical re-engagement with Marxist theory in the academy will also include a

critique of both capitalism and the opportunistic sexism that accompanies it. The potential for such a re-engagement was evident; the event certainly highlighted the diversity that can and does exist within Marxism, and the kind of debate that can take place when the divisions that still inhibit the development of a united left are temporarily suspended.

At the time that the conference was being organised the left in Ireland was working to achieve some measure of unity and had already gone some way towards coordinating a fight-back against the 'austerity' onslaught. Hopefully, professional intellectuals, academics, researchers, and all of those who directly or indirectly reproduce the dominant ideological forms will find a way to follow suit. In this respect, left academics have much to learn from non-academic activists. A window of opportunity has opened for left thinkers everywhere. The times that we are in require us to move beyond internal debates and to bring any ideas, social commentaries and analyses that are in any way useful into the public domain. It is more and more necessary for those in positions of influence to do something about the general absence of critique of the system and society in which we live. The 'conference committee' decided quite early in 2010 that it should make at least some small gesture in that direction. We hope that our efforts to bring students, academics and activist together, to present and discuss papers that were specifically Marxist, was only part of the beginning of a long overdue revival of the tradition among academics. To this end we realised that it would be great pity not to produce a publication, if only to demonstrate that there are alternative ways to think about Irish political economy, Irish history, Irish society and the possibilities for the future.

The early chapters in the publication go some way towards developing the historical context in which to situate later offerings. To this end, the first chapter offers an examination of the most revolutionary period in modern Irish history (1917-1922). In this chapter, Dominic Haugh proceeds to highlight the inadequacies of mainstream accounts of the period; these have tended to focus almost exclusively on the nationalist movement. His chapter emphasises the role of the Labour Movement, the role of socialist ideas among the Irish working class, the role of Marxists, and thereafter considers the potential that existed for a socialist revolution during this transformative period. In chapter two, Stephen Ryan draws attention to the remarkable forms of revolutionary resistance that developed in rural Ireland in subsequent decades. His chapter looks at the life and activism of revolutionary socialist teacher and campaigner, James Gralton, concentrating on the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary activity in and around the dancehalls of Leitrim, where Gralton's activities were considered such a threat to the status quo that he became the first

natural-born Irishman to be deported from Ireland for his political beliefs (as part of the red scare of the 1930s). In chapter three Micheal O'hAodha offers an interpretation of the life and works of the Irish writer and socialist campaigner, Robert Tressell (also known as Robert Croker, and later in his life as Robert Noonan), who is best known for his novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. O'hAodha considers that Tressell's depiction of the working class and poor as philanthropists, working to support the rich and powerful, has a particular resonance today as their descendants work to pay for the gambling debts of bankers and developers. Chapter four revisits the issue of the 1981 Maze hunger strikes. The author, John McAnulty, draws attention to the class forces at play within and the without the republican movement. He deals with the weakness of the socialist movement in relation to the national question. Although the campaign did manage to generate a mass movement, McAnulty argues that the actual outcome was absorption of republicanism by constitutional nationalism and that, as a result, the Good Friday Agreement and the current settlement arising from it represents a new version of the 'carnival of reaction' prophesied by James Connolly. In chapter five D.R. O'Connor Lysaght takes the opportunity to consider the weaknesses of the left during the neo-liberal era and through the subsequent crisis. He considers the capitalist 'solutions' to the downturn, and the extent to which these are underpinned by continuing neo-liberal 'Celtic Tiger' illusions, arguing that the government demonstrates a complete inability to resolve the local effects of the crises that global neo-liberalism produces. Finally, O'Connor Lysaght considers whether Marxists can work together to develop a real resistance in the interests of the working class. Chapter six takes somewhat of a theoretical turn, followed by an empirical investigation. Tom Turner begins by considering the theoretical and practical divisions between revolutionary and reformist Marxism - thereafter concentrating on how each has dealt with the conflict of interest between capital and labour. He examines these conflicting views in Ireland, drawing on data from Irish Industry to assess the absolute and relative gains to capital and labour for the period 1953 to 1990. In chapter seven Micheal O'Flynn focuses on the class relations underpinning Ireland's 'dependent development' and subsequent economic collapse. The chapter deals with the historical weaknesses of Irish capital, its consequent dependence on the state, its relationship to international capital, its exploitation of opportunities to accumulate during the so-called Celtic Tiger and how ideological forms were transformed during this period. Considering its general strategy, its overall perspective, and the interests to which the Irish ruling class is firmly wedded, O'Flynn argues that any

future progress for the working class can only proceed through mass acts of civil disobedience. In chapter eight Kieran McNulty focuses on the disabled in Irish society. Criticising the medical model of disability, which depicts people with disabilities as unable to fully interact and develop relationships with the rest of their community, McNulty goes on to highlight the limitations of the social model. He draws attention to the establishment of rights for people with disabilities in Ireland, while cautioning that notions of charity with regard to the disabled still exist. He explains that though activists have made considerable gains, they feel that the leadership of the disability movement has lost touch with the radical spirit of people power which first brought it into existence in the 1960's and 1970's. In chapter nine Clare Daly moves to directly confront the ruling class response to the ongoing economic crisis. Initially focusing on the class character of the McCarthy report, Daly warns against what she sees as an impending sell off of the nation's remaining state enterprises – a strategy which she expects to be adopted across the board by the political representatives of the ruling class. Anxiety over the growing national debt is being used to facilitate what she sees as a consistent ruling class strategy in which state enterprises and services make way for profiteers. Daly assesses the strengths and weaknesses of neo-Keynesian and pro-state capitalist perspectives vis-à-vis revolutionary Marxist perspectives in this regard. She insists that common cause between the Marxist left and workers is required, not only to develop a robust resistance, but to plan for the future socialist transformation of Irish society. Chapter ten focuses on what is happening to education in Ireland, by drawing connections with what is happening simultaneously in Britain and globally. The author, Dave Hill, puts forward a Marxist critique of neoliberal/ neoconservative capitalist globalization and its varying impacts. He highlights the subordination of government policy to the neoliberal project of global capital, doing so almost in the form of an open letter, drawing on the development of resistance in Britain and elsewhere, and calling for the development of similar forms of resistance in Ireland. In chapter eleven, Kieran Allen takes a more detailed look at Ireland's ongoing economic crisis. He explains why the government's austerity measures (wage cuts and public sector reduction) will undermine the industries we have come to rely on. His chapter deals with government approved bank bail outs, which were partly designed to secure Ireland's financial services sector. He also deals with the strategy of Irish elites that hope to maintain Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and develop the so-called knowledge economy. Allen argues that the ongoing cuts in public spending, most particularly in education, will undermine any such prospects. He suggests that capitalism

has entered a major systemic crisis and the policies pursued by the Irish government are in fact creating obstacles to recovery. As such, the only viable alternative strategy has become resistance. Finally, in chapter twelve Helena Sheehan offers a personal reflection of her life as a Marxist and left activist in Ireland. She openly admits that life on the left in Ireland, though never dull, was anything but easy. It has not become easier. Marxists (and the left generally) now face a terrifying set of totalising forces. However, Sheehan is certain that the struggle against all conditions in which human beings are exploited, degraded and humiliated will and must continue on into the future.

Any progressive body of thought has to be open, and it has to foster constructive self-criticism. A continuous re-questioning is absolutely necessary among all those trying to understand a system that is continuously changing, evolving and disrupting. Capitalism continuously disrupts the sets of relations, conditions, developments and consequences that we face. Every transformation produces new conditions, which have to be digested and analysed. It is perhaps not surprising then to find that there is more diversity within Marxism than there is outside of it. But that diversity is to be welcomed, even if some views do not appear credible to many. No doubt where there is little difference in analysis there are fewer disagreements and fewer bruised egos. But fewer disagreements usually means less pressure to reassess analysis in light of new knowledge, fewer related controversies and less opportunity to engage in constructive argument. Marxism must remain open, and the left must avoid the inclination to take up positions in an automatic fashion. Now, more than ever before, the world needs a thinking left, but more than that, it needs one that draws on all of its collective resources in order to think and act. This is a roundabout way of saying that the editors of this volume do not necessarily share the views of contributing authors. However it is safe to say that there appears to be at least one common thread running through the entire text: resistance has become essential.

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SOCIALIST REVOLUTION IN IRELAND— A LOST OPPORTUNITY 1916-1922

DOMINIC HAUGH

The period from 1916-1922 was a period of enormous political, economic and social upheaval in Ireland. This period was ushered in by the Easter Rising of 1916 which led to the building of a more militant nationalist movement aimed at complete independence from British imperialism rather than simply accepting the promised Home Rule. It progressed through a War of Independence and the building of competing power structures between British imperialism and Irish nationalism, eventually leading to the partition of the island and a divisive civil war between competing factions of Irish nationalism.

The historiography of this period is dominated by an overarching consideration of the nationalist movement. In this historiography the working class plays little more than a subservient, supporting role to nationalism. From their perspective there is no independent consciousness among the working class, there is no independent class movement outlined and there is no indication of the power of the working class during this period. The question of the potential for a socialist revolution in Ireland during this period is not considered. Yet the history of the Irish working class during this period is far more complex. Major class movements occurred and the Irish working class underwent a rapidly developing radicalism and class consciousness. The leaders of nationalism recognised this and actively pursued a campaign not just against British imperialism, but also against the developing class movement on the island of Ireland (ably assisted by unionism).

This chapter reviews the developments that took place in Ireland during this period from the perspective of the working class. It will consider the nature of the conflict that took place and outline some of the hidden history of the working class of the period. It will argue that socialist revolution in Ireland was a very real prospect and that while Irish nationalism won a partial victory, the workers movement was defeated. It will also outline the failure of the subjective factor, the failure of the

leadership of the trade union and labour movement and the lack of a revolutionary Marxist organisation to play a pivotal role during developments.

In addressing the issue of the potential that existed for socialist revolution in Ireland from 1916-1922 it is necessary to indicate a starting point.

“The socialist revolution is not one single act, not one single battle on a single front; but a whole epoch of intensified class conflicts, a long series of battles on all fronts, i.e., battles around all the problems of economics and politics, which can culminate only in the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure, or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.” (Lenin 1916)

Historians who comment on this period of revolutionary upheaval in Ireland address the issue of the potential of the workers movement in isolation. Either you were a nationalist or a socialist, but you couldn't be both, and as the nationalist movement was dominant then the workers movement had little or no role in events of this period. Furthermore when the influence of the workers movement is acknowledged it is only done so in a fleeting manner.

Hadden (1980) argued that since the first Norman invasion the entire history of Ireland has been a history of struggle against subjugation, conquest and exploitation. This struggle has at all times been more than a battle for mere independence. Conquest meant more than the overrunning of a country. It meant the overthrow of a social system. At every stage the fight to obtain "freedom" has been driven on by the desire of sections of the Irish people to remove one or other form of class rule and oppression. The motor of Irish history has been the social exploitation of its people.

In 1798 the United Irishmen, an armed and secret movement built up over previous years, rose in rebellion. It was one of the greatest movements of the Irish against domination. It welded the Protestant petty bourgeoisie of Belfast and the Protestant tenants of Antrim and Down together with the Catholic peasantry of Connaught, Wexford and elsewhere.

One of the Rising leaders, James Hope, (2008) commented on the attitude of the wealthy classes:

“The new adherents alleged, as a reason for their former reserve, that they thought the societies [are] only a combination of the poor to get the property of the rich.”

The major class differences that emerged during the 1798 rebellion could no longer be put back in the box. The class differences were exemplified by Henry Joy McCracken’s assertion that ‘the rich always betray the poor’. This class conflict continued throughout the nineteenth century.

The property-owning classes have been incapable of pursuing the fight against national domination in Ireland. In particular, since the defeat of the 1798 rebellion, this has been an unmistakable fact of Irish history. Hadden (1980) suggested that the involvement of these classes in any aspect of the national struggle has always been with the objective and the effect of dissolving the social basis and amputating the social demands of that struggle. The tactics and strategy of both Daniel O’Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell are the most striking examples of this during the nineteenth century. As the twentieth century dawned Connolly (1944) was clear in his assessment that “only the working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland”.

In looking at the period following the Easter Rising it is necessary to first address one crucial event pre-1916 in terms of its role and impact on the class struggle. The Dublin lock-out of 1913 is the most unforgettable chapter in the history of the Irish workers movement.

Lenin (1913) outlined his view of the events in Dublin:

“In Dublin, the capital of Ireland—a city of a not highly industrial type, with a population of half a million—the class struggle, which permeates the whole life of capitalist society everywhere, has become accentuated to the point of class war... At the present moment the Irish nationalists (i.e., the Irish bourgeoisie) are the victors. They are buying up the lands of the English landlords; they are getting national *self-government* (the famous Home Rule...)...

Well, this Irish nationalist bourgeoisie is celebrating its “national” victory, its maturity in “affairs of state” by declaring a war to the death on the Irish labour movement....

The Dublin events mark a turning-point in the history of the labour movement and of socialism in Ireland. Murphy has threatened to destroy the Irish trade unions. He has succeeded only in destroying the last remnants of the influence of the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie over, the Irish proletariat. He has helped to steel the independent revolutionary working-class movement in Ireland, which is free of nationalist prejudices.”

Hadden (1980) claimed that with the words "Labour must wait" the nationalists of the post-Easter Rising period attempted to emulate their predecessors and ditched the driving social motivation of the revolt.

Patterson (1979) has outlined his view that the period from 1890 onwards saw the emergence of a well-organised and combative labour movement, a movement that went hand in hand with the building of the British labour movement, and tore the existing Orange and Green Toryism asunder.

On April 20th 1918 a special Labour Movement conference of 1,500 delegates lit the torch of this new workers' movement. It decided to call a one day general strike against conscription. April 23rd, the day of the strike, brought the greatest shut down there had ever been in Ireland. All over the country factories, transport, even pubs remained firmly closed.

Only in the northern area was there an exception - something which has been made much of by those who look for sectarian division in everything. This, they say, was a sign that even the working class movement, north and south, was following different paths.

In fact the evidence indicates that there was broad sympathy in the north, among Protestant and Catholic workers, for this strike. There was no strike only because the union leaders hesitated and did not call workers out in Belfast and other northern areas. Despite this, as outlined by Dillon (1918) in the House of Commons, on the 14 April an anti-conscription meeting was held in Belfast, under the auspices of the Belfast Trades Council and was attended by 20,000 people, mostly Protestants. Mac Donncha (2008) informs us that the following Thursday there was a major demonstration against conscription in Belfast. In Ballycastle, County Antrim, Catholic and Protestant workers marched together with bands playing *The Boyne Water* and *A Nation Once Again*.

The strike showed the power of the working class and gave it confidence in itself. The possibility of united working class action across the entire island forced a climb down from the British government. What followed was an unprecedented strike wave that has yet to be fully researched and recorded – Lenin's 'epoch of intensified class battles'.

Class consciousness had already begun to develop. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, the SPI (1920) claimed an attendance of over 10,000 people that overflowed from the Round Room in the Mansion House onto the street outside. While it is likely that the SPI exaggerated the numbers attending, the fact that the crowd spilled onto the street indicates an attendance in the thousands.

During the conscription crisis tens of thousands of workers attended Mayday protests all over the country. The *Voice of Labour* (1918) reported that in Limerick 15,000 people listened to speeches around three platforms in the Markets Field. A report in the *Limerick Leader* (1918) indicates that class consciousness was continuing to develop, as can be seen from the fact that resolutions were passed paying tribute to '*our Russian comrades who have waged a magnificent struggle for their social and political emancipation*' and a ten point pledge that concluded with the following statement:

"...we pledge ourselves in the name of the oppressed of every land in every age to use all means that may be deemed effective to achieve those objectives".

The beginning of 1919 saw two major class conflicts. The month long engineers strike in Belfast in January and February followed in April with the Limerick Soviet.

Hadden (1980) cites the official history of Belfast Trades Council which indicated that during the strike in Belfast the Trades Council became a virtual organ of workers' government in the city. As this history records the event:

"To an increasing extent the Belfast Trades Council was looked towards as the leadership of the people. The Council formed itself into a "Council of Action" and to a great extent had control over the movement of goods in the city."

Reaction was held at bay by the power of the workers. Initial attempts to invoke sectarianism only added to the workers' strength. At the beginning of February the Orange Order had hung out its true colours by publishing a manifesto calling for a return to work. Each issue of the Belfast Newsletter lamented the manner in which the "Bolsheviks and Sinn Feiners" could mislead the "good workmen" of Belfast. Sir Richard Dawson Bates, secretary to the UUC wrote to Sir James Craig about the strike. In his letter he revealed the total impotence of the forces of the state and the Unionist leaders when confronted with the might of the organised working class. The question of the use of troops against the strikers, he reveals, was discussed and dismissed as "inadvisable". Failure of the strike leadership to appeal for solidarity on an all-Ireland basis helped the reaction regain a foothold. Like the Southern union leadership who failed to mobilise for the election in 1918, the conservative political outlook of the majority of the strike leadership, meant an opportunity to place Labour at the head of developments was lost.

In relation to the Limerick Soviet, Cahill (1990) claims that the Soviet was instigated by the IRA in an effort to stymie the efforts of the British military to arrest the IRA unit involved in Robert Byrne's rescue attempt. O'Callaghan (2010) goes further claiming that its existence was due to the toleration of the British army and that its purpose was not to foment social revolution. He further comments that the Soviet was political rather than industrial as if somehow the two were mutually exclusive. From a Marxist perspective we have to refer back to Lenin's comment that socialist revolution is the product of "battles around all the problems of economics and politics". Irrespective of the issue that sparked the Soviet, the reality is that the workers of Limerick reacted with class instincts, immediately organising their own democratic structures to facilitate the organisation of affairs in the city.

In relation to O'Callaghan's claim of tolerance being shown by the British authorities, Russell (1920) outlined that their tolerance had more to do with the sympathies among the rank and file troops for the striking workers than anything else. During the Soviet a regiment of Scottish troops had to be withdrawn as a result of the fact that they were allowing strikers break the cordon at will.

O'Callaghan (2010) himself quotes from the Workers Bulletin produced by the Soviet Committee:

"The English press is doing its level best to dub it a Sinn Fein one, in the hopes that the English worker will be fooled. However, this is a workers strike and is no more Sinn Fein than any other strike against tyranny and oppression". The article continues "Tommy is not our enemy and we wish him to understand that he is merely a tool of an Imperialistic, Capitalistic Government".

Cahill (1990) cites police reports to show that as early as the previous January Chief Inspector Yeats of the RIC was of the opinion that the ITGWU was overshadowing the active local Sinn Fein clubs in Limerick.

Following the ending of the Soviet there was widespread commentary in imperialist and nationalist circles: The *London Times* (1919) stated that 'the collapse did not come before it demonstrated the power of labour to an impressive degree'. Russell (1920) quotes Markievicz as claiming 'Labour will swamp Sinn Fein'. Mitchell (1995) outlines the report received by the United States Secretary of State which comments that the 'Soviet' was 'not a trade dispute, not a strike against the military, but purely a labour demonstration of bolshevism served out with a flavour of Sinn Fein'.

The Limerick Soviet once again demonstrated that the leadership of the ILPTUC were unwilling to work to ensure that the workers movement took the dominant role in the struggle for national and social independence, deciding instead, as they had repeatedly done, to coat-tail Sinn Féin. Opportunity after opportunity to place Labour as the dominant political force on the island was being wasted by the leadership of the movement. Repeatedly the workers had shown a willingness to move forward in the struggle for class emancipation and repeatedly the leadership was found wanting.

Even some commentators on the left mistakenly suggest that the Limerick Soviet was the highpoint of the workers movement. Kemmy (1990) argued that in the aftermath of the Limerick 'Soviet' the militancy of the workers became dissipated and Kostick (1996) claimed that locally employers regained their previous authority and the workers fell back into passivity. Haugh (2006) outlined that both assertions are incorrect. In the proceeding months the struggle of the workers movement in Limerick, and on a nationwide basis, increased in frequency and intensity.

Mayday 1919 brought hundreds of thousands of workers onto the street. The Workers Solidarity Movement (2008) for example quotes the Belfast Newsletter in describing how "*a little band of disgruntled Red-Socialists*" led 100,000 workers through the streets of Belfast. A general strike was called in April 1920 to force the release of republican activists and labour activists who were being held in jail. As in 1918, the strike once again demonstrated the power of the workers movement and the willingness of workers to struggle not just for political but for social and economic emancipation. Limerick, Cork, Galway became centres of workers' power. So too did smaller towns, even villages. Greaves (1982) outlines that in Tralee the local Trades Council took control, setting up its own 'police'. 'Red Guards' patrolled the streets of Naas. Greaves (1982) also includes a report from Muine Bheag in Co Carlow which gives a flavour of the overall mood: "On the second day of the strike we held a public meeting in the Market Square and publicly proclaimed the establishment of a provisional soviet government...". Additionally, Britain's military commander, Neville MacCready, arriving in Dublin during this strike, stated: "Red murder stalked through the length and breadth of the land".

Foster (1989) comments that during 1921 the cause of labour was threatening to displace the cause of the republic in many areas of the country. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, he doesn't develop this assertion any further. So let's look at the situation.

By 1920 widespread strike action was taking place all over the country. Workplace occupations and soviets were emerging with regularity. It is still to be determined the actual scale and quantity of these soviets.

The first of these workplace soviets in Limerick occurred in May 1920. The workers declared that ‘we make butter not profits’ and hoisted the red flag and the tricolour over the Knocklong creamery and its twelve auxiliaries. O’Callaghan (2010) claims that ‘it was republican flavoured butter’ because the tricolour resided beside the red flag on the roof. Again, for him, because the tricolour was in evidence, nationalism must have been the driving force behind the political outlook of the workers. In reality the driving force was the desire for self-determination in political, economic and social terms. The Knocklong Soviet was a conscious political act organised and carried out under the direction of the local Marxist industrial organisers of the ITGWU, Sean Dowling, Jack McGrath and Jack Hedley. It was designed to demonstrate to workers that they possessed the power and ability to run their own affairs. The Knocklong Soviet was an enormous success as all the workers demands were met and the prestige and influence of the ITGWU and the Marxists were significantly increased. In the following months workers engaged in a major strike wave and in widespread occupations in Munster.

The Knocklong Soviet was also the first demonstration of the fear within the nationalist leadership of the potential of the class war. From this point on, not only were the Sinn Féin leadership engaging in a nationalist struggle with British Imperialism, they were conducting a class war against the workers movement. As Hadden (1980) outlined, within a nationalist or a republican all-class alliance there are those whose sights are on a socialist republic and others whose minds are filled with the vision of a capitalist republic or nation - with themselves in charge. These strands are always separated by the pull of the class struggle. The class struggle in Ireland was now intensive in scale. It was threatening to pull the nationalist movement asunder.

The potential for Labour was demonstrated in the local elections in January 1920. After the decision by the leadership not to contest the 1918 election, Labour in 1920 won 394 seats in comparison to 550 for Sinn Féin. In an election that Sinn Féin expected to win an overwhelming mandate they secured barely 30% of the available seats and Labour had demonstrated firmly the level of support for a socialist movement. A report in the *Dail Eireann Secretariat Files* (1922) indicated that the Labour vote in Belfast “was not Carsonite, but clearly internationalist” in outlook.

The *Dail Ministry for Home Affairs* (1921) described events as ‘a grave danger threatening the foundations of the Republic’. It went on to say:

“1920 was no ordinary outbreak...an immense rise in the value of land and farm products threw into more vivid relief than ever before the high profits of ranchers, and the hopeless outlook of the landless men and uneconomic holders...All this was a grave menace to the Republic. The mind of the people was being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war, and there was every likelihood that this class war might be carried into the ranks of the republican army itself which was drawn in the main from the agricultural population and was largely officered by farmer’s sons...The republican police had been established just in time to grapple with the growing disorder and withstood the strain upon its own discipline”.

O’Connor (1988) has outlined that employers were becoming alarmed at the implications of the class nature of the struggle and were becoming particularly annoyed at the failure of the nationalist authorities to suppress law-breaking and violence during strikes. The *Watchword of Labour* (1920) reported that the Irish Farmers Association advocated the establishment of a body, the Farmers Freedom Force, intended to provide a “permanent organised body in each branch...capable of meeting force by force...in the interests of the country and of the farmer”. In response to agricultural labour strikes they claimed the “F.F.F. should take action as may be required”. The farmers’ organisations made clear their priority in political terms, “the F.F.F. is required as a national bulwark against Labour, Socialism and Bolshevism, irrespective of whatever political developments may take place in the country”.

The economic downturn in 1921 was now having a major impact on developments. Cullen (1987) reports that the index of agricultural prices fell from 288 in 1920 to 160 by 1924. O’Connor (1992) outlined that during 1921 manufacturing trade was almost halved and by December 1921 over twenty six per cent of workers were idle. The *Dail Eireann Secretariat Files* (1922) quote Markievicz, writing in the aftermath of the truce, as stating that:

“the unemployed are already looking to us to do something towards providing work...one has to face the fact that complaints have come to this office of men of the I.R.A. taking part in labour disputes. Evidence has also come to me that in some areas the workers are not willing to submit to the authority of their Executive and are beginning to get out of hand. What is to be feared in the near future is:- small local outbreaks growing more and more frequent and violent, the immediate result of which will be,

destruction of property and much misery which will tend to disrupt the Republican cause”.

With the economic collapse, a full scale class war was now being waged by the business class, the farmers and the Provisional Government. O'Connor Lysaght (1981) outlines that threats were made that the IRA would be used to remove striking workers from occupied workplaces. This claim is supported by reports of decisions made by the *Dail Ministry for Home Affairs* (1921). Sinn Fein attempted to set up subservient 'Irish' trade unions in an attempt to cut across the leftward trajectory of the workers movement. Their efforts had minimal success but to demonstrate their seriousness, they drew up plans to engage in armed attacks against members of British based unions in the eventuality of workers being prevented by force from joining an Irish union.

By the end of 1921 major strikes involving farm labourers were breaking out all over the country. Workers in the agricultural sector had taken over in excess of 100 workplaces all across Munster. The *Irish Times* (1922) reported that at a farmers meeting in Geary's Hotel in Limerick, Laffan, then a Sinn Fein chairman of Limerick County Council, said that 'this struggle threatened the very lives and liberties of the farmers'. He claimed that all lawful government was being ignored and he proposed a resolution stating that 'we forbid our members to supply the red flag, which is the flag of revolution and anarchy...we look for protection from our government to assert our right as free citizens'. A further report from the *Irish Times* (1922) outlines that a meeting of the Executive of the Irish Farmer's Union on 18th May took up the demands. The meeting stated that they did not want communism in Ireland and delegates claimed that acts of sabotage were being carried out and that farmers were being forced to supply the creameries at gun-point. Mr. M. Doran stated that 'if the government would not govern they should be told to get out', while Rev. Father Maguire from Co. Monaghan made an appeal to those responsible for social order to expel those who had invaded private property.

The *Munster News* (1922) reported that Martial Law was imposed by the IRA around Kilmallock. O'Seioighe (1987) indicated that 200 IRA men were drafted in to patrol the locality. All over the country the IRA were engaged in assisting farmers to break the labourer's strikes. Even at this late stage the potential existed for the workers movement to defeat the actions of the nationalist movement who were now operating with the assistance of British Imperialism. Once again the leadership was found wanting. O'Brien and the ITGWU leaders abandoned the workers at the height of the battle and systematically removed the left-wing union

organisers as the strikes were defeated. Cahill (1990) outlined that the ITGWU went from 5,000 members in 1916 to 120,000 members in 1920, however the membership of the ITGWU was to collapse again in the period of reaction following the emergence of the Free State.

The period from 1917-1922 demonstrated the cross-class nature of nationalism and the threat of class struggle to pull this cross-class alliance asunder. Repeatedly during the period, the working class demonstrated the strength and organisation to lead the movement for social, economic and political emancipation. Every time the workers movement stood at the head of events, the leadership was to derail the movement. The Marxists in the Irish Labour Movement during this period played a huge role in assisting both the industrial organising of workers and in the development of a class consciousness among the working class.. They fought with determination and selflessness in conjunction with the workers they represented. Syndicalism was the predominant political philosophy of the movement during this period and as a result the Marxists in the movement failed to recognise the importance of building a revolutionary party for the class struggle. Despite having established small revolutionary groups they were never more than minor propaganda groups in the general developments of the period. The possibility of socialist revolution in Ireland between 1917-1922 was a realistic prospect but was unfulfilled because of the failure of subjective factors, primarily the betrayal of the leadership of the Labour Movement. For the working class the period was a lost opportunity to achieve social, political and economic emancipation.

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CLASS CONFLICT IN SOUTH LEITRIM

STEPHEN RYAN

This chapter examines the ‘red scare’ in Ireland in the 1930s as it is manifested in one particular flashpoint in what was described as an era of ‘class conflict and coercion’ (English, 1994). It re-examines the deportation from Ireland of James Gralton, a naturalised American citizen, who was born in Effernagh, Co. Leitrim. Gralton had the unique tag of being the only Irish born citizen ever to have been deported by a native government for political activity. Gralton’s deportation arose as the capitalist superstructure of the nascent ‘Free State’ sought to suppress the pedagogy and communication of class consciousness.

As the British Empire was passing its zenith, the ‘spectre of communism’ sought to haunt Ireland. James Connolly, a socialist and a leader of the 1916 rising, seeing independence as a prerequisite for Irish socialist success, struck a blow against the British Empire on behalf of the Irish working class (English, 1994). Connolly united with separatist republicans to achieve these socialist gains. Just as Connolly amalgamated his efforts with other separatists to further his cause, the IRA in the struggle that was to ensue, consisted of an assortment of people from different political codes and with different political beliefs. The Irish War of Independence, where the Gralton saga began, did however, have a distinct red tinge.

Gralton was born in 1886. The son of a small farmer, he left Leitrim at a young age and joined the British Army. Gralton was a member of the 1st Royal Irish Regiment in Cork that was due to be posted to India (Feeley, 1986). He refused to go on the grounds that, he was a conscientious objector to the suppression of the people of India. For this he was court-martialled and sentenced to a year in prison. On his release he deserted the army (Gralton, 1991). Working in various labouring jobs in England and Wales, Gralton then travelled the world working as a stoker on a tramp steamer. In 1907, he emigrated to New York, where he worked as a barman before joining the U.S. Navy. On joining the navy he was automatically endowed with U.S. citizenship. In the U.S., Gralton became politically active. He joined Clann na Gael but became disillusioned with

its conservative nature. He also joined the Communist Party of America and was a founding member of the James Connolly Club in New York (Feeley, 1986).

When the War of Independence broke out in Ireland in 1919, Gralton began fundraising for the cause. Two years later, in the dying weeks of the war, he returned to Ireland. He handed over the money he had raised to the IRA leadership and was put to work training the volunteers in the use of arms (Gralton, 1991). The preponderance of nationalism in the historiography of the Irish War of Independence has been at the expense of studies into this active period in working class political life. Within the opening months of the war a general strike in Limerick resulted in the formation of the 'Limerick Soviet' led by the city's United Trades and Labour Council. Other soviets, similar to the models that existed in the Soviet Union, appeared in Knocklong and Castleconnell in County Limerick and Broadford in County Clare. Quarterstown Mills outside Mallow in County Cork had been seized by workers and in Mungret, County Limerick a cattle drive had been organised (McCarthy, 1980). These examples give a flavour of the social unrest and class syndicalism that peppered the Irish War of Independence. This context meant that when the truce came into effect on the 11 July 1921, and Gralton focused his attention on dealing with social issues in Leitrim, his actions reflected the context of the time. He formed the Leitrim Direct Action Committee which coordinated seizures of land and organised cattle drives off large estates (O'Farrell, 1996).

In March 1921, Lieutenant Wilson of the Bedfordshire Regiment was killed in an ambush at Sheemore Mountain, near Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim (*Freeman's Journal*, 1921). As a reprisal, the Black and Tans burned out the Temperance Hall in Gowel. As part of Gralton's social efforts he sought to replace the burnt out parochial hall. Dance halls were a fixation amongst the Catholic hierarchy of Ireland. They were identified on several occasions as the 'most dangerous source of corruption in the country' (Gibbons, 1996). In 1925, the bishops' statement on the evils of dancing was read quarterly from the pulpit and the sentiment was echoed in the conservative media (Bourke, 2002). As such, the replacement of the Temperance Hall with a dance hall, independent of church control and influence, was considered an institutional challenge (Gibbons, 1996). Building it on his father's land and partly funded by himself, he mobilised volunteers from the community to bring the project to fruition. Gralton received considerable flak from the clergy with Fr McGaver, a priest in Kiltubrid, using such evocative rhetoric as 'the Antichrist' to describe him (Gralton, 1991).