

# FOR AN ALL-ISLANDS, REPUBLICAN COALITION

## CONCLUSION 'FREEDOM COME ALL YE'



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### Contents

- a) **From the Radical Independence Campaign to the All-Islands Republican Internationalist Coalition?**
  - b) **To party or not to party?**
  - c) **The Republican Socialist Platform (Scotland) and the case for an all-islands League of Emancipation, Liberation and Self-determination?**
  - d) **Looking globally to 'Freedom Come All Ye'**
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The purpose of the three part article, Part 1, *The Changing Nature of British Rule in Ireland – One Left Response*; Part 2, *Winners Losers and Learners*; and Part 3, *Summer is Coming – Kick Starting the*

*'Unfinished Revolution'* has been to make the case for an immediate republican, 'internationalism from below' challenge both to the reactionary unionists and those liberal unionists and constitutional nationalists wanting to take their place within the current imperial and corporate world order. Fully aware of the depth of experience found in the Socialist Republican movement in Ireland, highlighted by the authors of the three books reviewed in this article, this Conclusion will nevertheless draw attention to the experiences and international connections of the Socialist Republican wing of the independence movement in Scotland.

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### **a) From the Radical Independence Campaign to the All-Islands Republican Internationalist Coalition?**

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The Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) was set up in Scotland on 30.11.12, with an openly affiliated Republican Socialist wing.<sup>1</sup> The Republican, former leader of Plaid Cymru, Leanne Wood addressed a RIC rally in Glasgow,<sup>1</sup> and Edinburgh RIC sent a message to the Scotland 'Go For It' rally, she addressed in Cardiff, on 13.9.14.<sup>2</sup> And, despite, from an Irish point of view, the RIC's unfortunate initials, it was welcomed by Republican Socialist, Bernadette McAliskey. She addressed the 2<sup>nd</sup> RIC conference<sup>3</sup> and the 'London Says Yes' rally.<sup>4</sup> RIC speakers were well received at meetings in Dublin, Belfast and Newry. The slopes of Divis/Black Hill behind Belfast were adorned with a massive 'YES' made up of stones. This was in defiance of Sinn

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<sup>1</sup> This was called the Republican Communist Network, which continues to publish *Emancipation, Liberation & Self Determination* (<http://republicancommunist.org/blog/>) but has now dissolved into the Republican Socialist Platform (see later). Other openly RIC affiliated organisations included Commonweal (SNP orientated Left social democrats), the Scottish Greens and the Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers. Two SWP breakaways, the International Socialist Group (now dissolved) and later rs21, the Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Resistance, Democratic Left, the SWP itself, Revolution (a Militant offshoot) and Anarchists all participated. Individual members of the SNP, Labour Party, and many non-party members also joined.

Fein's advice not to get involved. This self-denying ordinance, again reflecting Northern Ireland's and Irish Nationalists' semi-detached relationship with the UK state, was not practised by the Loyalists, who came across to march in Edinburgh, the weekend before the referendum. The British ruling class seek to maintain their control over the whole of the UK, whilst attempting to buttress a neo-colonial relationship with the Republic of Ireland. They face some opposition to this within the Republic of Ireland from the Irish ruling class, now backed by the EU. But with regard to the rest of these islands, including Northern Ireland, the Irish ruling class accepts British dominance.<sup>ii</sup>

The British ruling class usually pursues its bureaucratic 'internationalism from above' strategy, through a policy of conservative unionism. But with their long experience and consequent survival instincts, they have the flexibility to resort to reactionary unionism (as at present) or liberal unionism (as during the 1998 'Devolution-all-round' negotiations) when challenged. To counter this, Republican Socialists need to have a vision of creating, on an 'internationalism from below' basis, a united Poblacht na hEireann or Irish Republic; a Scots Commonweal/Poblachd Albannach or Scottish Republic; a Gweriniaeth Cymru or Welsh Republic; and a People's Commonwealth or English Republic.

This article suggests that the arguments provided by the authors of *TSoNIatD*, and *AstarS:ICaUR* would support a link-up between Republican Socialists and advanced Democrats, who agree on such an immediate policy encompassing Ireland, Scotland (particularly RIC), Wales (particularly Undod) and England to create an All-Islands Republican Internationalist Coalition (AIRIC).<sup>iii</sup> This would also involve migrants and asylum seekers and provide solidarity to those

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<sup>ii</sup> In practice the Irish ruling class had long accepted this, but it was important for the British ruling class that the GFA deal included a referendum in the Republic of Ireland, on 22.5.1998, which abandoned the state's constitutional claim to the Six Counties.

<sup>iii</sup> There is no intention to insist on this particular name, however.

exploited and oppressed particularly by British imperialism elsewhere in the world. Fortuitously, the Gaelic 'airic' means 'agreeable' in English, but this would be a very different form of agreement to the GFA, one based instead on an immediate Republican, 'internationalism from below' challenge to the UK state and its imperial allies.

## **b) To party or not to party?**

Forming such a coalition would represent a considerable political advance. However, in the longer term, there is also a need for political parties, with their ability to address and link up a much wider range of issues. The British ruling class have long recognised this. They use their own political parties (supported by their state and media) to try to impose their bureaucratic 'internationalism from above' strategy, backed, when necessary, by the US State Department and the EU bureaucracy.

But there have also been Labour, Left Social Democratic and Marxist parties, or sects claiming to be parties or proto-parties (be they orthodox, i.e. state backed, or dissident, e.g. Trotskyist), with their own relationships to existing states and national movements. However, these have bequeathed such a toxic political legacy, that it is not surprising that many on the Left end up confining their activity to particular campaigns and movements. They often drop one campaign to move to another after a decline in its political activity.

Thus, the important political legacy left by the best of these campaigns and movements becomes marginalised. History is rewritten by others and the real challenges these movements and campaigns have offered (e.g. Scotland's 2012-14 'democratic revolution'<sup>5</sup>) are first trivialised then ignored by those trying to bury or cash-in on such challenges. They are much assisted in this by those on the Left who have moved on to their latest campaign. This contributes to the loss of political memory.

Thus, Republican Socialists should distinguish themselves from Anarchists and Movementists by arguing for the need for parties. Party activities are not confined to one arena, e.g. workplace, community, particular oppressed group, or field of cultural endeavour.<sup>6</sup> The party is where the experiences from all these other arenas can be discussed, debated, leading to more effective wider political work. But this requires a very different culture from that associated with bureaucratic organisations like the Labour Party or the Marxist sects.

Furthermore, when it is decided to make use of existing state constitutional provisions, e.g. participate in elections, this should always remain subordinate to creating independent class organisations, otherwise Left parties soon turn into outriders buttressing the political and economic status quo, as we have seen with Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

Many on the Left are much better informed of Russian official and dissident Communist history, and in the UK of English/British history. When forced to examine Irish, Scottish, Welsh or Black resistance they can only do so through superior Russian or British chauvinist 'glasses.' Instead, Republican Socialists need to be politically located within the historical traditions of the exploited and oppressed of their own nation and indeed pre-nations within those specific territories. This also encourages a much greater understanding of the importance of culture as a counter to alienation, and its significance in upholding these struggles' historical memory, after they have been marginalised or erased in the political arena. Cultural struggles can also contribute to the formation of 'communities of resistance'.

Yet a party cannot just be declared. It has to have an organised relationship with the politically advanced sections of the exploited and oppressed - our class 'united in its diversity'. To accomplish all this, pre-party organisation is required. This would uphold all the aforementioned party principles and work in genuine autonomous organisations to develop a wider democratic culture and to win wider support. Pre-party organisations would also repudiate treating

autonomous organisations as front organisations or trying to substitute their own activities for those of wider autonomous organisations. They should actively uphold the need for autonomous organisations<sup>7</sup> (e.g. campaigns and movements). But within autonomous organisations, rather than the usual behind-the-scenes ‘politicking’, open political (and other organisational) affiliations should also be encouraged. Wider debates can then be organised, beyond those required for immediate activities. This ensures that all participants are involved in the wider strategic thinking, instead of leaving that to behind-the-scenes, unaccountable leaders.

A key feature of any pre-party (or party) organisation is the need to develop a programme.<sup>iv</sup> Whilst many accept the need for an immediate programme (which some ambiguously call a minimum programme), this is not usually linked to the need to build and defend independent class associations. These include both parties and autonomous organisations, which need to develop independently of the existing constitutional order. Indeed, ‘immediate’ often comes to mean just the next election, with a ‘programme’ acting as a manifesto. Programmes, however, are a central democratic tool to enable both pre-party and party organisations to distil what has been learned internationally and nationally. Debates organised around programmes are both politically educational and allow proposals and demands to be agreed democratically.

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<sup>iv</sup> The need for programmes has come under attack for a number of reasons. Trotskyists have elevated Trotsky’s 1938 *Transitional Programme* either to a ‘sacred’ document or a cover for adopting immediate social democratic politics. This reflects the fact that for there to be any possibility of a transition, there already needs to be a situation of ‘dual power’ with independent parties and autonomous organisations in power. This was not the case anywhere in the world in 1938, hence the spit between the Trotskyist abstract propagandists and the social democratic accommodationists. Anarchists oppose programmes because they believe that the major international and national demands of the exploited and oppressed arise spontaneously. The SWP opposes programmes, because they act as a democratic impediment to the opportunistic U-turns it often makes – e.g. on Scottish independence in 2011.

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And to encourage democratic debate, there is a need to move beyond the old practice of having factions (including the undeclared leadership and the secret factions) found in the bureaucratic Labour/social democratic parties and the Marxist sects. Factions act in a superior manner towards anybody else and resort to personalised abuse and worse when dealing with those they perceive not to be with them.

Instead, platforms are required. All members of pre-party or party organisations should have joined on the basis of agreed principles or programme. Therefore, the purpose of debate between different platforms is to further develop ideas for all members, including other platform and non-platform members. Discussion and debate should be conducted, not to impose one particular line on others (or force them to leave), but to achieve a new synthesis, that is a higher level of understanding, for agreed action. The right to form platforms should be enshrined in the pre-party or party constitution, accompanied by a code of conduct. This would still lead to majority voting when programmatic positions need to be taken and particular actions agreed. But these decisions can be returned to later, in the light of experience, and be revised if necessary.

### **c) The Republican Socialist Platform (Scotland) and the case for an all-islands League of Emancipation, Liberation and Self-determination?**

One place, where these discussions are currently taking place in Scotland is the Republican Socialist Platform (RSP).<sup>v</sup> These debates

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<sup>v</sup> The RSP was initially formed as a platform in RIC after the attempt by some associated with one of the SWP breakaways, the defunct International Socialist Group now behind *conter*, and the Aberdeen Anarchists to close RIC - an example of an anarcho-bureaucratic alliance in practice. (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2021/02/03/freedom-come-all-ye/>). Behind-the-scenes, the RIC Terminators also had the backing of some who went on to form Alec

look beyond any immediate programme, strategy and tactics needed for our struggles in Scotland. The RSP seeks “a global commune which places humankind in a planned sustainable relationship with nature, to end capitalist exploitation, oppression and alienation and environmental degradation.”<sup>8</sup> And the RSP is seeking ways of avoiding falling between the dangers of tail-ending immediate struggles or movements or of offering abstract propaganda for a better future. RSP sees the key to this in “promoting the fullest democratisation of all organisations involved in struggle... Only when we are in full control of our own organisations of struggle can we begin a transition to a new society.”<sup>9</sup>

So, when it comes to any new parties, where are we today politically? Looking around these islands, we are some distance away from being able to form parties with strong links to the advanced sections of the exploited and oppressed and their own autonomous organisations of struggle. But there was a time in the Tsarist Russian empire, before the formation of any party, whether it was the Bolshevik ASUCP in 1925, its RCP predecessor in 1918, or the RSDLP in 1902, when Socialists got together to promote what was in effect a pre-party. They formed the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class in 1895.

Perhaps today we could envisage a League of Struggle for Emancipation, Liberation and Self-Determination,<sup>vi</sup> reflecting our

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Salmond’s vanity party, the socially conservative Alba (<https://republicansocialists.scot/2021/04/what-the-alba-party-represents/>). Many,

particularly younger, activists resisted this and fought back. RIC has reformed with clearly Republican ‘internationalism from below’ principles. The Republican Socialist Platform and the SNP Socialists affiliated, but it also includes members from the Scottish Greens and SSP, as well as non-party members involved in various campaigns, e.g, Living Rent and the Cop-26 Coalition (<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2022/02/05/ric-revived/>)

acknowledgment that capitalism is a linked system of exploitation, oppression and alienation. However, back in 1895, one of the key contradictions which was to emerge on the International Left, was already present.<sup>vii</sup> Under the guise of promoting working class unity throughout the Tsarist Empire, one-state, ‘internationalism from above’, party organisation came to be insisted on. ‘Internationalism from below’ political organisation came to be vehemently opposed. Luxemburgists and Leninists argued that such organisational principles could only become a conduit for petty nationalism. They were completely blind to the greater possibility that one-state organisations would become the conduit for ‘great nation’ chauvinism, social unionism in the UK (which later extended to the infant USSR) and social imperialism generally.

These two undoubted problems cannot be resolved organisationally. But autonomous organisations for the oppressed, be they nationalities, women or LBGT+, should be supported in parties and campaigning organisations and movements. Here Socialist Republicans will undoubtedly come up against those championing organisational autonomy for Separatist reasons (e.g. Left nationalists, Radical Feminists). The Socialist Republicans answer to this is to be fully involved in such autonomous organisations but also call for unity through solidarity with others challenging their own specific oppressions, the better to overcome the wider capitalist system which sustains them.

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<sup>vi</sup> Again, there is no intention of insisting on such a name, just the principles this covers.

<sup>vii</sup> For an analysis of the International Left and its three main components, the Radical Left followers of Rosa Luxemburg, the Bolshevik then Third International followers of Vladimir Lenin, and the supporters of Internationalism from Below, e.g. Kazimierz Kelles-Kreuz, James Connolly and Lev Yurkevich, see <https://allanarmstrong831930095.files.wordpress.com/2022/12/ukraine2.pdf> - pp. 4-35.

#### **d) Looking globally to ‘Freedom Come All Ye’**

The experience of Social Democratic parties and the Marxist sects at national or state level has been replicated on the international scene. Sects like to puff themselves up with the appearance of being internationally organised.<sup>viii</sup> A glaring weakness of these organisations, after their initial mobilising successes in the Alter-globalisation movement (1999) and anti-Iraq war (2003) movements, has been their marginalisation in Occupy in 2011, the Women’s March against Trump on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017, and Black Lives Matter in 2020. None of these mobilisations have been achieved under the banner their diplomatic multi-sect internationals, or within Europe by the European Anti-Capitalist Left, now a shadow of its former self. In their absence, Anarchists and Movementists have once again made a virtue out of immediacy and spontaneity.

Instead of sect internationals, d multi-sect internationals or no international at all, a new international, based on a non-confessional basis would be more appropriate. This would mean rejecting the

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<sup>viii</sup> The SWP and the SP have their own sect internationals, the International Socialist Tendency (IST) and the Committee for a Workers International (CWI). The United Secretariat of the Fourth International has Socialist Resistance (SR) as its British section and Socialist Democracy its Irish section, although its French affiliate, the LCR – now dissolved – has carried far more weight within the USFI.

The USFI maintains its unity through diplomatic ‘internationalism’, so its constituent units can find themselves on different sides over crucial issues. The IST and CWI maintain their ideological coherence, through expulsions or bureaucratic marginalisation and harassment until people leave of their own accord.

And as at the national or state level, there has also been an attempt to bring the sects together internationally. This was done in 2000 in the form of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL). When the EACL declined, losing much of its EU parliamentary representation in 2004, its various constituent members withdrew to their own sect internationals, or were drawn more and more into the orbit of the Left social democratic European Left

inevitably sectarian approach through adherence to particular ‘isms, e.g. – Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism.<sup>ix</sup> Instead a new international should seek the unity of those seeking emancipation, liberation and self-determination. Today we need something more like the early First International.

The First International organised solidarity for migrant workers, for national democratic struggles (the USA, Poland and Ireland) and backed the Paris Commune in 1871.<sup>x</sup> In all the Internationals and especially in the constituent parties of the Third International, migrant and colonised workers and intellectuals played a disproportionate but positive role, in opposing Eurocentric (including the US) ‘internationalism’ and trying to uphold a global internationalism. Any proposed international organisation today, whether for these islands, or possibly extending across Europe, should be acutely aware of the dangers of Eurocentrism. However, migrant communities, often with close links to the exploited and oppressed in the neo-colonial states, today form a much larger section of the working class and should be central to any new international organisation.

Similarly, any such international should avoid the ‘Campism’ left by the legacy of the USSR and its Third International, and some Fourth International organisations. These have also exerted their pull in sections of Left social democracy and Left Labour, and even some

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<sup>ix</sup> The Second International was initially ideologically based, giving primacy to an orthodox Marxism. This tradition was continued in the Third International, only it was not Marxist primacy, but Marxist-Leninist supremacy that was sought. The CPSU, backed by the USSR state, was able to enforce this. This attempt to establish Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy was taken almost to the point of parody by the Fourth International, which, without state backing, split up into the infamous 57 varieties of Trotskyism.

<sup>x</sup> The eventual collapse into competing sects – e.g. Marxist, Lassallian, Bakuninist – largely came about because of the defeat of the Paris Commune.

Anarchists. e.g. Noam Chomsky.<sup>xi</sup> Any genuine international organisation today would support the struggles of the oppressed for example in Palestine, Kurdistan, Syria, Yemen, Xinjiang and Ukraine against their imperial aggressors.

The First International was non-confessional but had a set of founding principles. Real discussion and debates took place. Its meetings were well prepared and recorded. Therefore, this article's last appeal is wider than to the authors and co-thinkers of the three books reviewed. There are many Socialists, still eager or anxious to oppose the current imperialist order. They have become troubled at the behaviour of the Marxist sects and their sect-Internationals. So, it is hoped that these Socialists can also join with the RSP and others to help make the break with the toxic legacy which still plagues sections of the Left.

Corporate capital and imperialist states threaten us with nuclear annihilation or 'barbarism if we are lucky'- leading to environmental degradation and major and more devastating pandemics. To counter this, this Conclusion, will draw for inspiration upon the Scottish internationalist, Hamish Henderson. He made the global call - 'Freedom Come All Ye'.

**Allan Armstrong, 26.2.23**

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### **References**

<sup>xi</sup> This does not mean a repudiation of everything some of these political activists and intellectuals have written or said in the past. Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* is an important book. When the ruling class and their apologists denounce the brutal activities of competing imperial powers, it is their hypocrisy that needs challenged, not adopting the position my immediate enemy's enemy is my friend. This cuts you off from the exploited and oppressed in major parts of the world, leaving them far fewer political options and more prone to the appeals of your own ruling class.

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- 1 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/08/15/wales-and-scottish-independence-leanne-wood-president-of-plaid-cymru/>
  - 2 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/09/19/message-from-edinburgh-ric-to-the-go-for-it-scotland-rally-in-cardiff-on-september-13th/>
  - 3 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2013/11/25/2nd-ric-conference-after-the-uk-the-future-of-4-nations/>
  - 4 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2014/09/10/to-scotland-with-love-a-report-from-the-london-says-yes-rally-on-september-6th>
  - 5 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2015/02/24/british-unionists-and-scottish-nationalists-attempt-to-derail-scotlands-democratic-revolution/>
  - 6 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2017/08/11/a-critique-of-jeremy-corbyn-and-british-left-social-democracy-part-2/> - To party or not to party, that is the question
  - 7 <http://republicancommunist.org/blog/2017/08/11/a-critique-of-jeremy-corbyn-and-british-left-social-democracy-part-2/> - d. Autonomous organisation
  - 8 <https://republicansocialists.scot/constitution/>
  - 9 <https://republicansocialists.scot/constitution/> - Principles of the RSP, 1.2