

DEVELOPING THE CASE FOR A REPUBLICAN SOCIALIST, ALL-ISLANDS, 'INTERNATIONALISM FROM BELOW' COALITION IN A REVIEW OF THREE BOOKS

[Allan Armstrong](#) reviews *Ireland's Partition: Coda to counterrevolution* by John McNulty; *Anois ar theact an tSamhraidh - Ireland, Colonialism and Unfinished Revolution* by Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston; and *The State of Northern Ireland and the Democratic Deficit: Between Sectarianism & Neo-Liberalism*, by Paul Stewart, Tommy McKearney, Georoid O'Machail, Patricia Campbell and Brian Garvey



**Dustbin lid resistance
West Belfast**

**Poll tax resistance
Edinburgh**

Introduction

Part 1 of this review examines the historical points raised in John McAnulty's book, *Ireland's Partition: Coda to counterrevolution*.¹ I have dealt with its more contemporary politics with regard to Irish reunification elsewhere.² The historical section of John's book makes reference to the wider British imperial policies which flowed from the UK's experience in trying to handle the Irish Republican challenge from 1916-23. In the process, the British ruling class pioneered a neo-colonial approach in Ireland, including the use of partition, which later came to be applied elsewhere. However, John's book then concentrates on the working out of partition in 6 Counties, Northern Ireland and 26 Counties, Irish Free State (later the Republic of Ireland). And his later chapters largely confine their arguments within these geographical limits. This may well be due to considerations of space in a short book.

However, Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston, in their "*Anois ar theact an tSamhraidh - Ireland, Colonialism and Unfinished Revolution*,"³ undertake a much longer historical analysis of Ireland and its role both within and challenging the British Empire. This also covers the period addressed in John's book. Their book has a very contemporary relevance in the wider world today. This has been highlighted by Black Lives Matter and the call for open borders on one hand, and on the other by the political pull on the EU to define European citizenship on ethnic/cultural grounds (those who accept the 'progressive' nature of Enlightenment Europe), on racial grounds ('White'), or even on religious grounds (Christian). The wider significance of their book has been picked up by Ronin Lentin in *Race and Class*.⁴ As well as having much relevance in Ireland today, many of the arguments apply to Scotland too, and indeed McVeigh and Rolston provide some historical parallels. Union and Empire have always gone together. And that Union began with Scotland 1707 to be extended to Ireland in 1801. So, the main purpose of part 1 of this review is to try to gain a better understanding of the particular unionist relationship of Ireland, later Northern Ireland to the rest of the United Kingdom (UK). Up to 1998, Great Britain was

politically represented by the unitary state at Westminster and its bureaucracy at Whitehall. There was only administrative devolution for Scotland and Wales, and from 1972-1998 in Northern Ireland (although in this case subordinate to the UK's military and security forces). Since the 1998 'Devolution-all-round' settlement, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have had a shared constitutionally recognised, politically devolved status within the UK, although the political nature of each devolved assembly or parliament is different. It is through an understanding of the nature of the UK state and its changes that a better appreciation can be gained of the politics of the Socialist, Labour and trade union movements and of the Nationalist parties and movements, which John addresses in his book.

Part 2 of this review will take up McVeigh and Rolstons' arguments and extend them to contemporary Scotland. Part 3 will examine *The State of Northern Ireland and the Democratic Deficit: Between Sectarianism & Neo-Liberalism*, by Paul Stewart, Tommy McKearney, Georoid O'Machail, Patricia Campbell and Brian Garvey.⁵ All of these writers have been deeply involved in the political economic and social struggles in Ireland. Most recently four have been involved in the Independent Workers Union (IWU) in Ireland. The other writer has been involved in Irish language activism. This is one arena where the unfulfilled promises of the post-GFA agreements have become more and more evident. This is leading to the re-emergence of the 'cultures of resistance' which became marginalised in the lead up to and after GFA. Furthermore, the authors show an understanding of the significance of 2014 Scottish Independence referendum and the challenge the wider independence movement is making to the UK state. The political origins of the wider unofficial Yes Movement resistance lay not in the SNP leadership but in the 'communities of resistance' organised in Anti-Poll Tax Unions and Federations in Scotland. They then went on to take the campaign, on an 'internationalism from below' basis to England and Wales.⁶ Following this, part 3 returns to the argument made in the earlier review,⁷ about the need for an 'internationalism from below' challenge to the UK state and its imperialist alliance with the USA.

PART ONE

Ireland's Partition: Coda to counterrevolution by John McAnulty - a historical and political review

a) The history of Partition

John's Chapter One, *Partition: a last stand against democracy*, states that, "What was invariant throughout the {post-1921 Treaty} turmoil was the undemocratic nature of the Unionist and British interventions and the inherent instability and violence of the settlement. Having failed to destroy the Irish demand for independence, partition was a last gasp mechanism to hobble the further progress of democracy. Ireland was a giant laboratory where a series of strategies designed to subvert the global waves of anti-colonialism were hammered out."⁸

This clear statement does locate the experience of Ireland during the War of Independence within a wider global, and in particular, British imperial framework. John describes the period when the UK government, led by the post-war Tory dominated, War Coupon coalition, was living through the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave and facing other anti-imperial challenges, e.g. in Egypt, Iraq and India.⁹ In the face of these unforeseen circumstances, the government experimented with neo-colonial strategies. And lessons learned in one arena were transferred to another, e.g. when Winston Churchill despatched 800 former Black and Tans to Palestine.¹⁰

But John points out that "the strangest thing about the {1916-23/5} conflict from a modern perspective was the lack of focus on partition." He asks, "Why was this?" and argues that "In part, the lack of division on partition itself was as a result of the low level of politics within the nationalist movement, itself fed by the relative abstinence of the Labour movement and the trade unions. The Labour reformists played the role of peacemakers and referees and the remaining revolutionaries of the Irish Citizen Army were largely absorbed into

the republican forces during the civil war. A final element was the weakness of the Northern nationalists. A minority under siege, the popular front structure of the old Irish Volunteers remained, as did the leadership of the old Irish Party and the Catholic Church. The Labour influence here was violently suppressed by the unionists.”¹¹ John’s suggested factors undoubtedly contributed to Partition. But the following part of this review will examine his “strangest thing” and see how valid it is, and whether other interpretations of these events can be made.

b) The unforeseen emergence of 26 counties Irish nationalists and 6 counties ‘Ulster’ unionists

First, it is worth looking a little more deeply at the “low level of politics within the nationalist movement”? With few exceptions (e.g. William Martin Murphy), as John would agree, Irish Nationalism was dominated by small scale Irish capitalists, including the notorious rural and small town gombeen element, “based on money lenders, publicans and land agents within a largely agricultural economy.”¹² Their interests were mainly confined to the South. Given the chance to cash in on the Irish Revolution, they were quick to ditch a 32 counties Irish Republic and accept their own 26 counties state with Dominion status under the British Empire. They saw this state as an adequate framework to pursue their economic interests. They were partly persuaded by Jan Smuts, who had moved from being a former Boer War commander fighting the British to a leading British imperialist politician. And John goes on to state that, “In the aftermath of the Civil War, the new Free State government was largely indifferent to the fate of the North”¹³. They were representing the interests of capitalists in the 26 counties. And that meant abandoning the Catholic, Irish Nationalist, and small capitalists in 6 counties Ulster.

And the more localised Irish Nationalist outlook, focussed on the 26 counties, was mirrored by Ulster Unionist, Sir James Craig in what became 6 counties ‘Ulster’/Northern Ireland. He turned his back on the Irish Unionists, the Ulster Unionists in the 3 counties of Donegal,

Cavan and Monaghan, as well as his recent ally, Sir Edward Carson. Carson, originally from Dublin, advocated a particular all-UK and wider British imperial strategy. This followed Carson's close involvement in the British court system and with Westminster. The Irish Conservative & Unionist Party (IC&UP) fought for the maintenance of an all-Ireland Union, and only under continued Republican pressure did Ulster Unionists, originally a provincial section of the IC&UP, fall back on 9 then 6 of the Ulster counties remaining in the Union. But even those Ulster Unionists who accepted only 9 or 6 counties within the Union, initially shared with Carson a desire for their 'Ulster' to remain fully part of the Westminster system, as all its counties had been since 1801.

Carson had been quite prepared to mobilise the deeply reactionary extra-constitutional Unionist and Loyalist forces round the Ulster Covenant in 1912 and to promote non-state Loyalist (i.e. fascist) pogroms in 1922. However, Carson didn't want to establish a local Protestant supremacist order in 'Ulster'. Like others from this own particular class, then and since, Carson thought he could use fascists for his own ends. He was also privately contemptuous of the Orange Order. After the Republicans and the wider Catholic/Nationalists had 'learned their lesson', through a short brutal period of state and non-state repression, Carson wanted the Loyalist militias demobilised. Northern Ireland would then take its place, in the same manner as Scotland, within the UK state and at Westminster. The numerical balance of the British Unionist MPs, in particular in the Conservative and Unionist Party, would more effectively marginalise any remaining Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) MPs from Northern Ireland, than it did when the IPP MPs from the whole of Ireland were represented at Westminster. But at the same time, the Ulster Unionist/Loyalist 'ultras' would not be able to impose their own Protestant supremacist order. "You want to get a Protestant ascendancy over there {he was speaking at Westminster}... we have always said that it was the fact that this Parliament was aloof entirely from these racial and religious distinctions {a somewhat dubious statement!} that was the strongest foundation for the Government of Ulster."¹⁴

Joe Devlin IPP MP for West Belfast and leader of the sectarian ancient Order of Hibernians, clearly agreed with Carson about the dangers of setting up a devolved Northern Irish parliament. “This will mean the worst form of partition and, of course, permanent partition... we Catholics and Nationalists could not, under any circumstances, consent to be placed under the domination of a parliament so skilfully established as to make it impossible for us to be ever other than a permanent minority, with all the sufferings and tyranny of the present day continued, only in a worse form”.¹⁵ But he remained committed to the institutions of the UK state and took up his seat in the new Northern Ireland parliament in 1925 to defend the one arena specifically allocated to the Catholic hierarchy within the new order – primary and secondary education. The Ulster Unionists, following the earlier Irish Unionists, realised that whatever their own sectarian attitudes, the Catholic hierarchy remained their best ‘fire and theft’ insurance to derail any Nationalist, and especially Republican challenges. And in relation to Westminster, where Devlin also became an MP, Carson was also proved right. There were now only two utterly marginal IPP MPs, the other from the Liverpool Scotland constituency (until finally abandoned to Labour in 1929).

In 1920 Craig opened the way to the Ulster Unionists’ acceptance of the devolved parliament being promoted by the British government, which Carson rejected at this time. Unlike Carson and other IC&UP/UUP members, Craig’s followers were more focused on cross-Irish Sea than Irish markets., although both sets of Unionists wanted to retain access to imperial markets. But Craig’s followers had few interests in the rest of Ireland and relatively little sympathy for the declining landed interests there, including in the three other Ulster counties. Craig, like the Free State leaders, saw the possibilities for his class to enrich itself on a more localised basis. But the opportunity to do this would be greatly enhanced if his ‘Ulster’ had its own devolved parliament. The British government wanted to create a devolved Northern Ireland parliament for its own imperial and unionist reasons. They originally envisaged this having the same status as the 1920 devolved Irish parliament in Dublin. Lloyd George’s strategy was still to restore the whole of Ireland to as much British imperial control as possible. From his viewpoint, a new

Southern Irish parliament was seen, along with the new Northern Irish parliament, as a transitional element in a possible Irish reunification under the Crown and Empire.

Thus, after initial rejection, Craig and his backers began to appreciate how they could benefit from this new political devolution. He was now prepared to let the UK government go ahead, with creating a separate Northern Ireland parliament, as well as recognising the ‘Southern’ Ireland parliament (soon to be called the Dail). In return, Craig asked for a free hand to make sure that Northern Ireland was allowed to become ‘A Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State’¹⁶ by whatever means necessary. But those Ulster Unionists benefitting from this new Northern Ireland parliament no longer considered themselves to be any sort of Irish, whether that be Irish-British, as in the past; or Northern Irish-British as the UK government would now have liked. Instead, they considered themselves to be Ulster-British and ensured the adjective ‘Ulster’ was applied to most institutions they controlled, especially the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Otherwise, they resorted to ‘Loyalist’ and ‘Orange’. A subordinate, very loyal ‘Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State’ was seen as the ‘No Surrender’ frontline defender of the Union. But unlike Carson, on the frontline of wider British imperial interests, Craig’s Ulster Unionists would leave it to the British government to decide on how to pursue these interests and when to go to war. Then ‘Ulster’-British would loyally sign up, as a mark of their ‘true Britishness’, keener even than the white Dominions, to fight for the British Empire’.

The 1922 Anglo-Irish Treaty was accepted by Arthur Griffith and the right-wing Irish Nationalists, who as John points out, had largely “dissolve{ed} into Sinn Fein only to re-emerge as the pro-Treaty faction and launch a counter-revolution”.¹⁷ But David Lloyd George, now backed by a majority of the War Coupon coalition was also keen to keep the USA onside to help him maintain as much of the British Empire as possible. This meant making some concessions, particularly over Ireland, even if these were vigorously opposed by the reactionary ultra-Unionist sections of the British ruling class, who

looked to Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. But to achieve the UK government's aims Lloyd George had first to crush the First Irish Republic. And as John states, the British "suppl{ied} field guns to the provisional {Irish} government to crush republican forces...and {to unleash} a savage civil war." Under the Treaty, the British, as well as providing the military stick, also provided the diplomatic carrot of the Irish Boundary Commission to woo the pro-Treaty Irish Nationalists. But as John points out, most Irish Nationalist leaders in the 26 counties were not that concerned with the North, so this concession was aimed more at splitting Sinn Fein and isolating its Republican wing. Thus, by 1925, with the Free State government firmly in control, following the anti-Treaty Republicans' defeat in the Civil War, it agreed "to suppress the boundary commission report... in return for debt relief".¹⁸ The Free State's local capitalist backers were far more concerned about their immediate economic interests than they were about Partition. Meanwhile Devlin, albeit on a lower scale, compared to those Ulster Unionists far more able to cash in on what became the new Northern Ireland order, was able to pursue his own business interests in the *Irish News* and the Distillery Company.¹⁹

In helping to crush the First Irish Republic, Lloyd George achieved much of his British imperialist, all-Ireland aims. The new Free State constitution was subordinate to the British-imposed Treaty; the Crown's power was restored, including an oath of allegiance from the new TDs; the Royal Navy retained the Treaty ports; and the Irish Free State was forced to accept responsibility for a proportion of the UK state debts. These had been massively bloated by the British war debts inherited from the First World War, which Irish Republicans had always repudiated.

But it wasn't only the Republican wing of Sinn Fein, but the intransigent Right Unionists, led by Henry Wilson and his allies, who opposed the Treaty. Wilson wanted to use Northern Ireland as a military base to reinvade southern Ireland. In this, he mirrored the otherwise pro-Treaty Michael Collins, who wanted time to build a new regular Irish Army to restart the war in the North. And seeing

the danger from the ultra-Unionists, it was most likely Collins who arranged the assassination of Wilson in June 1921, not the anti-Treaty Republicans.

But the removal of Wilson came at a very high cost for Collins. Although Lloyd George and Wilson had long been at loggerheads, and Wilson's death strengthened Lloyd George's hand within the wider Unionist camp, he was able to drum up enough faux outrage to use Wilson's assassination as a stick to beat Collins and the pro-Treatyites with. Accept the whole Treaty and eliminate the Republican opposition or the British Army would launch "immediate and terrible war."²⁰ This is precisely what Collins had hoped to avoid in his negotiations for the Treaty.

Collins seemed aware that his new position was now untenable. He forecast his own demise at the hands of the Republicans when he signed the Treaty, remarking, "I may have signed my actual death warrant."²¹ Collins did want to maintain the unity of Treaty and anti-Treaty forces, offering the latter the opportunity to join his clandestine forces in the North. For Collins, at least, Partition, remained a pressing concern. But, with the old Irish Nationalists (most now in Sinn Fein), the leadership of the Irish Labour Party, the old Irish Unionists and the Catholic hierarchy throwing their weight behind the Treaty and a 26 counties Irish Free State, polarisation was growing. Collins fell victim to an assassin in August 1922. Ironically, like Wilson, this was at the hands of Republicans who had received their military training in the British army.

The ensuing Civil War in the Irish Free State gave Craig much greater scope to entrench his 6 counties statelet. He launched the terror of the official RUC and B Specials and of the unofficial C Specials. These included those unofficial Labour Unionist forces first mobilised by Carson for the 1920 Belfast pogrom. Craig's 'Ulster' was no longer a pawn in Wilson's or Carson's wider British unionist and imperialist ambitions. Craig's Northern Ireland parliament was never a transition to anything but a new provincial 'Ulster'-British Orange Ascendancy. The same Civil War entrenched the 26 Counties Irish Free State,

where as John writes, “The poor fled in search of work. The rebels and intellectuals fled the stranglehold of the church.”²²

But, despite the defeat of the First Irish Republic, the Irish Free State’s emergence out of a major revolutionary struggle, meant that it didn’t so easily follow the other British Dominions in giving the UK wider continued imperial support. Even after their military defeat, the anti-Treaty wing of Sinn Fein actually increased its vote in the August 1923 Dail elections. It gained 27% of the vote compared to 22% in the June 1922 Dail elections. It was the pro-Treaty Irish Labour Party which took a hammering, losing 11% of its previous electoral support. The anti-British imperial legacy of the struggle for the First Irish Republic was to be highlighted when the Irish Free State declared itself neutral in the Second World War. There may have been a ‘counter-revolution within the revolution’ of 1916-23, but the old British unionist and imperialist order had not been restored.

c) British or Irish Labour – which was the weaker?

John argues that the apparent lack of concern about Partition was “fed by the relative abstinence of the Labour movement and the trade unions.” However, getting a better understanding of this problem means looking beyond the strained relationship between the “Labour movement and the trade unions” in the ‘South’ and that section in north-east Ulster “linked to the British market and unionist employers, who used sectarian divisions to maintain a tight hold on the workers.” So that a more meaningful comparison can be made between these two sections of the Labour Movement, the impact of the pro-unionist section of Labour, mostly in north-east Ulster, needs to be seen within the wider context of the politics of the British Labour Party and TUC. Both supported the UK state. However, there was always a significant section of the Irish “Labour movement and trade unions”, which looked beyond the UK, and to earlier specifically Irish traditions, be they the Irish land and labour struggles or the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). Both had their own international connections.

The pro-imperialist and unionist, British Labour and trade union leaders exerted greater control over the working class at the all-UK level, and always worked to box in any more radical challenges in Ireland. They focussed their activities upon Westminster and, the UK state's social liberal institutions. These were greatly enhanced following the Liberals' 1905 election victory. The Liberals' pursuit of social liberal, economic and welfare policies, within the Union and Empire, formed the background for national Labour's support for the First World War and the precedent for their own developing social liberal, welfare statist policies. These were to culminate in Labour's adoption of the Liberal, William Beveridge's 1942 Report on social insurance and their promotion of the post-war social monarchist and imperial welfare state.

And, as long as the post-war boom continued, following the devastating loss of capital across the world in the Second World War, the British working class could make economic and social gains. At this time, the Conservatives also supported a shared Keynesian welfarist strategy, giving rise to the politics of Butskellism. Outside of the UK though, both Labour and the Conservatives remained committed to the Empire, pursuing dirty wars in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Aden and elsewhere. Labour also dismissed the post-war pressure for Scottish Home Rule (the Scottish Covenant)²³ and for Irish reunification (the Irish Anti-Partition League²⁴). Defence of Union and Empire have always been closely intertwined.

John tends to over-emphasise the significance of Ireland's economic under-development within the Union and Empire (apart from north-east Ulster), resulting in "the working class {being} a minority in a population of small farmers and landless labourers". This has undoubtedly been a problem for any 'province' within the Union, subjected to 'boom and bust' phases of development; and even more so for any territories or nations subjected to economic under-development within the Empire. Ireland was subjected to both the Union's economic marginalisation and the Empire's economic subordination. However, similar or worse socio-economic and

political situations, under externally imposed imperialist conditions, have often been met by stronger resistance from workers, both urban and rural, from small farmers, whether tenants or landholders, and from landless labourers. To challenge both their super-exploitation and state repression, they have created organisations, which have been politically more advanced than those in the imperial heartlands.

James Connolly's *Labour in Irish History (LiH)* provides by far the best account from its period by any Socialist in these islands of the prolonged struggles of the exploited and oppressed in their particular nation, and against landlords, capitalists and their state. *LiH* is superior to Thomas Johnson's (Independent Labour Party - ILP) *History of the Scottish Working Classes*, and far superior to Robert Blatchford's (Fabian Society, Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and ILP) *Merrie England* (to be followed later by *Britain for the British* – an early forerunner of the Brexit Left).

In *LiH*, Connolly emphasised the long tradition linking small tenant farmers, rural and later urban workers' struggles in Ireland, and emphasised their social republican nature. He began with James Fintan Lalor's role in the attempted 1848 Young Ireland Rebellion.²⁵ Connolly saw Michael Davitt's attempts to extend the Irish National Land League struggles after 1879 to landless labourers and urban workers, as the bridge to a new Socialist Republican politics, which he was trying to develop.²⁶ Davitt also pioneered an 'internationalism from below' approach in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, the USA and Australia,²⁷ which Socialist Republicans, including Connolly, also built upon.

The Irish Land League organisations and their political successors, particularly the Irish National League, soon to be subordinated to the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), were arenas of struggle for the small tenant farmers, landless labourers and workers both rural and urban. And to accommodate this challenge, some Irish Nationalists developed Nat-Lab politics. This was a version of the Lib-Lab politics found in Great Britain. These had the effect of keeping the working class subordinate to the class interests of the Liberal Party

leadership. Two key figures in Irish Nat-Lab politics were Michael Davitt (backed by the Irish Democratic, Trade and Labour Federation) and Daniel Desmond Sheehan (backed by the Irish Land and Labour Association). Support for Irish Nationalist parties, particularly the IPP, undoubtedly put a brake on the development of independent Labour politics. However, in England, Scotland, and Wales, the Liberal leaders, whom Lib-Lab advocates tail-ended, had fronted the UK and British Empire for much of the nineteenth century. In contrast, Irish Nationalist leaders had a record of resistance, with many having served jail sentences. They used this to hoodwink Nat-Lab supporters, much to the chagrin of James Connolly and early Irish Socialists.

It was in Scotland, without any credible Liberal firebrands, but with strong land and labour links, that Labour first made its own independent breakthrough. This first occurred in the coal and oil shale fields. The political conditions for this had initially been forged in the Irish/Highland/Welsh Land League struggles of the 1880s. Scottish Land and Labour candidates stood alongside the independent Highland Crofter candidates in 1884. Keir Hardie stood as an independent Labour candidate in 1888 leading to the formation of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) a few months later. But it wasn't until 1892, that three independent Labour candidates stood in the 1892 general election in England. This prompted the formation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1893 at Bradford in the north of England. The ILP then went on to gain wider backing, absorbing the SLP. However, in Ireland, although there were various independent labour candidates in local elections from 1899, it wasn't until as late as 1907 that the British ILP-affiliated Belfast Labour stood in the Westminster general election. It was very much in the municipal, or 'gas and water' tradition, which Connolly criticised.

But the slowness of independent Labour in breaking free of the embrace of Irish Nat-Labs partly resulted from some of policies of the social Liberal government which benefited workers and labourers. The 1906 and 1911 Labourer (Ireland) Acts provided over 40,000 labour owned cottages.²⁸ Such was the parliamentary domination of

Nat-Labism over workers (urban and rural) in Ireland, that it wasn't until 1915 that the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party (ITUC&LP) (formed as late as 1912), stood for Westminster in a by-election.²⁹ However, Liberal reforms, which benefitted the working class in Great Britain, also sustained the British Lib-Labs and those Labour members in cahoots with the Liberals, including Keir Hardie. He gained his parliamentary seat at Westminster in a deal with local Liberals, for the two member Merthyr Tydfil constituency, where the other winning candidate, D.A. Thomas, was the owner of Cambrian Coal.

However, despite these weaknesses at the Westminster and local council level, an early indication of the more politically advanced nature of the Irish "Labour movement and the trade unions", with many members drawn from earlier Fenian (IRB) and Land and Labour backgrounds, was shown by their role in the Dublin Lock-Out. This was the highpoint of the all-UK, Great Unrest between 1911-4.³⁰ and the Lock-Out's centrality was recognised by all sides. Indeed, this was the most significant working class struggle in these islands since the Chartists. The strike produced the Irish Citizens' Army (ICA), one of the world's earliest workers' militias. Socialist and Syndicalist-influenced workers in Wales, England and Scotland campaigned for meaningful solidarity to be given to the Dublin workers. The major Irish women's suffrage organisations were drawn in too. Under pressure, the British trade union leaders organised a special conference in London, but ensured that the delegates were carefully selected, and solidarity was confined to financial support. Their main aim was to isolate the Syndicalist influenced workers. In several ways, this anticipated the behaviour of the TUC over the Great Miners' Strike from 1984-5, with the personalised attacks on strike leaders - the IT&GWU's Jim Larkin in 1913 and the NUM's Arthur Scargill in 1984.

It is the legacy of the IT&GWU campaign against the Dublin Lock-Out, which the majority in the ITUC&LP threw its weight behind, which helps to explain the very different reactions of the British Labour Party and the ITUC&LP to the outbreak of the First World

War. At first glance, it would appear that opposition to the First World War at Westminster better favoured an anti-war response from British Labour than from Irish Labour. In Great Britain 36 MPs, some Liberal, some Labour, did not support the First World War. However, in Ireland, as well as all the Irish Unionist MPs, all the Irish Nationalist MPs (in the IPP and the All-for-Ireland League (AfIL), supported the war. The sole opposition came from Laurence Ginnell, an Independent Nationalist and a veteran land campaigner, later to join Sinn Fein and then its anti-Treatyite wing.

But the majority of British Labour MPs went on to support the First World War. This was symbolised by the replacement of Labour's leader, the pacifist ILP's Ramsay MacDonald by national Labour, war supporter, Arthur Henderson. British Labour MPs then went on to vote for the draconian 1915 Defence of the Realm Act, which amongst other things, suppressed workers' ability to organise, whilst opening up the way for capitalist war profiteering (does this sound familiar?)

Yet in contrast in Ireland, the ITUC&LP issued a statement declaring the "European war for the aggrandisement of the capitalistic class has been declared". Whilst the Independent Labour Party of Ireland (ILPI) (an electoral organisation which involved the Socialist Party of Ireland (SPI) which Connolly was a member of), issued a statement which included, "We ask you then to let the Empire go its own way; let those who own it fight its battles. It is not yours, you are but its slaves, and surely there is nothing in creation meaner than slaves fighting for the source and basis of their enslavement".³¹ This was considerably stronger than the individualist pacifism found in the British ILP. Indeed, Keir Hardie's own opposition to the war was never wholehearted,³² even if the shock of the war contributed to his early death.

And in 1915, an anti-war, ITUC&LP candidate, standing in the Dublin, College Green Westminster by-election, won 43% of the vote against 57% for the pro-war IPP candidate. This level of support would have been inconceivable elsewhere in the UK at the time. In

the 1915 Merthyr Tydfil, Westminster by-election, there was a two-horse race between the official, locally backed Labour and South Wales Miners' Federation-supported anti-war candidate and the unofficial, but War Coalition-backed pro-war Labour candidate. The anti-war Labour candidate won 37% of the vote, the pro-war Labour candidate won 63% of the vote.³³ Even after the war was over, incumbent anti-war, ILP MPs, such as Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden, lost their seats in the 1918 general election.

Meanwhile, on the trade union front, the IT&GWU HQ was a centre, not only for opposition to the war, but also for the ICA and the organisation of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. Both the ITUC&LP and the IT&GWU took a leading part in the successful 1918 Anti-Conscription campaign in Ireland. But the leaders of the British Labour Party and TUC could even abandon workers in British trade unions in Ireland. The Amalgamated Union of Carpenters, Cabinetmakers and Joiners later berated the British TUC for failing to help them reinstate members victimised in Carson's Loyalist pogrom in the Belfast shipyards in 1920. Belfast Labour leader, James Baird wrote "by the inactivity of the English {that should have been British} Trade Unions... you have been supporting Sir Edward Carson and the Orangemen."³⁴

Having underplayed the longstanding Social Republican legacy of small tenant farmers, landless labourers and agricultural workers in Ireland's history, John goes on to claim that, during the struggles for the first Irish Republic, the workers' movement was "reluctant to include broader forces such as farm labourers"³⁵. However, compared to the growth of farm workers' unionism in England, Wales and Scotland immediately after the First World War, such growth was much more marked in Ireland. And it mainly took place within the Irish IT&GWU,³⁶ providing closer organisational links to urban workers. And from 1918 one of the IT&GWU organisers, Peadar O'Donnell was involved in organising tattie howkers, who migrated seasonally from County Donegal to Scotland.³⁷

d) Socialists and their impact before the 1916-21/3 International Revolutionary Wave

Prior to the First World War, Socialist hopes of bringing about “the overthrow of the existing capitalist order” centred primarily on the Second International (SI), founded in 1889, and for others on militant Syndicalism, especially that promoted by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in the USA in 1905. In the absence of a revolutionary situation (with the exception of 1904-7 International Revolutionary Wave particularly in the Tsarist Russian Empire), their emphasis was on using the time to organise industrially (most SI affiliates and the IWW) and politically (SI affiliates), ready for the future. This was often supplemented by social and cultural organisation. In Ireland, the Socialists, James Connolly (SPI and IT&GWU) and Jim Larkin (IT&GWU) were leading figures in the pre-First World War, Great Unrest. They were part of the wider international working class challenge at the time.

Until the post-1916 International Revolutionary Wave spread to Russia in 1917, Larkin showed no interest in the politics of Marxist Socialist parties. In the UK (then including Ireland) he associated these with small sects. Instead, Larkin, inspired by the example of the IWW became an ardent supporter of Syndicalism, which influenced his decision to form the IT&GWU in 1909. Nevertheless, Larkin was never a pure Syndicalist, concentrating only upon industrial action. He saw the need to supplement this with independent Labour political parties.³⁸ He had been a supporter of the non-Marxist, British ILP (seeing this as Socialist) up until 1907 and after some initial hesitation,³⁹ he gave his support to the formation of the ITUC&LP in 1912⁴⁰ He saw the militant Syndicalist IT&GWU, rather than propagandist SPI, as the effective upholder of Socialism within the ITUC&LP.

In contrast, Connolly was initially heavily involved in the internal politics of a number of SI-affiliated organisations – including the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Scottish Socialist Federation whilst still living in Scotland; the Irish Socialist

Republican Party when he moved to Ireland; the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) (both in Scotland and the USA); and the Socialist Party of America -SPA), whilst he lived in the USA. He also took the lead of the SPA's Irish-American section, the Irish Socialist Federation, which published *The Harp*.

But Connolly became disillusioned with the political sectarianism of the SLP, with its strident emphasis upon what its leader Daniel de Leon, claimed to be Marxist orthodoxy. Whilst retaining many important elements of Marxist inspired analysis in his later work, Connolly quietly dropped any Marxist label. Those using this label (and later others, e.g. Leninists, Trotskyists) tend to adopt a 'theological' approach to politics, seeing how reality matches the writings of their 'prophets'. When living in the USA, Connolly transferred his allegiance to both the IWW and to the SPA (particularly, its pro-IWW wing led by Big Bill Haywood). The SPA was not formally a Marxist Party, although it included Marxists.

But unlike the British ILP, the SPA was openly Socialist. The SPA acted as a political party which contested elections. But when Connolly returned to Ireland to join the SPI, this 'party' never became anything more than a Socialist propagandist organisation., although some became involved in a personal capacity in the purely electoral ILPI. When he was invited back by the SPI, Connolly became an IT&GWU organiser in Belfast in 1911, at Larkin's invitation. He saw this as far more important than his SPI role. But Connolly didn't counterpose Socialist organisations to independent Labour parties or later to militant Syndicalism. This was shown by his membership of the British ILP from 1894 in Edinburgh whilst also a member of the SDF, before he moved to Ireland in 1895; and by his active promotion of the ITUC&LP in 1912, whilst also a member of the SPI and IT&GWU, following his return to Ireland from the USA.

But in the context of the 1911-14 Great Unrest, there was a considerable overlap in the approaches of Larkin and Connolly, with their shared promotion of the IT&GWU and ITUC&LP, and their understanding that One Big Unionism formed the economic or

industrial basis for a future Socialism. However, up until his death in 1916, Connolly had the clearer conception of the wider kind of coalition that Socialists needed to build before they would be able to take advantage of any revolutionary situation to bring about “the overthrow of the existing capitalist order.”

Connolly’s coalition - or what later would be known as a united front - consisted of Socialist Republicans in the SPI; the Syndicalist-influenced IT&GWU (with its IWW links); the Irish Citizen Army; the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL) (which published the *Irish Citizen* and became very involved in both the Dublin Lock-Out and with Irish Republicans); the more ambiguous IRB and some leading intellectuals, including the cooperator, George Russell (AE). He also retained some of his SPA links, and those with his former comrades in the SLP in Scotland, which had a more open attitude to industrial organisation, promoting cross and non-party workshop organisation, rather than de-Leon’s SLP union front in the USA. Connolly eventually hoped to win over the ITUC&LP. He was also very much involved in cultural activities. He used the IT&GWU’s ecumenical *Irish Worker* as his main political organiser.

The ecumenical *Forward* in Scotland was also an important arena for Connolly’s writing from 1911-14, at the same time as the BSP’s John Maclean contributed to it. Connolly also contributed to the SPA’s *International Socialist Review* as late as 1915. Ireland, Scotland and the USA formed the wider geographical edges of Connolly’s alliance. Whereas Socialists’ activities in England largely centred upon London, and its pre-war contacts with the European-based SI; the links which Irish Socialists made extended from the cities of Dublin and Belfast to Scotland (initially Edinburgh, but later and more significantly to Glasgow and Clydeside) and to the USA. This also brought them into significant contact with the Syndicalism of the IWW.

In the USA, these contacts were mainly concentrated upon New York, (both city and state) and Butte (a copper mining city in Montana, with possibly the most advanced politics in the USA at the time). Jack

Carney, who worked for the IT&GWU in Dublin moved to the USA in 1916. He became involved in socialist journalism in Chicago, Duluth and Butte, and was a member first of the SPA and then a leading member of the Communist Labour Party of America. (CLPA)⁴¹ Such links were forged not only through migration from Ireland's and Scotland's cities to the USA, but also by migration from the Gaelic speaking Irish western seaboard and Scottish Highlands and Islands to the urban areas of Scotland, Ireland and the USA. This was another factor helping to transmit the legacy of earlier rural agrarian traditions to the new working class. Tom O'Flaherty/Tomas O'Flaithearta from Inismore in the Aran Islands is a good example. He emigrated to the USA, joined the IWW, then later the CPUSA. He became active in the defence of James Larkin and was editor of the Irish-American paper, *The Irish People*. He later resigned from the CPUSA and returned to Ireland, becoming editor of the left-wing, Irish language paper, *An tEireannach*.⁴² IT&GWU organiser, Peadar O'Donnell, from the Rosses, County Donegal, had an uncle in the IWW in Butte, Montana.⁴³

In Scotland, John Maclean retained some old Second International links. He was the comrade and friend of Peter Petroff, a Jewish, Ukrainian-Russian exile living in London then Glasgow. He came from the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), and later became a Bolshevik. Maclean was also acquainted with the Lithuanian Social Democrats, living in exile, particularly in Bellshill, Lanarkshire, where two Lithuanian Social Democratic papers were published. (A key figure, Vincas Kapsukas, was to become the Chairman of the Council of the short-lived Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1918.)

The significance of these two different geographical and political orientations, one centred upon London and the other with a Dublin/Glasgow axial core, was to become apparent when their possibility of creating the organisation needed for "the overthrow of the existing capitalist order" was tested from the outbreak of World War One. This different geographical basis for organisation later provided the framework for the most advanced politics to emerge in these islands during the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave.

And, particularly after 1919, John Maclean came to the fore, pushing for the break-up of the Union and Empire.

Before the First World War though, Connolly's initial coalition was built within the context of the increased political opportunities for Labour provided by the prospect of Irish Home Rule. Furthermore, far from passively tail-ending the Irish Nationalists or Sinn Fein, the IT&WU's *Irish Worker* threw its weight against leading Irish Nationalist proprietor, William Martin Murphy, during the Dublin Lock-Out. It also opposed Arthur Griffith, another person hostile to the workers' cause. He was the leader of Sinn Fein but did not support an Irish Republic. He wanted a 'dual monarchy' in a future shared Great British and Irish Empire. His model was the Hapsburg Austro-Hungarian Empire. This anticipated Griffith's return to an acceptance of working with British imperialism in the Anglo-Irish Treaty negotiations. And Connolly also used the pages of the *Irish Worker* to campaign vigorously against the IPP leaders' acceptance of Partition, famously anticipating its likely consequence - "a carnival of reaction both North and South."⁴⁴ Connolly's alliance subordinated itself to no other class forces, although prepared to work with Irish Republicans on agreed terms.

The significance of Irish Labour's independent class politics was seen in the Dublin Corporation elections in 1914, during the Lock-Out. The Irish Unionists lost 5 councillors, the Irish Nationalists lost 6 and Sinn Fein lost 1. Labour gained 7, emerging as the second largest party in the city.⁴⁵ One of these councillors, Richard O'Carroll, the Bricklayers Union general secretary, although also a member of the IRB and IV rather than the SPI and ICA, was to be captured and summarily shot by the British during the Easter Rising.⁴⁶

In Great Britain, when the First World War broke out, it wasn't only the British Labour Party which gave its support, but the leader of the Marxist, British Socialist Party - Henry Hyndman (who had a long and dubious record in relation to British imperialism and anti-Semitism); and its leading theoretician, Ernest Belfort Bax (who opposed women suffragists). This left the BSP politically paralysed. John Muir, editor of the SLP paper, *The Socialist*, also supported the

war. He resigned from the SLP but joined the Clyde Workers Committee (CWC). He tried to separate the CWC's 1915 strike from any political action against the war - unsuccessfully, since he was still jailed along with the other leaders! And Tom Mann, an anti-political Syndicalist in 1914, also initially gave his support to the war.

But within four days of the outbreak of the First World War, Connolly linked resistance to the possibility of 'overthrow{ing} the existing capitalist order', much as Lenin was to view the new political situation. Connolly wrote that such resistance in "Ireland may yet set the torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and the last capitalist bond and debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war lord."⁴⁷

This put an end to Connolly's pre-war strategy of building a wider coalition so that the Irish working class could take advantage of Irish Home Rule. Connolly immediately appreciated that Irish Home Rule was now dead in the water. The only winners in a competition between pro-war Irish Unionists led by Sir Edward Carson, and pro-war Irish Nationalists led by the IPP's John Redmond and Joe Devlin and by the AfIL's William O'Brien, would be the ultra-Unionists.

Connolly began to rejig his earlier coalition. Initially he followed the historical precedent of the Irish Volunteers in 1782, who used the opportunity of the war with France to raise Irish militias to defend Ireland. But for many of its supporters those Volunteers could also be used to pressurise the British government into conceding far more power to the Irish parliament. Soon after the First World War was declared, Connolly pushed for the anti-war section of the new Irish Volunteers to defend Ireland. But he also saw this force as a potential challenger to the UK state.

However, some of the political forces which gathered round this strategy proved to be half-hearted in their commitment to any meaningful action. So later in 1915, Connolly became committed to an insurrection to set up an Irish Republic. He wrote the *Re-Conquest of Ireland*⁴⁸ in 1915, which acted almost like a programme for his new alliance. It was advertised in every issue of the *Workers' Republic*.⁴⁹

It included special chapters on labour in Dublin and Belfast, on women, on education and on the cooperative movement. The central role he saw for Labour (especially the IT&GWU) in this wider coalition was emphasised in its conclusion. “Labour in Ireland tends to become more and more self-reliant, and in its self-reliance it discovers its strength. Out of such strong self-reliance it develops a magnetism, which will draw to it more and more support from all the adherents of all the causes which in their entirety make for a regenerated Ireland”.

Connolly remained aware that the Irish working class was not yet either politically or organisationally in the position to create an Irish Workers’ Republic. However, his publications continued to make the case for the ‘overthrow of the capitalist order’. But with the would-be Irish ruling class, organised in the two main Irish Nationalist parties, and tied into a growingly unpopular war, and with Sinn Fein more marginal in Dublin since 1914, the most militant section of the Irish working class had the potential to win other workers (urban and rural), small farmers and advanced intellectuals around the immediate demand for an Irish Republic. This was the thinking that led to Connolly’s leading part in the Easter Rising in 1916. And Connolly’s internationalism meant he understood that, in the context of the First World War, any such challenge might inspire others and was likely to be taken up elsewhere.

The leadership of the IT&GWU, its three consecutive newspapers, the *Irish Worker*, *The Worker*, *Workers’ Republic*, the Irish Citizen Army (ICA), other trade unionists (including Michael Mallin of the Silk Workers’ Union and ICA chief of staff, and William Carpenter, general secretary of the largely Jewish, International Tailors, Machinists and Presser TU, Richard O’Carroll general secretary of the Bricklayers’ Union; women in the Republican Inghinidhe na’ hEireann (InE), some in the Irish Women’s Franchise League (IWFL); and the elements of the Irish Volunteers under the control of the IRB, began to coalesce around plans for an insurrection.⁵⁰ The SPI, however, was divided, but even its pacifist members, including Francis Sheehy-Skeffington, did nothing publicly to oppose Connolly’s plans.

However, Connolly knew that he would face opposition from other trade unions and from the ITUC&LP. His newspapers continued to make propaganda directed at these targets. But he also had the advantage that the ITUC&LP, and even the Irish Nationalists, were opposed to conscription. And as time went on, Irish support for the First World War declined in the face of the continuing and ever-escalating imperial bloodbath.

e) Socialists and their impact in the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave

The 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin heralded the outbreak of an International Revolutionary Wave. This was the period when John's criticisms of Irish Socialists' and Labour's role in a real attempt to bring about "the overthrow of the existing capitalist order" have more purchase. Although the Easter Rising helped to trigger this new revolutionary upsurge, the epicentre passed to what had been the Tsarist Russian Empire in the February and October Revolutions of 1917. And because its prime leaders, the Russian Bolsheviks, including Vladimir Lenin (founder member in 1903) and Leon Trotsky (who joined in July 1917) have been looked up to by so many Socialists, their impact in Ireland, both positive and negative, has to be examined.

Given the huge significance of the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave upon the struggle to establish the First Irish Republic, it is a "strange thing" that John confines his comments to, "In the aftermath of 1916... Lenin and Trotsky believed that {Connolly} had risen too soon."⁵¹ and the briefest, "The 1917 Revolution saw wide solidarity in Ireland"⁵² and "the fallout of the war saw the birth of the USSR and abortive revolutions in Germany and other parts of Europe."⁵³

But, as John appreciates, this International Revolutionary Wave extended way beyond Europe. It included Egypt, Iraq and India, which were already or about to come part of the expanded post-war British Empire. However, it is also important to look at the

consequences of this struggle for the UK state. This is central to developing an ‘internationalism from below’ approach today. Although this certainly needs to be linked up with an ongoing global perspective. Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston have already outlined the outlines of the global thinking needed.⁵⁴ Their emphasis on Colonialism or Empire would be further strengthened by emphasising the link between Empire and Union, first forged by the 1707 Act of Union with Scotland, and then further cemented by the 1801 Act of Union. Their contribution will be examined in the second part of this article.

The struggle for the First Irish Republic was also linked to the struggles of the working class in Great Britain.⁵⁵ And the strongest support was organised within those linked geographical centres in Ireland, Scotland and the USA (with Russian, and other Third International backing). These links had been previously developed by James Connolly and Jim Larkin. John Maclean with his own links to Socialist in Ireland, ‘Russia’, Lithuania and England) became more central after 1919.

During this revolutionary upsurge, millions of workers and oppressed people became involved in solidarity action. This went beyond the fraternal links between state-based Social Democrats, which more and more represented the kind of ‘diplomatic internationalism’ that came to dominate the Second International in the lead-up to World War One. It is during revolutionary struggles, when theories, taken up by parties and other organisations with real social weight, can become material factors affecting their outcomes.

The 1916 Easter Rising prompted Lenin to write a whole additional supplement to *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up*.⁵⁶ He had been preparing this book for a number of months. The insurrection added to the urgency behind publication. The final Section 10 is entitled *The Irish Rebellion of 1916*. With the Irish addendum, this work is the most significant work Lenin ever wrote on the National Question, highlighting the profound impact the Easter Rising had upon his thinking.

And it was in this work, as John alludes to, that Lenin wrote, “It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had time to mature.” But Lenin went further, emphasising the continued significance of the National Question, even in Western European areas, where he had earlier dismissed this possibility. He was up against many, including those otherwise close or relatively close to his politics who opposed such thinking - a section of the Bolsheviks and also Karl Radek, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky. And an excellent collection of their writings, *The Communists and the Irish Revolution*, was published by the late D. R. O’Connor Lysaght, also a Socialist Democracy (Ireland) member.⁵⁷

So, to emphasise the significance of the National Question in Europe, East and West, after the Rising, Lenin wrote, “The struggle of the oppressed nations in Europe, a struggle capable of going all the way to insurrection and street fighting, capable of breaking down the iron discipline of the army and martial law, will ‘sharpen the revolutionary crisis in Europe.’” “Every crisis discards the conventionalities, tears away the outer wrappings, *sweeps* away the obsolete and reveals the underlying springs and forces.”

Trotsky however, in his own response to the Easter Rising, wrote, “The basis for national revolution has disappeared even in backward Ireland”. Instead, he thought that the insurrection was largely a workers’ revolt, but one that was still inspired by a backward hybrid of “nationalism and syndicalism”. He wrote that, “After the land reforms of 1881-1903 the farmers were transformed into conservative petty proprietors, whose eyes the green flag of nationalism could no longer distract from their small holdings.”⁵⁸ This is not a very good introduction to any understanding of the renewal of the struggle for the Irish Republic, that soon re-emerged after the military crushing of the 1916 insurrection.

John, though, does acknowledge the later role of the IRA, which mainly recruited from small farmers in the rural areas. During the struggle for an Irish Republic, he writes, “In the countryside {the

IRA's} main role was to disperse the concentration of British Forces”⁵⁹ Furthermore, both small farmers and agricultural labourers were prepared to take on the forces of the new Irish Republic and later the Irish Free State, to get land or to improve their conditions. They were never as passive or parochial as Trotsky claimed.

Lenin proved to be very percipient in his anticipation of the role that national, colonial and peasant revolts would play in the developing International Revolutionary Wave. Where he foundered, was his belief, retained from an earlier Karl Kautsky, that following any successful workers' takeover of 'their' state, the demand for the implementation of national self-determination became counter-revolutionary. Thus, at the revolutionary climax, workers and peasants in long-oppressed nations were expected just to drop their demand for national independence - the political equivalent of coitus interruptus! And the Bolsheviks still included many who believed that, even before any workers' takeover, National Movements in Europe (including the East as well as the West), and for some anywhere in the world, were reactionary.

Eric Blanc has outlined the contradictory features of Lenin's (and other Socialists') approach to the National Question in the Russian imperial borderlands during the pre-First World War period.⁶⁰ I have also addressed this issue⁶¹ and have argued that “The limitations of Social Democratic and official Communist theories have their effect on the struggle for national self-determination”.⁶² These theories had their negative impact during the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave in Finland and Ukraine⁶³ and this could be extended to the old Tsarist Russian Caucasus and Turkestan. They also impacted on the struggle for an Irish Republic.

John writes that, “For Connolly the 1916 Rising did not hold out the prospect of military victory”⁶⁴ However Connolly's thinking was not primarily concerned with the military impact of the Rising (other than the ICA conducting itself with honour), but with its political impact. He perceptively predicted that the 1916 Easter Rising would fatally undermine Irish Nationalism and marginalise Home Rule politics. These were caught between the hammer of an increasingly

bloodthirsty British imperialism (the crushing of the Dublin insurrection was soon followed by the Battle of the Somme) and the anvil of increasingly discontented or rebellious workers (urban and rural), small farmers, a section of the intelligentsia and even Irish soldiers serving in the British Army.⁶⁵

However, the prospect of a Socialist Republican-led, or co-led struggle for an Irish Republic did **retreat** after Connolly's execution in 1916.⁶⁶ Other contributing factors included the death of Socialist Republicans, including Michael Mallin, who was executed; and the more politically ambiguous, Peter Macken/Peadar O'Maicin, who had recently been in the SPI and was a Labour councillor up until 1914, but who went on to join Sinn Fein and the IV. He was killed in action. Furthermore, the ICA suffered proportionally far more deaths than the IV. This was due to its leader, Eoin O'Neill, cancelling the insurrection, which, as a result, ended up being confined to Dublin. Here, the ICA led by Connolly and those IRB members led by Pdraig Pearse went ahead anyway. But the majority of the IRB-influenced, IV members in the rest of Ireland were not involved in action, so they lived to fight another day.

Connolly's key political organiser, the *Workers' Republic*, ceased publication after the defeat of the Easter Rising. Although a member of the SPI, and the IT&GWU, William O'Brien was happy to let the *Workers' Republic* go. He "passed a spineless resolution commemorating all the dead"⁶⁷ at the postponed August 1916 ITUC&LP conference in Sligo, rather than claiming the ICA's prominent role in the proclaimed Irish Republic. This would have meant outlining a different strategy to that of the IRB, which relied on winning over sections of the Irish bourgeoisie, the Catholic hierarchy and later President Wilson's USA. By October 1917, the IRB had been able to take over the leadership of Sinn Fein from 'dual monarchist' Griffith and to ensure that it alone was now the political representative of the proclaimed 1916 Irish Republic.

Key SPI members, including Thomas Johnson and William O'Brien, continued to play a leading role (as individuals) within the ITUC&LP. At its Waterford conference in August 1918, they backed a manifesto

which put forward the party's new aim. This was "to recover for the nation complete possession of all the physical sources of wealth." This was linked to the more Socialist aim, to "win for the workers of Ireland collectively the ownership and control of the whole produce of their of their labour."⁶⁸ This could be considered a Workers' or Socialist Republican stance. However, despite O'Brien invoking the name of Connolly,⁶⁹ the pressing immediate issue of whether to fight for the creation of an Irish Republic, as Connolly had done in 1916, and to break from the UK state, was studiously ignored.

But this ITUC&LP conference was already hinting at the real role its SPI leaders saw for the party. At the same time as they pushed forward an advanced ITUC&LP political stance, the two terms of the ITUC&LP's name were reversed. Johnson successfully moved a change to the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILP&TUC); whilst O'Brien outlined the principal purpose behind this change. This was to participate in elections "to secure labour representation, independent, able, strong, efficient and constructive on all our public bodies both national and local."⁷⁰

At first glance, there appear to be elements of Connolly's pre-war approach, when he pushed for the formation of the ITUC&LP in 1912, whilst Irish Home Rule seemed to be pending. But Connolly had moved on from this to giving his support to the creation of an Irish Republic. And had he lived, he would most likely have recognised the revolutionary situation that existed in 1918. If so, Connolly would have pushed workers to take the lead in the immediate struggle for an Irish Republic as he did in 1916, looking to the wider international situation to prepare the grounds for the next phase – an Irish Workers' Republic.

But, as John also mentions, the ILP&TUC went on to hold a special conference on November 1st 1918⁷¹. It decided not to stand any Labour candidates in the forthcoming Westminster general election. Thus, the push for a Workers' Republican stance at the August conference had the effect of acting as a Left cover for an acceptance of Sinn Fein's version of the Irish Republic in the forthcoming Westminster election. The ILP&TUC leadership's paper support for

a future Irish Workers' Republic amounted to window dressing for a tacit acceptance of something much less. This was a somewhat stronger version of the role 'Clause Four Socialism' long played within the British Labour Party. I would argue that John's counterposing the demand for an Irish Workers' Republic today, when the immediate issue is Ireland's Republican reunification, amounts to similar abstract propagandist approach. Is it not better to become involved in the struggle for Irish Republican reunification and form a Socialist Republican-led pole of attraction as Connolly attempted, with a clear eye on the international situation?

A very common claim amongst many Marxists, about the 1916-21 International Revolutionary Wave, is that, apart from the Russian Bolsheviks, neither the rest of the anti-war Marxist parties and groups, nor the anti-war Syndicalists, appreciated the need for a Bolshevik-type party. This is clearly ahistorical, since nowhere else in Europe, North America, or the rest of the world, did the specific political or socio-economic conditions exist which had led to the formation of a Bolshevik-type party. However, the 'Russian' Revolution did place the benefits of having a revolutionary party able to coordinate political, economic and cultural activity to the fore of international political debate amongst Socialists. But Socialists elsewhere also had to grapple with how to further develop the best revolutionary traditions in their countries. These needed to be extricated from current national political and organisational restraints, whilst at the same time showing how they could contribute to a new International.

One clear indication of this was the conversion of the decidedly anti-Marxist, and more Syndicalist-influenced, Jim Larkin to support for a new communist party in the USA following the Bolshevik-led October Revolution in 1917. For a period before he was jailed in Sing-Sing in 1920, Larkin was prepared to work with other pro-Bolshevik party militants in a disciplined fashion (something that never came easily to Larkin!) to build such a party. This involved serious organised tendency work within the SPI, which had tens of thousands of members, a majority on the Left, before they were expelled by the Right. He became a founder member of the CLPA in December 1919 (which joined with others to form the United

Communist Party of America in August 1922, whilst Larkin was in jail).

And the impact of the October Revolution even impacted upon the SPI. Cathal O'Shannon, former IRB member, and assistant IT&GWU secretary to Connolly in Belfast, who had joined the SPI before the First World War, pushed for the reconvening of the SPI in February 1918. This followed the pro-October Revolution demonstration of 10,000 at Mansion House, Dublin.⁷² After the massive ITUC&LP-led strike against conscription in April 1918, and the huge May Day demonstration and associated strike action in the Clyde shipyards for peace, O'Shannon pointed out that "Glasgow and Dublin are the two cities in these countries that lead the van in the militant army of Labour" This was an indication of the further reinforcement of the Dublin/Glasgow political axis, that Connolly and others had already developed.

O'Shannon went on to oppose Thomas Johnson and William O'Brien, both fellow SPI members, who argued that the ILP&TUC should stand aside for Sinn Fein in the 1918 Westminster general election. O'Shannon was also to the fore in making new links between Dublin and Glasgow (along with Constance Markiewicz). They encouraged John Maclean to speak in Dublin in June 1919, a major contributory factor in turning Maclean from being a 'British roader' BSP member to an advocate of an 'internationalism from below', 'break-up of the UK and British Empire road to communism'.⁷³

And indeed, whilst the International Revolutionary Wave was on the ascendent, even O'Brien could be pushed into positive action. He attended the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies, which met in Leeds in June 1917. He argued that the Council recognise Ireland's right to self-determination. But he was unsuccessful. Yet he continued to uphold an all-islands approach to struggle and took the campaign for Irish self-determination to England by standing in the Stockport by-election in March 1920.

However, as the International Revolutionary Wave ebbed, not only Johnson and O'Brien but O'Shannon too retreated. He now opposed

the creation of a new communist party. The fact that when it was first reconvened in 1918, SPI members Johnson and O'Brien were on opposite sides to SPI member, O'Shannon in the ILP&TUC debate on standing in the Westminster, already showed that the SPI had no shared independent basis for intervening in debates. SPI members were happier promoting abstract socialist propaganda, rather than developing an independent party which promoted its own politics. These could have linked immediate political, socio-economic and cultural issues with a wider strategy to "overthrow the existing capitalist order."

And by the time the first attempts to create a communist party in Ireland were made in 1922, the International Revolutionary Wave was already in retreat. This led to different set of problems, which we are still living with today. Given the atrocious record of the confessional Marxist parties and sects (and of the bureaucratic, careerist Labour Party), it is not surprising that there has been a resurgence of anti-party Syndicalism, and a related even wider anti-party Movementism, amongst many of those campaigning against exploitation, oppression and alienation.

But many Marxists today still begin their advocacy of party building with the model of the Second Congress of the RSDLP in Brussels and London in 1903, when the Bolsheviks became an organised faction. Others look to the Prague conference in 1912, when the Bolsheviks controlled the participatory delegates, and were able to declare themselves to be the RSDLP. Worse, some champion the model of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) following the 1921 post-Kronstadt Rising, when internal democracy was severely curtailed. The CPSU became increasingly merged with the USSR state apparatus, which also became responsible for disciplining members. It extended its murderous operations overseas, if it found that necessary. This included the torture and murder of Andreas Nin in Spain in 1937 and the killing of Trotsky in Mexico in 1940. Stalin's NKVD handed over hundreds of German Communist Party (KPD) members to the Gestapo at the time of the Hitler Stalin Pact from 1949-41.⁷⁴

f) The women's movement from the Great Unrest, through the First World War to the International Revolutionary Wave

John has a whole chapter on a key section of the participants in Connolly's alliance - "the many women activists."⁷⁵ He also makes the very important point that "the rights of women have proved to be a litmus test, mirroring the rise and fall of the struggle".⁷⁶ The first three pages of his chapter begin with the fate of the women's movement under the impact of the Irish revolution, counter-revolution and Partition.

There is little explanation in John's chapter about why leading Irish women suffragists drifted into Irish Republican organisations. These included Inghinidhe na' hEireann (InE), Cumann na mBan and later Sinn Fein, when it became a Republican party. InE had included Constance Markiewicz and Helena Moloney. They were very active in the Dublin Lock-Out and in the Easter Rising as part of the Cumann na mBan (CnmB) contingent. CnmB was integrated, along with the IV and ICA into the Army of the Irish Republic.⁷⁷

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington of the Irish Women's Franchise League was a close supporter of the IT&GWU. The IT&GWU had its own autonomous women's union sections - the Dublin-based, Irish Women Workers Union⁷⁸ organised by Delia Larkin and Rosie Hackett, and the Belfast-based Irish Women's Textile Union, organised by Winifred Carney, and backed by Connolly the local IT&GWU organiser. He wrote its manifesto, *To the Linen Slaves of Belfast*⁷⁹. Kathleen Lynn, a member of the more moderate Irish Women's Suffragette and Local Government Association, nevertheless actively supported workers in the Dublin Lock-Out and was the chief medical officer for the ICA during the Easter Rising. There were many other women activists at the interface between women's suffrage, Socialist, ITGWU, cooperative and republican politics and activities.

Connolly was a recognised champion of women's rights and fully understood the additional burden of oppression they faced. He wrote that, "The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave."⁸⁰ This is one of the reasons he recognised the need for autonomous women's organisation within the IT&GWU. However, whereas the IRB took the opportunity of the Easter Rising to turn the marginal Sinn Fein into a powerful Republican party, the SPI, which Connolly had been a member of, adopted an even lower political profile after his death. It neither developed into a Socialist Republican party nor attempted to take the lead of the ITUC&LP.

Whatever its other pre-Republican shortcomings, Sinn Fein and its related organisations had been open to women members and supported women's suffrage. The much smaller propagandist SPI was never as attractive to women and proportionally had fewer women members. When the renewed movement for an Irish Republic took off, it was therefore to Sinn Fein and its related organisations that most of these women activists gravitated. Hannah Sheehy Skeffington and Katheen Lynn went on to take leading roles in Sinn Fein when it became a Republican organisation. Even James Connolly's daughter, Nora, initially worked for Sinn Fein in the USA.

But something else important was lost by the loosening of the links between the Irish Women's Suffrage Movement and Socialist Republicans. Earlier, this article highlighted the specific geographical dimensions of Connolly's wider Socialist Republican alliance, which took on particular political characteristics. An additional dimension given to this through John Maclean's Ukrainian-Russian and Lithuanian contacts in Glasgow was also considered. However, as concern grew in the BSP over its leader Henry Hyndmans's support for the First World War, opposition also developed in London. But this took on a more passive form under Theodore Rothstein (who worked as a translator for the British War Office) and William Coates and his partner Zelda, than it did in Glasgow. Here John Maclean, Peter Petroff and his partner, Irma Gellrich were jailed for their public anti-war activities, which had a greater political impact.

But in the London heartland of the imperial beast, leading women's suffragist and independent Socialist, Sylvia Pankhurst, also challenged the relative inactivity and accommodation to racist forces which were found in the BSP opposition there. Just as Maclean was more militant in his opposition to war than Coates, so Sylvia Pankhurst was more militant than Zelda Kahan⁸¹ (although she was a principled Socialist) also living in London. Pankhurst had already met Connolly at a London rally in support of the strikers against the Dublin Lock Out in November 1913. This led to her break with her mother Emmaline and sister Christabel, who were supporters of Sir Edward Carson. Not surprisingly, their Women's Suffrage and Political Union went on to declare in favour of the First World War in 1914 and retitled its paper *Britannia!* At this time, Sylvia Pankhurst also became friendly with leading Irish women's suffragist and Dublin Lock-Out strike supporter, Kathleen Lynn.⁸²

After creating the East London Federation of Suffragettes, and publishing the *Women's Dreadnought* in 1914, Pankhurst formed the East London-based, Workers Socialist Federation and began to produce the *Workers' Dreadnought* in 1916. She was to win wider support, particularly in South Wales. Unlike any other Socialist paper in Great Britain, *Workers' Dreadnought* reported the Dublin Easter Rising sympathetically. Later Norah Connolly became the Irish correspondent of the *Workers' Dreadnought*.⁸³

Sylvia Pankhurst, Constance Markiewicz and John Maclean (with others) shared a platform at the 'Hands off Russia' rally held the Albert Hall in London in February 1919.⁸⁴ Pankhurst went on to become a critical supporter of the First Irish Republic and opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. She wrote that, "As Communists we stand for the self-determination of peoples and for the breaking up of empires. In so far as the Irish Sinn Féiners weaken the power of the British capitalist government, we recognise that they are doing our work".⁸⁵ She went on to campaign (along with Markiewicz) with Maclean during the Scottish Workers' Republican Party (SWRP) electoral challenge in the 1923 Westminster general election campaign.⁸⁶

Thus, the most advanced politics which emerged in these islands during the International Revolutionary Wave mainly came within the bounds of that earlier political alliance, which gelled in the Dublin Lock-Out and the First World War. And it was within this alliance that a Socialist Republican ‘internationalism from below’, ‘break-up of the Union and Empire’ strategy was further developed. John Maclean was to the fore, especially after 1919, precisely the time when his Left unionist detractors, beginning with Willie Gallagher in the early CPGB, write him off. And, for some time, Maclean, and later the SWRP, were able to hold their own in the competition between the infant CPGB for Red Labour support against national or what he called ‘Pink Labour’ in Glasgow. Indeed, when the CPGB gave its backing to the official Pink Labour candidate in the 1923 Glasgow Corporation by-election, Maclean beat him.⁸⁷

It was Maclean’s opposition to a vacillating BSP leadership, to the dubious characters promoted by Rothstein in particular; then later his support for the further break-up of the UK (inspired by Ireland) and for a specifically Scottish communist party (as part of the wider Third International), which led to his attempted marginalisation. In the process, one-time comrades, first Willie Gallagher, later Harry McShane broke with Maclean. Gallagher became responsible for slurs concerning Maclean’s mental health. It took until after 1956 and McShane’s break with the CPGB over the Budapest workers’ uprising before he was able to provide a more honest account of MacLean’s politics and activities.

Pankhurst’s political activities, and her anti-women’s oppression, anti-imperialist, anti-racist thinking, were the real basis for the criticisms she also faced in the infant CPGB, disguised under personalised attacks upon her inability to accept party discipline. And like Maclean she lost one-time close comrades, such as Harry Pollitt, a member of the WSF and ‘Hands off Russia’ leader. Pankhurst faced a more difficult situation in East London, where Poplar’s metropolitan borough mayor, Red Labour’s George Lansbury, took office in 1919. Later in 1921, he led a successful rates strike. But Pankhurst also challenged his failure to resist the darker racist forces which had

rooted themselves in East Labour's support particularly amongst dockworkers.⁸⁸ And she was aware of the racism of such soon-to-be CPGB leaders as Tom Quelch, who was a BSP delegate to the 1920 Communist international congress.⁸⁹

Maclean's death and Pankhurst's marginalisation on the Left very much contributed to the break-down of the particular geographical alliance, which had developed and to the loss of 'internationalism from below' politics, in these islands. In Maclean's case, this legacy was not quite so forgotten, but was more often remembered and celebrated in the cultural arena. It took the reappearance of the National Question in Ireland, Scotland (and Wales) from the late 1960s before it was once more possible to return to Maclean's actual politics. But it took somewhat longer and the rise of the new Women's Movement from the early 1970s before Pankhurst's contribution could be better appreciated.

h) The need for both a Socialist Republican party and a Social Republican 'internationalism from below' coalition

In 1934, during the inauspicious period, when both fascist and bureaucratised social capitalist forms of murderous police states were crushing all autonomous organisations of the exploited and oppressed, the emergence of the Republican Congress (RC) in Ireland represented an attempt, under these very difficult political conditions, to organise on a coalition or united front basis. Some though wanted the RC to become a new Irish communist party. This was proposed by the USSR state/party Comintern-backed, Revolutionary Workers Group (RWG). If it had been formed, this party would have been a branch office of the Comintern, subject to the abrupt turns in policy, which this body imposed on the orders of the CPSU leadership, the better to protect the USSR state. A counter to this was an RC formed as a Republican coalition. This was proposed by Peadar O'Donnell, ex-Sinn Fein and IRA, and member of its Republican Socialist breakaway, Saor Eire⁹⁰. O'Donnell had been heavily involved in the renewed land agitation. A problem with O'Donnell's thinking,

however, was that a healthy coalition, needed significant healthy political participants, committed to the promotion of a democratic culture. But this did not include the RWG, Irish Labour Party or Sinn Fein. And Irish state repression backed by the Catholic hierarchy, many sympathetic themselves to fascism, added to the problems. In the face of so much acrid politics, O'Donnell retreated more to the cultural arena becoming involved in the publication of *The Bell*.

However, in his attempt to create the RC, O'Donnell did emphasise the nature of the politics needed for a Republican coalition. He wanted the RC to promote an immediate programme for an Irish Republic. This had been abandoned by Fianna Fail, now that it had become unequivocally a constitutional nationalist party and formed the government of the Irish Free State under Eamonn de Valera. O'Donnell argued that "My quarrel with de Valera is not because he is not a Socialist, for he makes no pretence to be one. My quarrel is that he pretends to be a Republican."⁹¹

There is much here that has relevance today, following 'New' Sinn Fein's adoption of the constitutional nationalist road in the 1993 Downing Street Declaration and especially the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. Fianna Fail had followed a similar path after breaking from Sinn Fein in 1926 and entering government in in 1933. Now 'New' Sinn Fein also works through the institutions imposed by the UK state and the Irish Dail. Its Republicanism has become sentimental, a bit like the already mentioned old Clause 4 Socialism for many Labour Party members. Any coalition for a reunification of Ireland, which holds out any prospect of success, will have to be Republican. But this means upholding the democratic sovereignty of the people, against the UK state's Crown Powers and all the institutions it has imposed in both 6 counties Northern Ireland and the 26 counties 'Republic of Ireland'.

The pre-First World War, constitutional Irish Nationalists leaders had often made considerable personal sacrifices during the Irish Land War, including jail sentences. This had provided them with a radical cover when pursuing purely constitutional and economically conservative

policies. Today's 'New' Sinn Fein leaders can still make use of party members' record of making considerable personal sacrifices during 'The Troubles' to try and prevent a genuinely Republican coalition from emerging. And, if necessary, they will promote their own present-day version of Nat-Lab politics. Because Labour is so discredited in the Republic of Ireland and hardly exists in Northern Ireland, such politics could well take the form of a new Soc-Labism (e.g, bringing RISE and People before Profit on board).

Democratic republicanism is very different to the Republicanism of socially conservative militarists for whom Republicanism means an even more intransigent Irish nationalism and a greater degree of separatism. In the 1930s, those in the IRA leadership opposed Fianna Fail and the Republican Congress. Today, their descendant, Dissident Republicans, although they oppose the post-Good Friday Agreement's constitutional order, often still hold traditional conservative social values. The elevation of the 'armed struggle', without regard for popular support, to a permanent strategy, and relegating socio-economic struggles to something to be addressed after the armed struggle is over, can lead to such tragedies as the killing of Lyra McKee in Derry. The Dissident Republicans' continuity is not ensured by the self-perpetuating central committees of many Socialist sects, which have control over their sect/party fronts; but by the continuity of an army leadership to which all other organisations are subordinate. The leaders of Socialist sects usually resort to expulsions or low degree physical assaults to maintain their control; whilst army leaderships can turn to the physical elimination of any perceived opposition to maintain control. Armed struggle is fetishised by Republican militarists in a similar way to strike action by Economistic Socialists.

Any new political organisation today, which wants to promote emancipation, liberation and self-determination (in its widest sense), has to have a democratic practice and culture embedded into its organisation. In the current context of an ascendant Right, a party, with an organised connection to significant sections of the working class and oppressed, cannot just be proclaimed. But, if we were to

look to Russia for an example of pre-party organisation (along with good examples from our own historical experiences), perhaps the League for the Emancipation of the Working Class would form a better precedent. This organisation preceded the first RSDLP Congress held in Kiev in Ukraine in 1897. Today, an updated version could be a League for the Emancipation and Liberation of the Exploited and Oppressed (LELEO) - maybe with a snappier title!

But the promotion of pro-party organisation goes along with support for genuinely autonomous economic (e.g. trade unions and cooperatives), social and cultural organisations, and campaigning coalitions formed for a specific purpose. This approach is opposed both to the party front and to popular front organisations. These limit their party/sect front politics to those set by their behind-the-scenes leaders or, in the case of popular front politics, to those of the most conservative of their hoped-for participants. A genuine united front though, should encourage all participants in any coalition to raise their politics and suggested actions, and these be debated and resolved in democratic manner. And the relevance of any such proposals would be determined by the level of class struggle, which, of course, would itself be the subject of discussion. And today a very necessary campaigning coalition to take on the UK state, and to break its alliance with UK imperialism, would be an All-Islands Republican Internationalist Coalition.⁹²

Allan Armstrong, 24.3.22

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