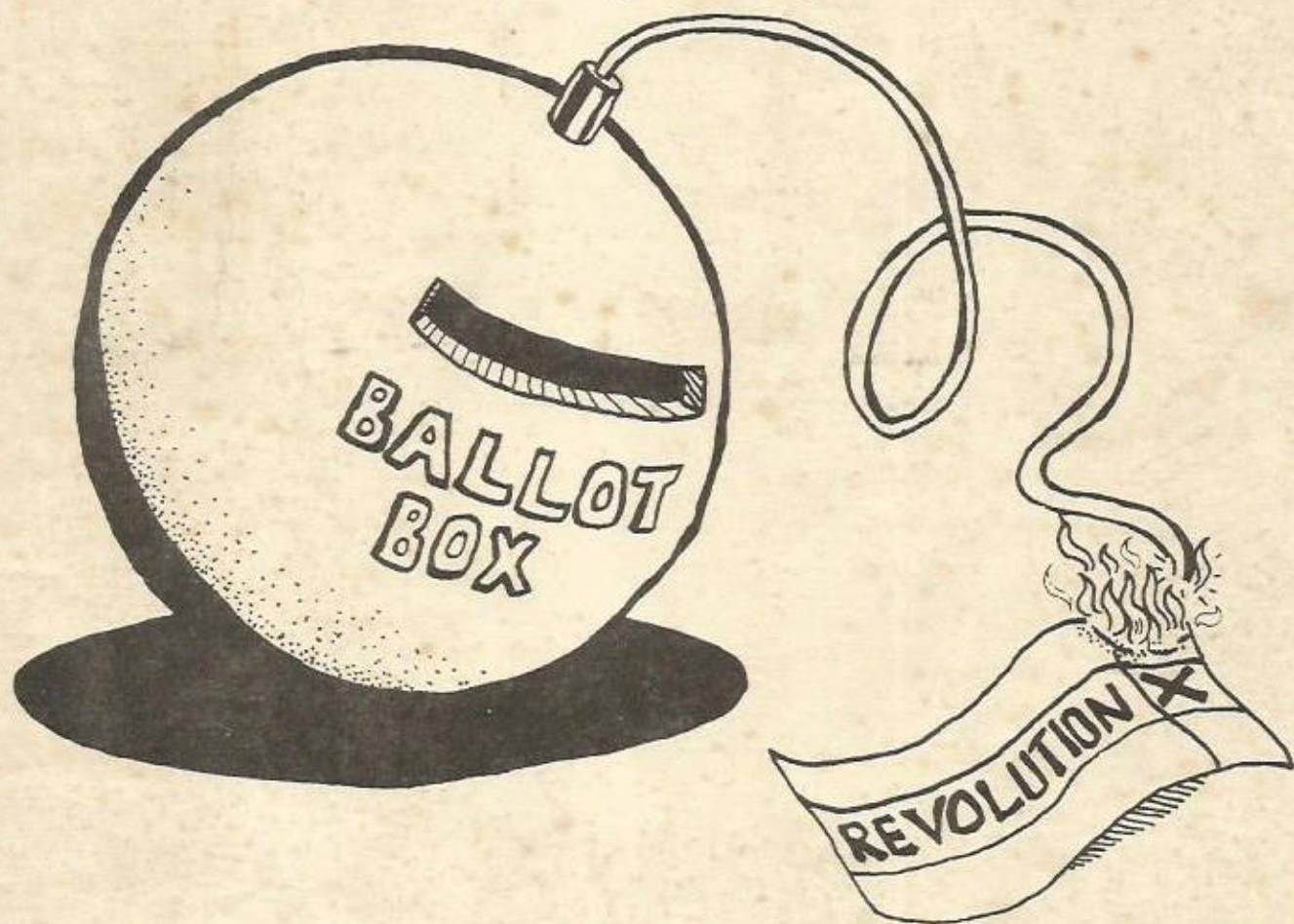


MARXIST REVIEW

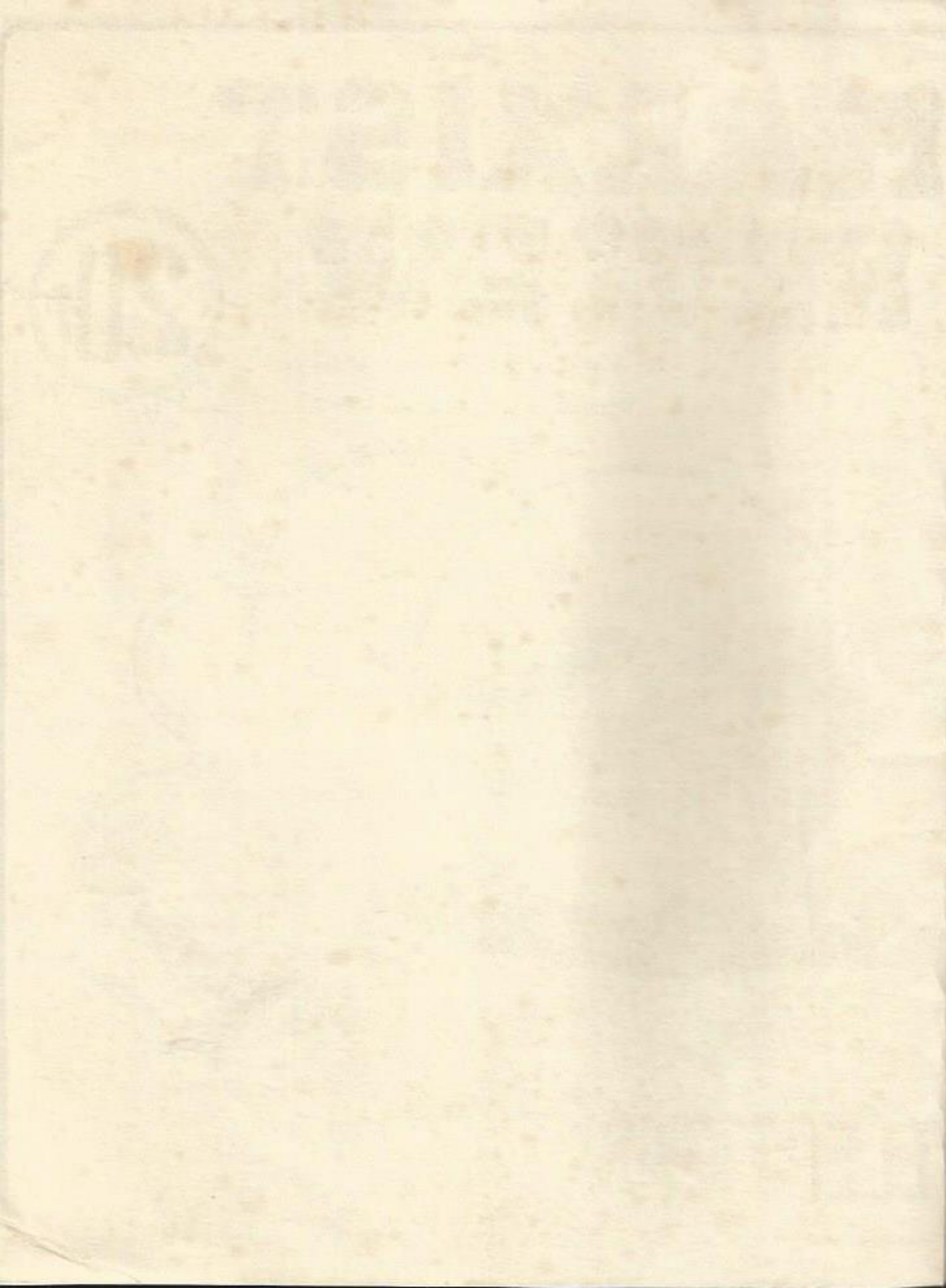
theoretical journal of the
Revolutionary Marxist Group

20p
OVERSEAS — 25p



ELECTIONS:

A REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY



MARXIST REVIEW No 6

theoretical journal of the revolutionary marxist group
irish section of the fourth international

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MARXIST REVIEW is the theoretical journal of the RME
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Floor, 2 Mary Street, Dublin 1.

ELECTIONS — the revolutionary tactics

Elections to bourgeois administrations can be important tools for the ruling class in reinforcing its ideological hold on the masses. But it is a tool which can be utilised by revolutionaries against the ruling class.

The tactics of a campaign around elections by revolutionaries must be judged, as all revolutionary action must, from an assessment of the objective and subjective conditions. From this assessment the correct method by which the only basis of revolutionary action at elections - the propagation of the revolutionary programme, the strengthening of the mass movement and for the purpose of educating the more backward strata of the working class - can be implemented.

For the ruling class, elections serve a number of purposes.

Primarily, they make up a part of the ideological armoury of the ruling class by offering what is said to be a democratic apparatus, presented as a key of the "democratic" system. In reality, while universal suffrage is a democratic institution which must be defended against fascist or bonapartist attack, its role in replacing suffrage limited to property owners only when the stage was reached that parliament was not the only institution carrying out government must be recognised. Thus, today, parliament is subject to the irresistible pressure of capital, national and international: and can over-ride the opinion of the mass of the people either by changing the rule of "democracy" - gerrymandering or the restructuring of government - or by simply claiming "superior information", as in the case of the initial entry of Britain into the EEC, despite majority opposition in the country.

Also, elections can serve specific tactical purposes. The secret ballot splits the collective power of the working class. The unity developed in struggle is broken down as individuals are isolated and bombarded with the propaganda of the state and its mass media.

Thus, the intention is that in the electoral procedure itself fragmentation within the working class can be encouraged.

This tactic was employed with the hope of defusing the mass upsurge of May '68 by the French Government, and by the Tory Government in Britain last year in an attempt to counter the rising tempo of working class militancy spear-headed by the miners.

But while elections serve specific needs of the ruling class they can also be utilised by revolutionary socialists as an auxiliary to an on-going extra-parliamentary campaign of agitation and propaganda.

The strengthening of the class consciousness of the working class, and not only the vanguard of that class, the putting forward of the revolutionary programme, and the development of the mass movement are the factors which determine the actual methods adopted at elections - the opportunity for an extended platform for agitation on all aspects of the struggle.

And while the revolutionary movement lacks the strength to do away with the existing bourgeois apparatus then revolutionaries must work within the elections by participation. This is the case even for the most counter-revolutionary parliaments as the experience of the Bolsheviks illustrated. Lenin deemed such participation as "not only useful, but indispensable to the party of the revolutionary proletariat, after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905) so as to pave the way for the second bourgeois revolution (Feb 1917) and for the socialist revolution (October 1917)"; "Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder".

The attention of the working class almost invariably cannot but be focussed on elections - and in such circumstances revolutionaries must take advantage of the platform offered by the ruling class - and in general this can best be done through participation.

But in certain circumstances the needs of the mass movement and the education of the masses can best be served by an active boycott of elections. This tactic can, however, only be correctly applied in certain specific circumstances - when the masses are in rapid revolutionary upsurge of the magnitude of having broken the bounds of bourgeois legality on a mass and universal scale; in order to prevent or weaken significantly any new structures of government the bourgeoisie may attempt to introduce; and to give this upsurge, which will, almost without exception, find one form of expression in a spontaneous boycottist and non-participation form, a coherence and direction only the leadership of socialist revolutionaries can provide.

An acid test of the correctness of the boycott tactic, and of all revolutionary tactics is - can it strengthen the mass movement and the revolutionary consciousness of the working class, and in particular, can an 'active' boycott be mounted in which revolutionaries counterpose to the bourgeois elections a viable radical alternative which will attract the masses - whether it be behind the slogan of calling for workers' own organs of power, soviets, street committees, or by more limited calls for strengthening mass struggle behind democratic slogans. If not, the boycott tactic is clearly incorrect.

A failed 'active' boycott holds no advance for the struggle of the working class and exposes the political misjudgement of those who made the call. Similarly, a 'passive' boycott campaign which offers no alternative to the bourgeois structure, save possible abstract calls to struggle with no real leadership, exposes the political impotence of the groups involved and will contribute to their isolation from the mass of the proletariat.

Revolutionary experience has taught the value of boycott and participation and the methods for the implementation of these tactics in different situations and with the mass consciousness at differing levels. Examples to be considered were in Russia when in 1905 the Bolsheviks correctly applies a boycott but incorrectly held to the same position the following year, and in Spain when in 1930 a boycott was the only realistic tactic to be followed though only months later participation was correct.

RUSSIA 1905-07

In Russia during 1905 an immense uprising found expression in the creation of soviets. It appeared that the winning of state power by the proletariat was possible. The barriers of the old police state had been broken down. The popular masses were in what Trotsky described as a "chaotically oppositional mood" and when the pressure of militancy forced the Tsarist government to attempt to create a new governmental structure, the Bolsheviks tried to give coherent revolutionary form to this mood in agitation around an election boycott.

The Tsarist government announced elections for a new body, the Duma. This was created as a manoeuvre to gain the support for the liberals against the growing threat of revolution; its power was that its agreement was necessary for the passing of legislation.

So, with mass upsurge and an attempt by the ruling class to create a new structure, the classic preconditions for the application of a boycott tactic were present. And with the boycott the revolutionaries succeeded "In preventing a reactionary government from convening a reactionary parliament in a situation in which extra-parliamentary action (strikes in particular) were developing at great speed, when not a single section of the proletariat and the peasantry could support the reactionary government in any way, and when the revolutionary proletariat was gaining influence over the backward masses through the strike struggle and through the agrarian movement" - Lenin (Left Wing Communism).

But the following year the Bolsheviks again applied the tactic, this time against the Second Duma. This was incorrect and arose from a failure to grasp that the peak of the revolutionary upsurge had passed. The masses were no longer in an upswing of consciousness and mobilisation. In conference in December 1905, the Bolsheviks resolved the "attempt to undermine this police Duma, rejecting all participation in it". But the time had passed for such resolutions.

Lenin in 1907 outlined the error of the Bolsheviks:

"The condition for the success of the boycott of 1905 was a sweeping, universal, powerful and rapid upswing of the revolution. We must now examine, in the first place, what bearing a specially powerful upswing of the struggle has on the boycott, and, secondly, what the characteristic and distinctive features of a specially powerful upswing are.

"Boycott... is a struggle not within the framework of a given institution but against its emergence. Any given institution can be derived only from the already existing, i.e., the old regime. Consequently, the boycott is a means of struggle aimed directly at overthrowing the old regime, or, at the worst, i.e., when the assault is not strong enough for overthrow, at weakening it to such an extent that it would be unable to set up that institution, unable to make it operative.

"(Reference everywhere in the text is to active boycott, that is, not just a refusal to take part in the institutions of the old regime, but an attack on this regime... the Social Democrats spoke openly at the time (of the boycott) about active boycott, sharply contrasting it to passive boycott, and even linking it to armed struggle).

"Consequently, to be successful the boycott requires a direct struggle against the old regime, an uprising against it and mass disobedience to it in a large number of cases (such mass disobedience is one of the conditions for preparing an uprising). Boycott is a refusal to recognise the old regime, a refusal, of course, not in words, but in deeds, i.e., it is something that finds expression not only in cries or slogans of organisations, but in a definite movement of the mass of the people, who systematically set up new institutions, which, though unlawful, actually exist and so on and so forth. The connection between boycott and the broad revolutionary upswing is thus obvious: boycott is the most decisive means of struggle, which rejects not the form of organisation of the given institution, but its very existence. Boycott is a declaration of open war against the old regime, a direct attack upon it. Barricade a broad revolutionary upswing, barricade mass unrest which overflows, as it were, the bounds of the old legality, there can be no question of the boycott succeeding". (Against Boycott; 1907. Emphasis in original)

He subsequently added, "It was an error... for the Bolsheviks to have boycotted the Duma in 1906. It was an error, because after the December defeat* it was impossible to expect a revolutionary attack in the near future; it was therefore senseless to spurn to Duma's tribune for mobilising the revolutionary ranks". (Concerning the Boycott of the Third Duma)

However, in the situation of the Bolshevik Party in 1907 Lenin found himself almost alone amongst the leadership in holding this position. Mass arrests took place all over the country that year, naval mutinies ended in failure, the Duma was prorogued and a massive wave of state violence was unleashed. In reaction to this the Bolsheviks renewed their boycott call with determination - but in doing so failed to draw the guide to their action from the consciousness of the masses. Trotsky later described this reaction and the boycott as "an attempt to cover their own impotence with a radical gesture". (Stalin - Trotsky)

"When the masses are in retreat, the tactic of the boycott loses its revolutionary meaning". (Stalin.)

SPAIN 1930-31

The experience of Russia 1905-07 and the lessons derived from it were reinforced in Spain with the upsurges preceding the Civil War.

The social and political crisis opened up in Spain with the depression in 1929 and this ended for a period the attempts of absolutism to crush all protest with military repression.

In 1930 dictator Primo de Rivera was forced to resign when he failed to gain a vote of confidence from the garrisons of Spain, necessary in the face of rising working class militancy. King Alfonso XIII appointed General Damasco Berenguer Fustre head of a caretaker government prior to the intended formation of a constitutional monarchy. But the success of this plan depended on a mass base for the monarchist and clerical political parties - a base they did not have.

* In particular, the smashing of the Soviet in December 1905.

This loosening of the chains of absolutism opened the flood gates of mass militancy expressed in opposition to attempts to foist a new structure which though less authoritarian did not go far enough for the Spanish masses. This took a particular form in a general mood of non-cooperation with the authorities, and boycott for the elections for the new structures, the Cortes.

A mass upsurge was in process, which for its development necessitated the intervention of communist revolutionaries - taking the initiative thus to gain a leading position in the struggle.

The conditions described by Lenin as opening up the possibility for the use of the boycott tactic - the "sweeping, universal, powerful and rapid upswing of the revolution" - were being fulfilled in the radicalisation gripping the Spanish masses; working class and peasants.

But the actual failure of the communists to take a clear line was to be criticised by Trotsky in that year: "The communists obviously committed an error by failing to take the initiative in the boycott. They alone, at the head of the revolutionary workers, could give the boycott campaign a bold and militant character.

"The sentiment for boycott, nevertheless, is clearly widespread in opposition parties and is a reflection and symptom of the profound restlessness around the popular masses."

Prior to the election Trotsky had written of the possibility of its invalidation by boycott, just as had been achieved by the Bolsheviks and the other boycottists with the Duma in 1905. And on February 15, following the elections and the failure of the monarchist strategy, both because of the boycott but also due to the weakness of the bourgeois and clerical parties still blinking in the light of their new found legality, he wrote of the lack of confidence engendered and exacerbated in the ruling clique, and its ramifications:

"The superstitious respect for power in the consciousness of the people will be relentlessly undermined by all this. A wave of satisfaction, of confidence, of daring will go through millions of hearts, warming them, inspiring them, spurring them on". This was the result of a boycott of mass proportions, springing from the demands of the masses themselves, but the communists had not attempted to develop this and they paid the price. "Unfortunately, the communists were not the stars in the boycott performance. That is why they did not achieve any important victories in the campaign of the last two or three months", Trotsky wrote later that year.

Just as Trotsky was unequivocal on the necessity of the boycott call against the attempts to build a new structure and to unify the masses struggle, he had no doubt about the political content that should have characterised that call: that at that time to counterpose the creation of soviets, of organs of dual power to the ruling clique's Cortes would be mere abstraction. The Spanish masses were in universal upsurge, there could be no doubt of that, but the actual process of radicalisation to the point at which organs of dual power would be thrown up in working class organisation, was still at an embryonic stage. Thus, to have made such a call for soviets would have found no mass response and would have been to contribute to the fragmentation of the masses rather than in uniting them in struggle.

The masses of the city and countryside can be united at the present time only under democratic slogans. These include the election of a constituent Cortes on the basis of universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage. I do not think that in the present situation you can avoid this slogan. Soviets are as yet nonexistent. The Spanish workers - not to speak of the peasants - do not know what soviets are: at any rate, not from their own experiences.

Nevertheless, the struggle around the Cortes in the coming period will constitute the whole political life of the country. To counterpose the slogan of soviets, under these circumstances to the slogan of the Cortes, would be incorrect". He added that soviets could be built in the future only by mobilising the masses on the basis of democratic slogans at that period - the task was to prevent the monarchy convening a conservative Cortes and to ensure the convocation of a democratic constituent Cortes which could give lead to the peasants and which would thus necessitate the creation of soviets to fortify the position and gains.

Berenguer, the then head of Government, resigned and was replaced with a civilian administration. Believing the rightist groupings could not win a majority to the Cortes, the King called municipal elections instead, to be held on April 12, 1931. And less than two months after advocating a boycott of elections, Trotsky stated the necessity of participation. The decision showed neither inconsistency nor a revision of his earlier position - the two elections were of deeply differing character.

With regard to the Berenguer Cortes, the tactic of boycott was perfectly correct. It was clear beforehand that either Alfonso would succeed for a certain period in again resorting to the road of military dictatorship or else the movement would roll over the head of Berenguer and his Cortes. Under these conditions, the communists had to take the initiative in the struggle to boycott the Cortes. This is precisely what we had insisted on with the aid of those meagre resources we had at our disposal. Had the Spanish communists come out resolutely and in time for a boycott, even if only by distributing short statements on the subject, their authority would have been considerably greater at that moment when the Berenguer ministry was overthrown. The advanced workers would have said to themselves: "These people are capable of foreseeing things". Unfortunately the Spanish communists, thrown off the track by the leadership of the Comintern, did not understand the situation and made preparations to participate in the elections, but again without any confidence. The events rolled over their heads, and the first victory of the revolution brought the communists almost no increase in influence.

"Now the Zamora Government has undertaken to convene a constituent Cortes. Is there any basis for thinking that the convocation of this Cortes will be interrupted by a second revolution. To call for boycott would now be to call for self-isolation. It is necessary to participate most actively in this election. The revolution poses political questions directly and at the present stage gives them a parliamentary form.

"We do not solidarise ourselves for a moment with the illusions of the masses; but we must utilise whatever is progressive about these illusions to the utmost, otherwise we are not revolutionists but contemptible pedants". (The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers threatening it, May 1931)

In the time of Berenguer the Cortes had to be boycotted in the name of a revolutionary constituent Cortes. The question of suffrage should have been at the forefront of agitation - a call for increased democracy as part of the struggle for soviet workers democracy. Having then overthrown the old repressive regime along with its new structure, militant workers and peasants wanted to participate in elections - to strive for a democracy the bourgeoisie could not grant, in the demand for a democracy the governmental structure did not actually represent or could concede. This was the key to the necessity of revolutionary intervention in the elections.

But others implemented differing tactics. The Communist Party ignored the elections, thus playing into the hands of the anarchists, a powerful Spanish tradition, who counterposed the slogan of arming the masses to the reality of the political process: gripping the masses and thus contributing to their isolation from the workers and peasants, and the isolation of the masses from arms. The question of revolution is at one time or another "refracted through the prism of parliamentarianism". The tasks for revolutionaries were to use the Cortes as a forum from which the revolutionary programme could be powerfully presented and as a bond with the masses that can be developed to contribute decisively to the overthrow of the Cortes in favour of workers' democracy.

On the election results, Trotsky noted there was not one communist in the Cortes: "Of course, the revolutionary wing is always stronger in action, in the struggle, than in parliamentary representation. The weakness of Spanish communism is fully disclosed. Under these conditions, to speak of the overthrow of bourgeois parliamentarianism by the dictatorship of the proletariat would simply mean to play the part of imbeciles and babblers. The task is to gather strength for the part on the basis of the parliamentary stage of the revolution and rally the masses to us. That is the only way parliamentarianism can be overcome. But precisely for that purpose it is indispensable to develop a fierce agitation under the most extreme democratic slogans.

"What should be the criteria for advancing the slogans? On the one hand, we must consider the general direction of the revolutionary development, which determines our strategic line. On the other hand, we must take into account the level of consciousness of the masses; the communist who does not take that into consideration will break his neck". (Trotsky, July 31, 1931.)

And Trotsky went on to stress the necessity for the participation to be a part of an ongoing agitation in all areas.

The weakness of the communists in Spain, aggravated by political mistakes, was to have implications tragic for the Spanish working class and peasantry.

Crisis gripped the government, resignation and further elections followed with political regroupment. The social-democrats were frightened by their new found parliamentary power and refused to implement socialist policies which would have opened up a new stage in the revolutionary process which would have swept them aside. Instead, they handed power to the bourgeoisie and in doing so undermined the confidence of the proletariat in itself and the confidence of the petit-bourgeoisie in itself. In the crisis, the conditions for the growth of fascist reaction were thus prepared.

It came with the Civil War and the defeat of the Spanish masses - for the lack of adequate political preparation.

"The result of the civil war depends for one fourth, not to say one tenth, upon the development of the civil war itself, its technical means, its purely military leadership and for three fourths, if not for nine tenths, on the political preparation", Trotsky wrote in November 1934, and he was soon to be proved correct.

IRELAND 1969-74

Despite the wealth of revolutionary experience to be drawn upon, the positions adopted by Republican and Socialist groups to elections in Ireland in recent years have consistently missed potentially valuable vehicles for agitation. The tactics adopted by anti-imperialists in four elections should be considered: the six county general election of February 1969, the Free State General Election of December 1972, the Northern assembly election of July 1973 and the British General Election in the North of Ireland, February 1974.

The growing militancy.

By early 1969, Stormont Prime Minister Terence O'Neill had been caught between the hammer of civil rights agitation and the anvil of loyalist reaction; personified by Ian Paisley. The pressure of the Paisleyite right forced O'Neill to make his infamous liberal call to arms "Ulster at the Crossroads" speech and to call a Stormont General Election. Sections of the civil rights movement were seduced by O'Neill's liberal rhetoric and slackened activities. Peoples Democracy, on the other hand, contested 11 seats with a programme of demands calling for reform in a number of social issues and an ending of repressive legislation.

PD did not reach its decision to participate on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist analysis - for the organisation was at that time a loose though militant civil rights group and not a socialist organisation - but they nevertheless adopted a very good position as their publications of the time explained:

"In the turmoil of the election campaign it is important we do not forget that, for the Peoples Democracy, fighting the election is only one of many tasks. We are contending seats, not to join the carpet-baggers and place-seekers, but because it offers an excellent chance to put our ideas to the people and keep the demand for civil rights in the limelight. For us, democracy is a continuous struggle by the people, not just making a mark on a ballot paper every four or five years".

Thus the electoral platform was being used to agitate for extra-parliamentary struggle. The PD agitation was successful, its character meshing with the growing militancy of the anti-unionist people, and reflected in some high voting figures within their total of 23,645 votes. And following the election the PD carried out its promise to continue the struggle on the streets. A contribution had been made to the struggle by the election intervention and the confidence of the anti-unionist working class aided.

Outflanked in the 26 Counties.

By late 1972, Jack Lynch required a new mandate to strengthen his government's position in order to increase repression against anti-imperialists and thus aid British Imperialism in the North. He therefore called a General Election for December 7. But it was the case that the necessities of capitalist stability in the Free State dictated that the policies of the Cosgrave-Corish coalition would differ little from that of Fianna Fail on the Northern crisis and anti-Republican repression.

In the election campaign, however, the major parties sensed the frustration and confusion of the mass of the electorate to their policies on the national question and switched the main thrust of their campaign to immediate social and economic issues. Thus Republican or Socialist intervention in the elections necessitated a campaign not only on social and economic issues, but primarily on the question that the major parties avoided - the North and repression: to place a revolutionary position before the people on the issues that the major parties had retreated from.

But before this opportunity, Provisional Sinn Fein itself retreated, PD failed to contribute to developing consciousness in any meaningful way, and the Official Republicans missed an opportunity to put forward key questions.

The Government was attempting to draw Provisional Sinn Fein into battle before the organisation was prepared. But in recognising this and refusing to go forward in the elections, Sinn Fein actually exposed and exaggerated their weakness before the working class. An aggressive Republican campaign would not have produced massive election returns, but even a moderate poll for Sinn Fein candidates would in effect have been a defeat for the policies of the major parties in that it would nullify any claim they had to having a mandate for repressing Republicans. It would have shown that there was popular opposition to this repression. This was not done, the issue of repression was side-stepped and the position of the major parties left unopposed.

People's Democracy adopted an abstentionist policy and wrote of combatting electoralist illusions. But electoral illusions will not be broken by propaganda. This will occur only with the concrete experience of the masses in struggle. And participation in elections on a revolutionary basis will contribute to this process. Participation does not mean solidarising with these illusions but rather to utilise elections in an appreciation of the reality of the mass consciousness in order to extend agitation and to reach the masses still under the influence of bourgeois ideology. Thus election agitation forms a part of the development of the forces which will eventually break down the electoral illusions.

The RAG put forward a form of action which did offer such a perspective for the utilisation of the election. This was to bring the main question of the conjuncture to the fore - the anti-republican repression, the necessity for it to be opposed, and support for the national struggle.

This was formulated in an election slogan - "Against Repression - Vote Republican" - and in an active campaign in critical support of the Official Republican Movement as the only anti-imperialist organisation which recognised the need to present a working class alternative in these elections.

And by so doing the RMG was in a position to make more effective criticism of the campaign of the Officials and to increase the credibility of revolutionary Marxism within elements of that section of the Republican Movement in particular.

While the Officials offered the only radical opposition to the major parties, the nature of their campaign, with its restricted revolutionary content limited the impact they could have made and meant a failure to take full advantage of the opportunity presented. The very fact that the major parties had shifted the emphasis of the campaign from the national question to the important but nonetheless secondary considerations of inflation, rates and so on, placed a Republican campaign centred on the national question in a favourable position. Such a campaign could have:

a) forced the major parties to state their position unequivocally on this question and thus expose them and force them into confrontation with the working class on the issues they preferred to push under the carpet because of the reaction of the electorate to their policies;

b) the anti-imperialist movement would have become a real alternative to the major parties in the minds of a considerable section of the working class and thus have gained a greater mass of support;

c) combatted the rightist nationalists of Aontacht Eirean and elements of Fianna Fail. The failure of the Officials to raise the national question left the issue open for these elements to capitalise and consolidate themselves. The Officials did not take advantage of their reputation in this field and by not mounting an aggressive Republican campaign - encompassing the economic and social issues in a rounded revolutionary campaign - the rug was not pulled from under the right nationalists and their position was strengthened to the cost of the anti-imperialists.

By campaigning around the immediate economic and social issues the Officials highlighted aspects of a revolutionary perspective but by failing to place the national question at the head of their campaign they failed to place these issues in the context of such an overall revolutionary approach. Thus their agitation did not sufficiently explain the imperialist causes of the economic and social ills and their interrelationship with the anti-imperialist struggle. By this weakness, the Officials' campaign was severely handicapped for thus the differentiation between the anti-imperialists and the major parties becomes blurred. It is not for revolutionaries to automatically accept the terms of reference laid down by the ruling class in its election agitation - it must expose these terms and ensure that matters crucial to the needs of the working class are raised and if possible, brought to be major axes of the election debate. This is possible with the national question in Ireland.

Unfortunately, the Officials' concentration on the lowest level of economic and social issues to the exclusion of a full revolutionary perspective, was not isolated to this election.

Against the Assembly

In mid-1973, with the local government and assembly elections, the British Government was attempting to create a new administrative structure with which to consolidate the "moderate" pro-imperialists, take further sections of the anti-unionist working class from support for resistance in order to isolate the revolutionary movement and bring stabilisation in Imperialist interests closer.

The creation of the Assembly was the keystone of Britain's strategy around which the pacification of the North was to be achieved. It was an election objectively quite different from orthodox Westminster local government elections. They came as a culmination of the processes of the British policy since the imposition of direct rule in 1972 and as such opposition to this structure was the primary task of anti-imperialists.

How could this best be carried out? Three main questions faced revolutionaries: A new structure was to be formed which must be opposed - was it possible to participate in elections to the structure on the basis of opposition to its existence? Could the more backward elements of the working class, those under the influence of the reformists, be better educated by agitation in participation or in boycott? Could revolutionary forces be mobilised, the mass movement strengthened by agitation in participation or boycott?

These questions are not difficult with Marxist analysis. Consider the consciousness of the anti-unionist working class - there was no "broad, universal upswing", instead a working class increasingly fragmented and disorientated since the struggle had passed from its peak with the destruction of Stormont in March 1972 to ebb, and the continuing repression accompanied by political manoeuvring.

The overwhelming weight of this factor meant that the tasks of revolutionaries could most meaningfully be carried out in participation in the elections. But the precise nature of the elections and their role in the imperialist strategy necessitated a high degree in accuracy and precision in agitation.

For Marxists there is no contradiction in participating in elections, or even in the parliaments themselves, in order to agitate for the ultimate smashing of the bourgeois institutions - it is the basis for revolutionary Marxist participation in all elections they take part in. This election was not different in this respect but its peculiar nature made a particularly exact mode of participation essential. This mode, the only revolutionary approach possible given the precise circumstances, was on a clear programme headed by opposition to the Assembly - explaining its role in the imperialist plan - linked with demands for the ending of all repression, the type of demand essential for the mobilisation of the masses at time of ebb in struggle, and stressing the extra-parliamentary methods of struggle.

But not only was this the only genuinely revolutionary approach possible - participation on any basis which did not oppose the Assembly clearly and unequivocally would objectively be to contribute to the building of the Assembly and the consolidation of imperialism. It would have been to imply acceptance of the Assembly.

Yet no Republican or Socialist group attempted to implement this tactic.

And because of the specific nature of the election, the norms by which small revolutionary groups support the candidates of other groups - their breaking with class collaboration or on their class composition (see below: 1974 Gen. Elections) - were not sufficiently precise. There could only be one type of intervention in the elections which would in effect break break with class collaboration - that outlined above; while class composition in this instance did not necessarily imply the vote would be class against class, workers against imperialist. Again, this was not sufficiently exact given the objective nature of this election.

The RMG, itself too weak to stand in the elections, was thus forced by the lack of revolutionary participation by any group, in order to give a revolutionary Marxist presence in the elections to adopt a boycott position and to attempt to inject revolutionary content into the boycott campaign.

People's Democracy acknowledged the role and character of the structure to be created and from its evaluation concluded that their opposition could be expressed best in boycott. But PD did not propound an active boycott. To the election PD counterposed an abstraction - calls for the struggle to continue - when the working class required concrete guide lines. Thus one of the primary objects of revolutionary agitation around elections, the education of the more backward elements which cannot be so easily reached in the normal extra-parliamentary course of agitation, was neglected. Imperialism was enabled by this weakness of the strategy not only of PD but of the major sections of the anti-imperialist movement in general to easily outmanoeuvre the revolutionary vanguard and further isolate it by stripping more of these elements from active resistance.

This failure to give revolutionary form to the boycott was the almost inevitable result of the failure to assess the conjuncture. This dictated that any boycott of this election had also to be of a precise nature to have revolutionary form. Opposition to the Assembly could not be rallied to a boycott campaign because such opposition did not exist in a mass form and did not have any real presence outside the revolutionary vanguard itself. The mass of the anti-unionist working class had not understood what the Assembly represented or its place in the repressive structure, not because the propaganda of the revolutionary groups had been inadequate, but because it had not learnt of its character through their actual concrete experience. PD had made the mistake of identifying the consciousness of the vanguard with that of the mass of the working class, a mistake, which, if repeated, could only contribute to the further isolation of the vanguard.

Provisional Sinn Fein also failed to offer a realistic alternative to the elections and so no attempt was made to give a revolutionary dynamic to the boycott. The abstract slogans put forward - to continue the resistance struggle couched in terms which did not even concretise this to the extent of supporting mass protest - was doomed to failure at any time but mass upsurge.

The RMG, which at that time had itself not fully comprehended the character of the downturn, attempted to give the boycott some revolutionary meaning - to relate it to the needs and consciousness of the mass of the working class. The only possibility for an active boycott was to counterpose the working class structures of organisation, such as were still in the recent memories of the anti-unionist working class; for the construction and reconstruction of street and area committees for

the organisation of defence against reactionary assassination squads and the harassment of the British Army and for the coordination of the mass resistance campaign. Thus a way forward and a method of struggle, clearly linked to the needs of the working class was put forward.

In presenting this boycott policy the RCG strengthened its position within the revolutionary vanguard in the North.

Despite the call for non-participation, Imperialism was able to form the Assembly. It was neither prevented from doing so, nor was the Assembly significantly weakened. Neither was the mass movement strengthened, rather it had been weakened by the revolutionary groups' inability to relate to the conscious needs of the working class. Imperialism was able, almost unopposed to strengthen its hold on the more backward elements. PD and Sinn Fein could not meet the challenge they had set themselves and were not able to promote a boycott to further the struggle.

But while the boycottists failed to strengthen the anti-imperialist struggle, their position was qualitatively superior to that of anti-imperialists who took part in the election. This was solely because this participation was not carried out on a revolutionary basis.

The Republican Clubs did not place opposition to the Assembly or the major issues of repression at the head of their campaign. Participation in elections is for revolutionaries an auxiliary to the main extra-parliamentary struggle. This participation must be used to build the mass movement, and in this case to strengthen the on-going anti-imperialist struggle. But there was no attempt to do this.

From the first mistake of dropping election participation to the level of an abstraction by not linking it to extra-parliamentary agitation, the Republican Clubs went on to repeat their mistakes of the Free State General Election by participation solely on the terms laid down by the ruling class. Thus, at the local government elections the Republican Clubs accepted the definition of local government laid down by Imperialism.

Agitation was limited to the dust-bin level of the petit-bourgeois local politicians and thus appeared qualitatively little different from the policy of many other non-working class candidates. The Republican Clubs called for more facilities in a similar manner to the other candidates, while making occasional reference to the Workers' Republic - but entirely failing to relate the two and thus explain how the social and economic problems could really be solved.

Imperialism was creating a structure of local government with jurisdiction over only sewerage and recreation and the Republican Clubs did not coherently step outside this to present a real alternative - to call for the replacement of this by a more democratic system, by a system which could put increased power into the hands of the working class.

The assembly elections of the following month were similarly approached. The Republican Clubs did not pose a clear revolutionary alternative to the pro-imperialists. This could have been achieved on the basis of opposition to imperialism on the issues which dominated the oppression of the working class - the repression of the British Army and the whole machinery of repression, internment and the political prisoners.

Again, the Republican Clubs propagandised almost solely around extremely limited social and economic demands. This was the expression of the false concretisation of the desire to relate to the consciousness of the most backward elements of the working class. An 11 point "Programme of Action" was put forward which covered a number of issues, housing, education, social security benefits, wage restrictions, health charges, industrial training, prices, speculative investment and nationalisation. It was a programme which might have been taken directly from a social-democrat group in Britain or almost any imperialist country at a time of stability - it took no account of the actual political situation in the North of Ireland.

Such a programme could have been utilised to back up other demands directly related to the immediate needs and consciousness of the working class, the dominating concern of the working class - internment, repression, and drawing them into a campaign of opposition to the Assembly.

The SDLP was the only credible group from the anti-unionist population which stated its opposition to internment and British Army harassment was a central plank of its campaign. Thus, the failure of the Republican Clubs to push these questions left them easily outflanked by the reformists. The SDLP were able to draw to their flag all the less politically conscious layers of the working class, unchallenged by anti-imperialists.

And by the very nature of the demands put forward, the Republican Clubs could not relate their programme to the actual on-going extra-parliamentary struggle against repression and British Imperialism. Thus they failed to contribute to the struggle of the working class or to the development of the class-consciousness of the more backward elements.

1974 GENERAL ELECTION- the ebb deepens

The British General Election of February underlined the continuing inability of the Irish revolutionary movement to cope with the ebb of struggle or to grasp the potential of electoral participation.

Clearly, for Marxists, there was no perspective for boycotting the 1974 General Election - participation to aid the rebuilding of the mass movement was the only coherent policy. Any possible basis for boycott had been broken by the continuing ebb and demobilisation of the mass movement. The boycott tactic had "lost its revolutionary meaning".

The RMG, not fielding its own candidates, adopted a position of support for all anti-imperialist candidates.

This was based on the principle that support should be determined by the class composition of organisations standing. Thus support should be given to established tendencies within the working class movement although they may not necessarily have broken from class collaboration - but that they nevertheless represent a counterposition to ruling class parties; that it would therefore be a class vote.

The RMG expressed its support for all anti-imperialist candidates; McAliskey, McManus and Republican Clubs, and mounted a campaign in support of Albert Price in West Belfast. Price was an independent candidate standing on a limited campaign ticket - free the political hostages, repatriate the Winchester hunger strikers, then a key agitational issue.

The RMG had originally called for the anti-imperialist organisations to unite behind common candidates campaigning on a basic anti-repression platform. With the failure of the groups to respond to this, support for all anti-imperialists became the central thrust, with particular emphasis on Albert Price a candidate unaligned to any of the organisations but who, as father of the hunger striking Price sisters, could have been a focus of a general anti-repression campaign around the election. Unfortunately, the failure of other anti-imperialist groups to support Price acted against this.

Again, the opportunity to strengthen the mass movement and the struggle in general was missed in the election.

The Republican Clubs participated on a set of anti-imperialist demands - against Sunningdale, against internment and British Army harassment and calling for the withdrawal of the British troops, an amnesty for all political prisoners and for the "re-conquest of Ireland, the full ownership of Ireland by the people who make Ireland - the Irish working class".

But while these in themselves represented an advance from the Clubs' position in the assembly elections, limited to an economic and social programme, they remained demands on election leaflets, and not on the streets. There was no perspective of linking the demands to a mass movement on the streets and transforming them into a concrete way forward for the struggle. It is this factor

which determines the revolutionary content of an election campaign: the mobilisation of the working class around those demands.

Sinn Fein (Kevin Street) characterised the election as an "irrelevant distraction" in their press statements. Sinn Fein appreciated that the election had been called by British Prime Minister Heath in an effort to strengthen the Tories against the British working class. From this they ignored the possibilities the election offered to revolutionaries in the North of Ireland from the conclusion that it related solely to "English interests" and that it would not deal with internment, the "Winchester hunger strikers" or the political hostages. And without the participation of anti-imperialists to bring these issues into the electoral arena, this was the case. The duty of revolutionaries is to use such opportunities to bring issues of repression to the forefront of the debate and in doing so not only force other groups into stating their position - embarrassing questions at that stage of the Assembly and Sunningdale, both being in unstable embryonic stages - but would have gained further support for the anti-imperialists from those who care about such issues, the anti-unionist working class. Thus an initiative would have been taken to bring disorientated elements within the working class back into the struggle - to educate the more backward elements upon which the SDLP and the imperialists have been able to thrive and to attack the reformists' base of support.

The Sinn Fein decision to ignore the elections was backed strongly in Belfast and passed with a small majority in Derry. It was not a clear cut decision, as the lack of homogeneity within the organisation dictates. The reformist elements within Sinn Fein will be supporting participation in future elections, but not on the basis of it backing up extra-parliamentary struggle, rather that it should be a central focus of Sinn Fein activity. The recent legalising of Sinn Fein will aid these trends.

The socialists within the ranks of Sinn Fein and those outside attempting to influence sections of the organisation are correctly wary of fostering the parliamentary pretensions of these elements, but this must not and cannot be done by counterposing a blanket policy of boycott.

The only coherent socialist opposition to this tendency can be on the basis of a principled revolutionary approach to elections. Thus to participate on a revolutionary basis is the very opposite of compromise with reformism or opening an opportunity for that tendency. It is to demonstrate in action that socialists, and only socialists, have a coherent strategy of struggle and that socialists can utilise effectively all forms of struggle and can offer a way forward for the working class and evolve tactics for the current ebb of struggle - thus outflanking the reformists on a principled revolutionary socialist basis.

Revolutionary socialists, it must be stated again, participate in elections to strengthen the mass movement and the consciousness of the mass of the working class for not to do so when there is no viable alternative by which this can more effectively be carried out will allow anti-revolutionary elements to consolidate their position and will detract from the mass movement and the development of the struggle for freedom.

An Phoblacht (8/3/74) is preparing a way for future Sinn Fein election participation: "It is essential that Sinn Fein form, if necessary, a cumann in every street, and that the political possibilities of the present situation be analysed, explored, debated, understood and exploited so that, if necessary, the party may be ready to put forward candidates for the next general election, expected before the summer". The article closes, "The military revolt against imperialism, of course, must continue unabated".

The article fails to stress the importance of activity by the mass of the working class and raises the spectre of increasing elitism by the organisation. Mass struggle not complemented, augmented and strengthened by the military campaign, as was the case during the upsurge up to 1972, but replaced by the military campaign isolated from the mass of the working class, and there is a danger that electoral participation, unlinked to mass activity, will contribute to this elitism.

The basis of participation is left largely unclarified but for one sentence: that the existing nationalist groups at Westminster, Plaid Cymru and the Scottish Nationalists could be persuaded through the Celtic League to give a Westminster voice to the Troops Out Movement. This position of using elections, and even participation in parliament, to strengthen the mass movement must be extended to all possible future Sinn Fein participation and to give it a revolutionary role, directly linked to agitation on the streets against imperialism.

the People's Democracy again called for a boycott on the slogan "Fight - Don't Vote".

In explaining their position, some confused thinking was shown:

"Those who favour abstention or a vote of disapproval are only fooling the people. What they are doing is asking people to take part in the imperialist political machine to protest at an institution imposed by that machine. This attitude gives credibility to the whole imperialist relationship between Ireland and Britain". But it is no contradiction for Marxists to participate in elections on the basis of opposition to the ruling class structure. Rather, when the overwhelming bulk of the anti-unionist working class is voting in and has its attention focussed on elections then it is the duty of Marxists to step into the limelight of the election campaign and to use it. The alternative, in all but times of the most dynamic upsurge when the mass of the working class has rejected parliamentarianism, is to gesture impotently from the side-lines and to miss an opportunity for reaching greater elements of the working class.

"And regardless of any protests made by voting for anti-Sunningdale candidates, the Assembly will still exist after the General Election on Feb 28", the article continued. But neither participation nor boycott could bring the Assembly crashing down. As the article goes on to state, this could only be done through mass mobilisations on the streets. So how can this mobilisation, the "street power" be

regenerated? A boycott could not and did not mobilise any sections of the working class but an active campaign behind anti-imperialist candidates could have given the mass movement a boost of morale and much needed impetus. The PD article posed the question incorrectly - neither tactic could immediately smash the Assembly, the real question was how the mass resistance could be aided, its rebuilding fostered. The answer was, by agitation in all areas, including the elections against imperialism, its repression and explaining its role and how it could be overcome.

But a confusion as to the relationship between these different forms of agitation was present. Analysing PD's 1969 election participation, the article states, "History has proved us right - for the decision to field candidates in that election and the large number of votes cast for PD brought on the downfall of Stormont itself, as it was designed to do". Yet a few lines later it continued, "The old Stormont was not brought crashing down by ballot boxes, but by street power". Participation in elections is a method of struggle, of building the comativity of the working class in the streets, to be applied when it is an effective way of educating the working class. This was the case in March 1974. Participation was not a "backward step" as the article suggested, but an attempt resulting from an assessment of the consciousness of not just the vanguard but of the broad mass of the working class, to bring the struggle a step forward and to counter the ebb.

And it is in such a period of ebb in struggle, when the militancy of the working class has passed its peak, that abstract slogans such as "Fight - Don't Vote" lose any revolutionary meaning with the finding of little response within the working class, and to contribute to the proces of the isolation of the vanguard from the working class mass.

Opposition to participation in Westminster elections on the principle that "those who call on people to vote in representatives to the British Parliament are asking people to vote for their own oppression and for the continuance of British rule in Ireland" is to don a moralistic straight-jacket alien to Marxism. Inflexibility on such a basis of tactics was characterised by Lenin as "like making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain and refusing in advance ever to move in zig-zags, ever to retrace ones steps, or ever to abandon a course once selected and to try others". (Left-Wing Communism). Such inflexibility will do nothing to enhance the reputation of socialists within the working class. Being outflanked and made irrelevant through inflexibility will not gain credibility - this will be achieved by a readiness to utilise all arenas of struggle and to provide a coherent strategy for the downturns of struggle - downturns which are the expressions of mass consciousness.

"Solzhenitsyn"

(This is an extract from an article first published in Intercontinental Press in March this year.)

The London Sunday Times of March 3rd published a translation of the full text of a 15,000-word letter from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to the leaders of the Soviet government. Dated September 5 1973, less than two months before the publication in the West of Solzhenitsyn's ' The Gulag Archipelago, the letter ranges over wide areas of Soviet life and government policy, as the introductory note by the Sunday Times editors indicated:

".... Solzhenitsyn denounces the cardinal folly of pursuing an expansionist foreign policy when there is nothing to fear from Europe and America. He calls for an accommodation with China. He deplores the mindless policy of economic growth which has despoiled the beauty of Russia's cities and ruined the beauty of her countryside. He reiterates that the real wealth of Russia lies in her own soil. He pours scorn on the dead creed of Marxism. He claims that the Russians drink far too much vodka. He advocates the end of national service and says promotion should not depend on party membership. He pleads for kindness from Russia's rulers and peace for its citizens".

Solzhenitsyn's letter does in fact range over all these areas and more. Its overall impact import however, can be summarized fairly briefly. In the letter Solzhenitsyn announces his rejection of Marxism and proposes to substitute for it a religious, Great Russian nationalism based on a return to a romanticized vision of nineteenth century Russian peasant economy. This reactionary utopian vision is mixed in a contradictory jumble with occasional proposals that in their own right are progressive and deserving of support.

RETREAT INTO THE PAST

Addressing the Kremlin, Solzhenitsyn states that the purpose of his letter is " to suggest to you what is, for the moment at least, still a timely way out of the chief dangers facing our country in the next ten to thirty years.

"These dangers are :war with China, and our destruction together with Western civilisation in the crush and stench of a fouled earth".

Solzhenitsyn describes the Soviet bureaucrats whom he addresses as "total realists", and he therefore presents practical arguments against war with China:

"Don't reckon on any triumphant blitzkrieg. You will have against you a country of almost a THOUSAND MILLION people, the like of which has never yet gone to war in the history of the world.... Its army and population will not surrender en masse with Western good sense, even when surrounded and beaten. Every soldier and every civilian will fight to the last bullet, the last breath.... You will not of course, be the first to use nuclear weapons that would do irreparable damage to your reputation, which you cannot disregard, and anyway from a practical point of view still wouldn't bring you a quick victory...."

"A conventional war, on the other hand, would be the longest and bloodiest of all the wars mankind has ever fought. Like the Vietnam War at the very least (to which it will be similar in many ways) it will certainly last a minimum of ten to fifteen years.... If Russia lost up to one and a half million people in the First World War and (according to Khrushchev's figures) 20 million in the Second, then war with China is bound to cost us 60 million souls at the very least...."
(Here, and below, emphasis is in the original.)

No defender of the Soviet Union and socialism can take issue with the fact that a war between the two workers states would be a monstrous and criminal folly. It is ironic, however, that Solzhenitsyn bases his argument on "Russian national interest" when it is precisely the two bureaucracies' defense of narrowly interpreted "national interest" - identified with their own caste interests - that has brought them to their present state of mutual hostility.

Solzhenitsyn cites two factors that he considers responsible for the threat of war between the Soviet Union and China. One is the competition between the two bureaucracies to pose as the true defenders of "Marxism-Leninism", The second shows how far the novelist has gone in embracing reactionary notions; he cites "the dynamic pressure of a China 1,000 million strong on our as yet unexploited Siberian lands." Solzhenitsyn thus puts himself in the camp of the racists who attempt to drum up fears of a "yellow peril".

There are elements of Solzhenitsyn's letter besides the warning to avoid a Sino-Soviet war that deserve at least a qualified endorsement. Certainly it is possible to share his disgust with destruction of the environment by carelessly planned industrial projects, even though his explanation of its causes and his proposed remedies are worse than useless.

Solzhenitsyn also calls for an end to Russian control over the workers states of Eastern Europe and over national minorities in the Soviet Union. He urges the Soviet leaders "sooner or later

to withdraw our protective surveillance of Eastern Europe. Nor can there be any question of any peripheral nation being forcibly kept within the bounds of our country."

(The March 3 New York Times translated what would appear to be the same passage as follows: "...our trusteeship from Eastern Europe, the Baltic Republics, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and possibly even from parts of the present Ukraine....")

However, here too Solzhenitsyn motivates his proposal by a supposed Russian national interest that in this case is described as switching attention away from distant continents - and even away from Europe and the South of our country". In order to make Siberia "the centre of national activity and settlement and a focus for the aspirations of young people."

Solzhenitsyn's proposals are all based on a viewpoint that bears little or no relation to reality. He asserts for example, that neither European nor U.S. imperialism represent any threat to the Soviet Union. In fact, he seems to regard U.S. imperialism (Solzhenitsyn does not call it that) as a beneficent force: He does not criticize the United States for its aggression in Indochina; but seems to disparage the "internal dissension and spiritual weakness" that kept it from winning the Vietnam war! And he criticizes past Soviet leadership for having "bred Mao Tse-tung in place of a peaceable neighbor such as Chiang Kai-shek".

Solzhenitsyn's proposal to isolate Russia from the rest of the world sets the stage for an impossible retreat into a romanticised past. His proposals that the Russian economy be reconstructed on a primitive agricultural basis:

"The construction of more than half of our state in a fresh new place (Siberia) will enable us to avoid repeating the disastrous errors of the twentieth century - industry, roads and cities for example."

Solzhenitsyn justifies his argument for a "zero growth" economy by combining a glorification of peasant backwardness with neo-Malthusian worries about overpopulation.

"How fond our progressive publicists were, both before and after the revolution, of ridiculing those retrogrades (there were always so many of them in Russia): people who called upon us to cherish and have pity on our past, even on the most god-forsaken hamlet with a couple of hovels, even on the paths that run alongside the railway track; who called upon us to keep horses even after the advent of the motor car, not to abandon small factories for enormous plants and combines, not to discard organic manure in favour of chemical fertilisers, not to mass by the million in cities, not to clamber on top of one another in multi-storey blocks. How they laughed, how they tormented those reactionary 'Slavophiles'..... They hounded the men who said that was perfectly feasible for a colossus like Russia, with all its spiritual peculiarities and folk traditions, to find its own

particular path; and that it could not be that the whole of mankind should follow a single, absolutely identical pattern of development. "No, we had to be dragged along the whole of the Western bourgeois-industrial and Marxist path in order to discover, at the end of the twentieth century, and again from progressive Western scholars, what any village greybeard in the Ukraine or Russia has had understood from time immemorial and could have explained to the progressive commentators ages ago, had the commentators ever found the time in that dizzy fever of theirs to consult him: that a dozen maggots can't go on gnawing the same apple forever, that if the earth is a finite object, then its expanses and resources are finite also, and the endless, infinite progress dinned into our heads by the dreamers of the Enlightenment cannot be accomplished on it...."

FROM STALIN TO SOLZHENITSYN

Solzhenitsyn's vision of a utopia of peasant hovels and mud roads is not likely to win much of a following either inside or outside the Soviet Union. Despite the letter's protestations to the contrary, it seems very improbable that Solzhenitsyn expected the Soviet leaders to give his suggestions serious consideration.

It needs to be kept in mind that although political themes are important in his novels, Solzhenitsyn is not a politician but an artist. And while both the Soviet bureaucrats and the capitalist press, each for their own reasons, will attempt to portray him as a representative of the Soviet dissident movement, that movement in fact encompasses a broad range of views from the reactionary nonsense of Solzhenitsyn's letter to demands for a return to the norms of Leninism, advanced by such figures as Pyotr Grigorenko.

The differing views of the various dissident currents do share a common origin, however. This is the reaction against the abominations of Stalinist rule. Solzhenitsyn considered himself a Marxist before he was arrested for the "crime" of criticizing Stalin in a letter. His present views were not adopted under the influence of capitalist propaganda: They were taught to him by the bureaucrats who herded millions of Soviet citizens into concentration camps, who crush with arms any movement for socialist democracy in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union, who live lives of luxury rivaling that of capitalist plutocrats while mismanaging the Soviet economy.

Some of Solzhenitsyn's most reactionary positions are borrowed more or less directly from the bureaucrats themselves. His Slavophilism, for example, is justified with an appeal to Stalin himself, as in the following passage ("ideology" is the term Solzhenitsyn uses for Marxism):

"When war began with Hitler, Stalin, who had omitted and bungled

so much in the way of military preparation, did not neglect that side, the ideological side. And although the ideological grounds for that war seemed more indisputable than those that face you now (the war was waged against what appeared on the surface to be a diametrically opposed ideology), from the very first days of the war Stalin refused to rely on the putrid, decaying prop of ideology. He wisely discarded it, all but ceased to mention it and unfurled instead the old Russian banner - sometimes indeed, the standard of Orthodoxy - and we conquered ! (Only towards the end of the war and after the victory was the Progressive Doctrine taken out of its mothballs)".

There is still another way in which the bureaucrats caste has contributed directly to the development of the sort of views expressed in Solzhenitsyn's letter. Soviet physicist Andrei Sakharov describes this contribution in another context, explaining why many of the dissidents seem unwilling to take stands on events outside the Soviet Union. His explanation, which was translated in the March 5 New York Times, referred to " the Western liberal intelligentsia" that expects the dissident movement to reciprocate its interest in Soviet affairs:

" These people look to Soviet dissenters for a reciprocal, analogous international position with respect to other countries. But there are several important circumstances they do not take into account: the lack of information; the fact that a Soviet dissident is not only unable to go to other countries, but is deprived, within his own country, of the majority of sources of information; that the historical experience of our country has weaned us away from excessive 'leftism', so that we evaluate many facts differently from the liberal intelligentsia of the West; that we must avoid political pronouncements in the international arena where we are so ignorant (after all we do not engage in political activity even in our own country); that we must avoid getting into the channel of Soviet propaganda, which so often deceives us."

The enforced isolation described by Sakharov does more than deprive actual and potential opponents of bureaucratic rule of reliable information on which to base their political judgments from being tested in practice. In this artificial atmosphere, reasonable and irrational ideas can and do exist side by side.

If there were free public discussions of political issues in the Soviet Union, Solzhenitsyn's proposals to replace motor transport with horses, and Marxism with religion, could only provoke laughter and little else. The absence of such a competition of ideas grants them a life they would not otherwise have.

CONNOLLY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY : III THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

In the first two articles of the series (M.R. Nos 3 & 4), James Connolly's attitude to the concept of the revolutionary party - the Marxist system of political organisation - were considered. In the first article his final concept of organisation was compared with that of the Bolsheviks. In the second article the relationship of his concepts to his practice in the struggle against the imperialist war was considered. Now it is necessary to consider the circumstances in which his views developed. The relationship of Connolly's ideas to their time, will be discussed in this and the next two articles.

THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

That the objective conditions existed in 1896 for the Irish Workers' political backwardness has been stated before now. It was a product of the overall economic backwardness in the context of an uneven world-wide spread - qualitative and quantitative - of Marxism. The relations between the classes were undeveloped due to the failure of the industrial revolution (outside Belfast where the same result was caused by the sectarian division within the labour force itself). The unskilled workers had yet to establish a permanent form of industrial organisation - let alone a political vanguard. The skilled workers were inevitably inclined to petty bourgeois radicalism, which in the colonial conditions of Ireland, tended at its most radical to take the form of an extreme and uncompromising form of nationalism - Republicanism. Most of the larger capitalists were Unionists - supporters of the colonial link with Britain: the smaller ones (including the newly and potentially liberated peasants) supported the compromising form of Irish Nationalism - Home Rule. When the influence of the Catholic Church is added to all this, it is clear that the struggle for the Irish Workers' Republic, seventy years ago, even more than today, was based in objective circumstances that resembled more those affecting the workers of the underdeveloped third of the world than those of the small but well-organised workers of Tsarist Russia.

This was the Irish situation in 1896. However it would be incorrect to say that it was the sole influence on the man who came in this year to help found the Irish Socialist Republican Party. James Connolly gained a reputation as an organiser in this time, he would not have been chosen by the Dublin Socialist Club to organise for it. He knew already most of the leading figures of the British Labour Movement. His development was probably not helped by having them centred mainly on Edinburgh - a city that had most of the defects of Dublin and some of Belfast, but which had few of the objective strengths of either. However, Edinburgh was merely one centre for Socialist action within a broad movement - both national and international. The weakness of the British Labour Movement was mentioned in the first article of this series. It is enough, here, to recall that it has been based on an almost opposite condition to the weakness of its Irish comrades. In the latter case, the weakness came from retarded economic development: in the case of the British working class, it arose from the fact that its industrial base was the oldest in the world and provided the resources for its capitalists to buy off large layers of its proletariat - first but of its monopoly and then out of its colonial super-profits.

Accordingly, its greatest theoreticians - Connolly and John Maclean - had to fight it with little support from within.

Here it may be merely noted that the debility of both the British and the Irish working class movements was not eliminated by the International organisation to which the Parties that composed them were affiliated. Though Connolly never attended a conference of this body, he could eventually read three languages besides his own and follow its debates. His politics and his choices therein cannot be understood without reference to this body (though the attempt to do so has been made all too often). It is well to consider at length.

For most of Connolly's political career - indeed until it broke up into opposing national sections under pressure of the imperialist war - the bulk of the working class movement was organised in the Second International. As its name implies this body was a recreation of the International Working Mens' Association (the First International) that Marx, Engels and Bakunin had dominated in the 1860's and which had Irish branches in Dublin, Belfast and Cork.

The First International had lasted formally 12 years (1864-1876) though it was, in fact, wrecked well within that time. The causes for its collapse were the political division that developed within it between the Marxists the Ultra-Left (Anarchist under Bakunin) and the Labour Opportunists. One of the main differences was on the issue of the state. Bakunin urged that the workers should establish their society wherever they could regardless of the capitalist states ruling the countries concerned. On the one hand, this strategy led to premature and isolated risings, as in Spain in 1873. On the other hand, it provided an excuse for a lack of organisation or planning of the class war beyond a very simple "cloak and dagger" practice of secret societies and assassinations. The political struggle was regarded as an irrelevant diversion as was the development of any disciplined political force to fight that struggle. On all these matters, Bakunin found himself opposed by Marx and Engels; on his organisational and strategic - if not his basic - assumptions he found himself in alliance with the Opportunists, who wanted a non-political confederated, international that would allow them to act politically as followers of their local bourgeois politicians. In the disputes following this the International succumbed.

In 1889, after Marx's death, it was revived again, but based, now on a number of homogeneous Marxist groups and parties, the largest being the German Social Democratic Party. The Anarchists were excluded from affiliation. The Opportunists of the style of the First International did not want to join anyway, preferring to act politically through their bourgeois parties.

The new International was not quite as revolutionary as it appeared. It affiliates paid lip-service to Marx - more or less yet they were all subject to internal pressures, that weakened their practice of what they preached. In Britain, where even then the working class included over half the population, the effects of industrial monopoly prevented that class from developing a mass Marxist Party in a ratio to its size. It was then the German Social Democratic Party that became the leading affiliate of the Second International but it, too developed internal problems.

Until 1890, the German Social Democrats grew in strength despite repressive Anti-Socialist laws. In this year, the laws were repealed, partly because they weren't working, partly because the new Kaiser wanted to get cheap popularity. The Social Democrats were enabled to operate legally and they used the opportunity. By 1914 they were the largest single party in Germany. Their organisation was praised by their comrades in other lands trying to create something similar. One such admirer was young V.I. Lenin in his pamphlet, What Is To Be Done. Another, despite his eventual disagreement with its form was James Connolly.

It is, of course, history that what Lenin created was a revolutionary party whereas his chosen model failed the test for such a body. The reason for this was simple. The German Social Democrat that had withstood magnificently the persecution of the 1880s were weakened from within by the easy successes of the later years. The party developed a paid bureaucracy to run itself and its many daily papers. Members of this became increasingly conservative, reluctant to give the order to overturn the state that had, after all, allowed them to earn their money, pathetically ready to believe that the said state could be changed peaceably.

This tendency began to appear within one year of the repeal of the Anti-Socialist Laws. In 1891, the Party branches in the less developed southern states of Germany (where the organisation was relatively weak) insisted on voting for the provincial budgets in their parliament. Until then, the agreed policy of the Party had been expressed in the slogan "Not a man nor a farthing for this system". The Party could not vote to maintain the finances of the capitalist state. The south Germans pleaded that they had to do so if they were not to weaken the relatively liberal state governments vis a vis the conservatives. Despite protests from old Frederick Engels in London, the Party accepted the argument that the "special circumstances" of the south German situation necessitated a measure of collaboration with the bourgeois state governments there.

Three years later after Engels' death and the final acceptance of the south German political uniqueness, the practice of the latter was given a theoretical underpinning by Engels' ex-secretary. Edward Bernstein had lived in England for some years. While he was there he was influenced greatly by the British Fabian Society - at that time a propagandist circle on the left of the Liberal Party. His relations with this body and his own impressionistic view of what was happening led him to advocate a broadly Fabian position in relation to the strategy of German Social Democracy. Instead of opposing the south German's policy, he urged that it be extended to its logical conclusion: the Social Democrats should carry on their role as just another (i.e. bourgeois) party distinguishable from the others only because it was more radical than them. They should work in coalitions with the capitalists to administer their common state if needs be.

This breach in Marx's teaching on the state had to be defended by further attack on Marxist teaching. Bernstein found himself denouncing this in philosophy, history and economics. Instead of the unfolding of an inevitable historical process which climaxed in the Socialist revolution and the ending of capitalism Bernstein insisted that there was neither inevitability nor necessity in this.

The workers were not getting more impoverished nor were large numbers of the petty bourgeoisie joining their ranks. Revolution was, therefore, an irrelevance and an obstacle to Social Democracy's real duty: the struggle for piecemeal improvements in existing conditions. Instead of the dialectic forcing the socialist to choose constantly between "Socialism or Barbarism" Bernstein insisted that the socialist had complete freedom to act according to his conscience to alleviate the worst defects in society. Kant replaced Hegel for him. This was a clear "revision" of Marx and such it became known: "Revisionism".

Bernstein's theory - already because of its Anglo-German development an international force - became a problem for the International because of its practical expression. In 1899 the French Social Democrat Alexander Millerand, did what Bernstein had advocated and entered an anti-clerical government to defend civil liberties in general (and the French victims of clerical reaction in particular). Millerand's choice and the fact that even a Revisionist could not get away from the dialectic was emphasised by the fact that one of his cabinet colleagues, General Gallifet, had earned notoriety as the mass murderer who had suppressed the Commune, which by the way, did not embarrass the more consistent and hardened Revisionists who tended inevitably to see only the Communards' blunders and not their revolutionary achievement. The south German leader, Georg Von Vollmar, summarised his views thereon: "Instead of seizing state power, they would have done better to go to sleep".

At the 1900 conference of the International at Paris, Millerand was condemned. He left working class politics altogether and ended his career when he had to resign as President of France because he was too far to the right for a new radical government. Bernstein was also formally isolated, and the south German strategy remained limited to south Germany. Only in wealthy Britain did the Fabian Society continue to play a big role in the growth of the Labour Party. Revisionism was in quarantine.

But it was quarantined and not liquidated. The bulk of the International's leaders were more than willing to leave it thus. The Russian Marxist, George Plekhanov urged on his German comrades a thorough theoretical struggle against Revisionism, but he was ignored. When Rosa Luxemburg tried later to carry the struggle for Marxism beyond the status quo of 1900 she found herself opposed by the leading figures among her official anti-Revisionist allies. The Millerand affair had already been decided by a motion that condemned Millerand on the technical point of not getting his party's permission for his act rather than on the political issue involved.

It was in this way rather than in open acceptance of Revisionism that the short term practice of developing Social Democratic Party bureaucracies was expressed. In the long term, they would end openly in the Revisionist camp. However, for the time being, they hoped that the revisionist case would, as it were, prove itself and prevent too decisive a breach with their parties' left wings, such as those headed by Luxemburg (in Germany and Poland) and Jules Guesse (in France). The bureaucrats' strategy was encapsulated by the advice that Bernstein claimed he was given by Igraz Aver, the Secretary of the German Social Democratic Party :

"My dear Ede, one does not formally make a decision to do the things you suggest, one doesn't say, such things, one simply does them".

This "Centrism" - so called as it took a position in the centre between Marxism and Revisionism - is more difficult to describe than either, precisely because it is an attempt to compromise between the two. The important points to remember are, firstly that it is a recurring political phenomenon in the international working-class movement, and secondly, that it is essentially a tendency towards unprincipled compromise between the two main competitors. ("One does not say, one simply does") Centrism under pretence of avoiding a sectarian approach towards "good people amongst the Revisionists surrenders to both the good and the bad in those ranks far more than is consistent with a principled position.

In the Second International, the issue which first caused the Revisionists to renege and on which the Centrists surrendered their positions was that of the Marxist theory of the state. On the eve of the October Revolution of 1917, VI Lenin distinguished the three trends in his State and Revolution.

"According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another, it is the creation of 'order' which legalises and strengthens this oppression by moderating the conflict between the classes. In the opinion of the petty-bourgeois politicians (including the Revisionists, D.R. O'C.L.) order, means precisely the reconciliation of classes, and not the oppression of one class by another.; to moderate the conflict means reconciling classes and not depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of struggle to overthrow the oppressors

"On the other hand, the 'Kautskyite' (Centrist, D.R. O'C.L. see below) distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. 'Theoretically' it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is lost sight of or glossed over is that: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and increasingly alienating itself from it, then it is obvious that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this 'alienation' ... Marx very definitely drew this theoretically self-evident conclusion as a result of a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution. And it is precisely this conclusion which Kautsky ... has 'forgotten' and 'distorted' V.I. Lenin, State and Revolution from The Essential Works of Marxism, Bartam Books, New York 1965 pp 105-106.

Karl Kautsky whose teaching Lenin denounced above, was the chief theoretician of the Centrism to which he supplied a left cover in his acknowledged capacity - after Friedrich Engels' death as "Pope of Marxism" (Even the title betrays a certain degeneration from Marxist principles.) Of recent months there has been a certain new interest in Kautsky in some Irish left-wing circles and, with it, a certain feeling that his reputation has been unduly diminished as compared with that of his Russian contemporary, Plekhanov.

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Certainly Kautsky, if not a revolutionary, did write useful works (most notably his Foundations of Christianity) during his "Papal" reign up to 1914. However, after making all allowances he is still a lesser figure than Plekhanov in his prime. The Russian educated the vanguard of his country's working class laying the foundations for the achievements of Lenin, Trotsky, the Bolshevik Party: after this he lapsed into open revisionism - but his historic task was completed. Kautsky could not claim such a result as Plekhanov's even if Plekhanov eventually disowned his child. Despite his undoubted intelligence, there was always in Kautsky limitations which made it inevitable that he would lead the centrists rather than the revolutionaries. Engels summarised it well in a letter which is the more devastating for expressing the opinion of a personal friend and political ally:-

"You have exactly hit off Kautsky's decisive weakness. His youthful inclination towards hasty judgement has been still more intensified by the wretched method of teaching history in the universities especially the Austrian ones. The students there are systematically taught to do historical work with materials, which they know to be inadequate, but which they are supposed to treat as adequate that is to write things which they themselves must know to be false but which they are supposed to consider correct. That has naturally made Kautsky cocky. Then the literary life writing for pay and writing a lot so that he has absolutely no idea of what really scientific work means. There he has thoroughly burnt his fingers a few times, with his history of population and later with the articles on marriage in primitive times. In all friendship I rubbed that well into him too, and spared him nothing in this respect: on this side I criticise all his things mercilessly. Fortunately, however, I can comfort him with the fact that I did exactly the same in my impudent youth, and only first learnt the way one has got to work from Marx. It helps quite considerably, too - "Letter to August Bibel, London, 29th July 1885 (Present author's emphasis.)"

Despite Engel's assistance Kautsky was never able to get beyond a formal theoretical correctness which was used only too easily to cover for the actual practice. ("One simply does them") of the Social Democratic bureaucracy.

An early glimpse of what centrism was to mean in the German Social Democratic Party's Effort programme of 1891. This was the highest theoretical point reached by the German Marxists during their Social Democratic period. It was regarded as the model programme for all affiliates of the Second International. However, even in its time, it overlooked certain vital aspects. In particular old Friedrich Engels remarked in his Critique of it, it glossed over the fact that Germany was a monarchy and a federation of monarchies - many of which were far from being restricted by their parliaments. In short, the question of state power was ignored, as the Revisionists were beginning to distort it openly. Engels ascribed this vagueness to the fact that the Party bureaucracy - newly liberated from the Anti Socialist laws - were enjoying their new freedom and its prospects too much to risk these perks by attacks on the German states. If this was the case (as seems probable), the bureaucrats were moved by their fear rather than by Engels analysis. The German Social Democratic Party remained vague on the question of the monarchy. This confusion was encouraged - and, in itself helped - the Revisionists to move to clarify it in the direction of acceptance of the bourgeois state.

Kautsky's peculiar qualities - his brilliant sloppiness - were such as to enable him to oppose the outright Revisionists - but as defender and sustainer of the existing confusion: not of Marxism. He allowed Bernstein to write his articles in the main Party daily, only attacking him when such youngsters as Luxemburg and Parvas had already moved.

He drafted the motion at the Paris Conference of the Second International by which Millerand was condemned for breach of discipline rather than for his political treachery.

Perhaps least forgivable was his attitude towards his patrons, Marx and Engels. Undoubtedly, it was difficult to publish everything that they had written. Nonetheless, Bernstein was given an immediate platform whereas such articles of immediate importance by the founder of Scientific Socialism, as Engels Critique of the Export Programme were kept suppressed for ten years. Other writings in a similar vein were left to the Third International to make available.

With Kautsky as its "Pope" it was inevitable that the Second International should have fallen into a schism along national lines on the outbreak of the First World War. No doubt, his elevation to his exalted position could not have been achieved without objective factors working for him; the point is that these factors were much less than the needs of the working class either in Germany or in the world at large. In the end, his dominance - despite all his works - was one that merely heightened the confusion. The real struggle for Marxist clarity was fought by Plekhanov at first and Luxemburg and, later by Franz Mehring, Lenin and Trotsky.

So, in 1896, when Connolly began his Irish career, there were four tendencies or embryo tendencies in the Labour Movement of the world. Outside, the international there were the Anarchists with their strength centred mainly among the workers of the less developed industrial countries (such as Spain, Italy and Switzerland). In the International were the Marxists on the one hand, the Revisionists on the other and, in between them, the shadowy Centrists. In each case, the basic difference between the currents was that of their respective views towards the state. The Anarchists regarded the state as an ultimate source of oppression, perhaps, even exploitation. They urged, accordingly, that political action (that is theoretically action affecting directly the distribution of state power, though, in practice, this definition remained remarkably difficult to operate) be renounced. It opposed Marxism from the Ultra-Left.

The other Anti-Marxist currents developed within the reconstituted International within sections where there were large bureaucracies. These vested interests feared to risk their immediate needs by too resolute opposition to the central coercive organisation, and hoped to gain their ends by peaceful (and piecemeal) reform without making trouble for themselves. To justify their needs for a compromise with the capitalist state they backed demands to drop Marxism as being "obsolete" and "unjustified by results" (the Revisionists) or, more subtly, paid lip service to it while ignoring it in practice (the Centrists). No doubt, there were possibilities of Marxist theory being degenerated from other incorrect conceptions. Anarchism had always included many such (as on religion) at the same time as its politico phobia. But the question of the state drew its significance from the objective need of the Social Democratic bureaucracies (or, particularly in Britain, the trade union bureaucracies and labour aristocracy's) to conform to a system that did not satisfy enough of their needs to raise the odds against the profitability of risking its overthrow.

CONNOLLY AND CENTRISM

Whether he liked it or not Connolly was, in fact, bound to develop his strategy in relation to the divisions of the working class movement of his time. History has placed him in the revolutionary - the Marxist camp -. However, his final failure shows that his Marxism was considerably less advanced than that of his successful contemporary, V I Lenin. In Germany a Third Revolutionary Marxist, Rosa Luxemburg came to grief - and with her went the hopes of proletarian revolution in that country, for many years to come. In her case, the decisive failure was her inability to break in time with the Centrist Revisionist majority of the Social Democratic Party. No doubt, her error here was linked to her ultra leftism on the national issue, and her mistakes on the question of Imperialism. Nonetheless, it was specifically as an organiser that she fell.

James Connolly failed for the same cause. Far less than Luxemburg (who knew the Bolshevik leader) was he able to benefit from the development and clarifications that Lenin and his party were making in Marxism. On many issues such as the nature of the state, of the nation, on the Marxist's attitude to religion and, above all, on the question of political organisation, Connolly's position owed more to the formalism of Kautsky than to Lenin's revolutionary perspective and insistence on clarity of formulation.

It's worthwhile considering Connolly's weaknesses. Two of them - his position on religion and on the nation - have been ascribed to his surrender to that truly esoteric phenomenon "Catholic Nationalism" - or, more accurately, Irish Nationalism. In fact, though the objective conditions of Irish life were not ones from which there could easily develop a more scientific approach to these matters, Connolly's position on each of them was in tune with most of the best thinking available to him within the Second International.

In his Critique of the Erfurt Programme in 1891, Friedrich Engels made specific insistence in favour of the demand for:-

"Complete separation of church and state. All religious groups without exception to be treated by the state as private associations. They are to lose all support from public funds and all influence on public schools. (One cannot after all forbid them from founding their own schools out of their own resources and teaching their nonsense in them.)" Friedrich Engels, Critique of the Erfurt Programme, British and Irish Communist Organisation, Belfast 1971, p.12

This view was encapsulated by the Social Democrats in their statement that "Religion is a private matter": that the state should not persecute religious belief but that it should not give it any aid at all in the expansion thereof, let alone maintaining in existence laws against blasphemy, atheism, or anti-clerical propaganda. Since the German Social Democratic Party was a recognised Marxist organisation in 1891, it was assumed that anyone who joined it would be Marxist, i.e. a Dialectical Materialist, and, hence, an Atheist. It was then, not considered necessary to immediately urge a struggle against religion within the party itself.

The immediate opposition to the Marxist attitude to religion was from positions even more obviously anti-religious than that of Engels. The attitudes of the Anarchists and of the early Revisionists on religion provide one more interesting example of how ultra-leftism and reformism tend to find themselves on the same side.

The Anarchist position was described by Marx (letter to F. Bolte, 23rd November 1871) as being "Atheism as a dogma dictated to members". This apparent likeness to the position as developed by Lenin was, in fact, very different, since the Anarchists were not interested in organising a proper political party. In practice what it meant was a disproportionate or anti-clerical propaganda and, on occasions, "practical agitatioⁿ" such as the burning of churches.

Though the Revisionist position was not practically as "terroristic" as that of the Anarchists, it had one decisive point in agreement with theirs. Both capitulated theoretically to the anti-clerical propaganda distributed by one section of the contemporary European bourgeoisie. The excuse used by Vollmar and the south German Revisionists in 1899, by Millerand, Jean Jaures and the Belgium Emile Vanderville in 1899-1900 for their co-operation in bourgeois governments was the same in each case: the need to support one section of the bourgeoisie (the anti-clerical liberals) against the other: the tactic of the "lesser evil". (Later Connolly's opponent William Walker was a similar tactician.) In fact, of course, eventually the clericals did take power even without the support of the Revisionists, the latter's world did not come to an end, and eventually, they and their heirs would find reasons to work with the greater evil to oppose which had been the excuse for the original departure from Marxism.

As Connolly was to discover in America, these two views on religion - the Anarchist and the Revisionist - were to merge in views reasserted in his original choice of Party there - the Socialist Labour Party and in the theory of its leading ideologist Daniel De Leon. Connolly was to lead the opposition to this confusion.

Connolly's mistake then, was that of the mainstream of what was thought to be Marxism during the original Second International. He himself was, on his own admission to his friend Matheson (30th January 1908) an atheist. He never wavered from the Erfurt position on secular education. In the original programme of his Irish Socialist Republican Party, the demand for it was the eighth of its 10 points. Twenty years later, he was reasserting it in his Reconquest of Ireland. This was a basic stand in opposition to the thought prevailing in Irish Nationalist circles in his lifetime. (It should not be necessary to assert, at this point, that, though Lillian Connolly bore her husband eight children during their marriage, there is no evidence for saying that he would today be a supporter of the clerical refusal to allow contraceptives to anyone, or even, that he would accept the ridiculous Cooney proposals in preference to the Robinson Bill.)

Connolly's overall political view on religion was summarised early in his career in his article "Socialism and Religion - the Known and the Unknowable", which appeared in his 1901 pamphlet, The New Evangel. While he later developed his thesis - and developed it brilliantly - he never departed qualitatively from the position given below:-

"The Socialist Party of Ireland prohibits the discussion of theological or anti-theological questions at its meetings, public or private. This is in conformity with the practice of the chief Socialist parties of the world, which have frequently, in Germany for example, declared religion to be a private matter, and as it is held and worked for by an increasing number of enthusiastic adherents throughout the civilised world, has an essentially material, matter-of-fact foundation. We do not mean that its supporters are necessarily materialistic in the vulgar, and merely anti-theological sense of the term, but that they do not base their socialism upon any interpretation of the language or meaning of Scripture, nor upon the real or supposed intentions of a beneficent Deity. They as a party neither affirm or deny these things, but leave it to the individual conscience of each member to determine what beliefs on such questions they shall hold. As a political party they wisely prefer to take their stand upon the actual phenomena of social life as they can be observed in operation amongst us today, or as they can be traced in the recorded facts of history". Erin's Hope - The End and the Means and the New Evangel, New Park Publications, Dublin, 1968, p.33

Such a policy in the politically under-developed Irish working class movement was not practically calculated to build a Marxist vanguard therein. But there is a further point. Connolly was only stating what became in fact the policy of the German Social Democratic Party leadership. Religion became a "private matter" for members of what was supposed to be the leading Marxist organisation in the world. Kautsky contented himself with writing an exposure of The Foundations of Christianity, but, or more precisely, the Party Secretaries, Auer and Friedrich Ebert, allowed into the Party many who had an altogether different view on the subject, without any attempt being made to explain matters, to them. In Germany it was merely part of the overall degeneration of Social Democracy. In Ireland, it was of initial importance in the aborting of a strong Marxist tradition.

It was left to Russia where there was a strong active and conscious industrial working class to provide the environment in which in 1909 Lenin could develop primer basis for Marxist thinking on the religious question. (Five years before, the American, Frank Janke had declared a similar position in the original Connolly-De Leon polemic - but he was just a member of a small Party about to decline.)

"Social Democrats regard religion as a private matter in relation to the state, but not in relation to themselves, not in relation to Marxism, and not in relation to the workers' Party" - The Attitude of Workers' Party Towards Religion - Marx-Engels - Marxism pp273-286.

By the time Lenin wrote this Connolly's position on religion had developed for the better; he was using the materialist method (observation of the "actual phenomena of every day life") to explain and thus expose religion. However, instead of developing his approach to the Party in the same manner, he had allowed it to decline. By 1909 he had adopted the Anarchistic organisational form of Syndicalism, allied to his overall Marxist approach. This resulted in his continuing to avoid posing the religious question amongst even the cadres of his organisations. This was just another part of his failure to develop an Irish Bolshevism. But it was an important part.

Connolly's approach to religion has been ascribed to a surrender by him to the forces of Irish Nationalism. In fact, the link between his errors on religion and nationalism was less direct; both were the natural results of dependence for theory on the current consciousness in the Second International.

Just as the current (Second International) Marxist position on religion lacked a vital clarification by V I Lenin, so did its position on nationalism - although here, for once, J V Stalin was to play a progressive role. The International was organised on the support of the working classes of the metropolitan countries. (It was to be the comintern that was to take seriously the problems of the workers and peasants in the colonies.) Because of this, its sections were under pressure from the bourgeoisies of their countries to accept their expansionist aims and their exploitation of other nations. In many cases this pressure was successful; in Britain, the leading Marxist of the time H M Flyndman, gave full support to the imperialist government of his country in its imperialist plans. Revisionism in such countries as Britain, France and Germany necessitated the acceptance of the aims of the bourgeoisies of these countries - as regards nationalism as well as other things.

This position was opposed first from the Ultra-Left. The Anarchists simply denied any relevance to "politics" and "political" matters included inevitably national questions. A practically similar position was taken up by the Polish Marxist Rosa Luxemburg. She remarked on the economic development that had taken place since the partition of her country, pointed out the fact that the main forces demanding independence were the small business and professional people, and feared the effect of their propaganda on the young Polish proletariat that she was trying to win to Socialism. Her answer to the Nationalists was total opposition - even to the point of ignoring the real grievances created by foreign oppression.

Finally, these lines were complimented by a Centrist tendency based on the Austrian Social Democratic Party which offered cultural but not political self-determination to oppressed nations.

As against all these, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were once again to do the work of clarification. Their analysis has been chronicled in Marxist Review No.1 and in the First Appendix of Comrade Robert Dorn's pamphlet, Irish Nationalism and British Imperialism.

Here it is necessary to recall only two main points. Firstly, Lenin declared his right to political self-determination had to be recognised for every nation, except where it definitely retarded development towards Socialism - simply because its denial created hostility on the subjective part of the workers of the oppressed nation against their oppressors (including the workers of among the latter). Nationalism sprung from circumstances that had a life of their own over and above their original economic base. For the Socialist, there could be no ending of nationalist divisions except by solving them by the fairest possible means. As a general rule: support for the national claims of the oppressed against those of the oppressor.

A concrete example of Lenin's analysis was Norway. In 1914, he replied to Luxemburg who had denounced Norway's secession from Sweden:-

"In the question of the self-determination of nations, as in every other question, we are interested first and foremost in the self-determination of the proletariat within a given nation. Rosa Luxemburg modestly evaded this question too, for she realised that an analysis of it on the basis of the example of Norway, which she herself had chosen, would be disastrous to her theory.

What position did the Norwegian and Swedish proletariat take, and indeed had to take, in the conflict over secession? We do not know whether the Norwegian socialist programme made it obligatory for Norwegian Social Democrats to hold particular views on the question of secession. We will assume that it did not, and that the Norwegian socialists left it an open question as to what extent the autonomy of Norway gave sufficient scope to wage the class struggle freely, or to what extent the eternal friction and conflicts with the Swedish aristocracy hindered freedom of economic life. But it cannot be disputed that the Norwegian proletariat had to oppose this aristocracy and support Norwegian peasant democracy (with all its philistine limitations). "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" from Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1967, pp 77-78 (Present author's emphasis)

Against Luxemburg, also, Lenin quoted approvingly Karl Marx's insistence that the British workers' seizure of state power would only be possible with the granting of self-determination for Ireland. In both cases, he was correct. The only major difference between Norway and Ireland during the period before 1914 (apart from the complications created by the Ulster Protestants) was the fact that the liberation of the Norwegian peasant from his landlord had been achieved in Norway for nearly a century, whereas, in Ireland it was not to be ended as a source of discontent until the 1930s.

So Connolly was not practicing an approach to the national struggle qualitatively different to that of Lenin when he worked to place, in turn, the Irish Socialist Republican Party, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and the Irish Citizen Army at the head of the Irish national struggle for self-determination.

any successful seizure of power by the workers of the British Isles or any part thereof would have involved recognition of Ireland's right to self-determination - just as the achievement of state power by the Russian workers was to involve the liberation from their prison house of the various nations of Tsarist Russia.

Connolly expressed this truth in Heude Gonne's L'Irlande Libre in 1897:-

"Non-political co-operation effort must infallibly succumb in face of the opposition of the privileged classes interested behind the ramparts of law and monopoly. This is why, even when he is from the economic point of view intensely conservative, the Irish Nationalist, even with his false reasoning, is an active agent in social regeneration, insofar as he seeks to invest with full power over its own destinies a people actually governed in the interests of a feudal aristocracy" - included in Socialism and Nationalism, Three Candles Press, Dublin 1948 p.34.

Despite the formal error of fact (even in 1897, Ireland was not governed "in the interests of a feudal aristocracy", but rather more of British finance capital, though the feudal aristocrats still dominated the colonial regime), this expresses the reality of the situation. It is when Connolly tries to develop his position beyond this that there appears a real tendency to capitulate to the political illusions of Nationalism. Thus, in the paper, the Workers' Republic of 4th November 1899, he summarised his position so as to reveal its weakness rather than its strength:

"As socialists we base our political policy on the class struggle of the workers, because we know that the self-interest of the workers lies our way. That the self interest may sometimes be base does not affect the correctness of our position. The mere fact that the inherited (and often unreasoning) anti-British sentiment of a chauvinist Irish patriot impels him to the same conclusion as we arrived at as the result of our economic studies does not cause us to shrink from proclaiming our position. It rather leads us to rejoice that our propaganda in thus made all the easier by this none too common identity of aim established as a consequence of what we esteem the strong and irreconcilable hostility between English imperialism and socialism" from Labour and Easter Week, 3 Candles Press, Dublin 1966 p.36

In this, the error lies partly in Connolly's (typical) confusion of the objective needs of the situation with the subjective approach to it of the individual (in this case the nationalist but more often, as will be shown, below, the worker.) There is no realisation that the "unreasoning anti-British sentiment of a chauvinist Irish patriot" might, by its very lack of reason, prevent that patriot from making the final transference of allegiance from Caitlín Ni Houlihan to International Socialism. Undoubtedly, Connolly's failure to understand this lost several potential ISRP recruits to the Fenian Movement.

The other part of the weakness in this passage arises from a theoretical failing that will be considered in a future article. Here it can be said, briefly, that he did not, so much capitulate to Irish nationalism as underestimate it both for the reason given above and because his whole approach to the concept of the "Nation" (and hence indeed, of "Nationalism") was an historical and static. (Undoubtedly, a visible expression of this was his idealised view of Celtic society).

But over and above Connolly's errors on religion and the nation (though closely intertwined with them, as has been shown) were his attitudes to the nature of the State and of the Social Democratic Party that would lead the workers in smashing it. As has already been stated, in this article, the essence of the Marxist view is that the State is the organised political expression of the power of the ruling class the Revisionist view is that it is somehow "above" classes and a force for reconciling differences and the Kautskyist Centrist view is that it is "formally" the first but that it can, in practice be captured peacefully - police, army and all by the exploited individuals,

Where did Connolly stand in all this? In 1916 he was to place himself with the Revolutionaries. Even in 1900 delegates from his ISRP voted in the Second International against Kautsky's compromise on Millerand. But, - and coming first from the home of Revisionism, it is not surprising - he only developed his final position gradually and with many lapses. In his days in the ISRP he showed distinct tendencies towards a Revisionist idea of the seizure of state power. His view can be compared with Kautsky's; theoretically Kautsky upheld the Marxist concept of the state but denied in practice that it applied any moment in which he found himself. Connolly tended formally at this period to accept the Revisionist idea that state power could be achieved by the workers through parliamentary means; he was careful to rule out Ireland from this perspective. His general statement on ends and means is well known:-

"The whole of Ireland for the people of Ireland - their public property to be owned and operated as a national heritage, by the labour of free men in a free country. That is our ideal, and when you ask what are our methods, we reply: 'Those which lie nearest our hands'".

Workers' Republic, 5th August 1898 - from Socialism and Nationalism Of Cit p.32.

Four years later in America, he stated, more certainly:-

"I believe firmly that the revolutionary Socialist movement will always be numerically weak until the hour of revolution arrives, and then it will be as easy to get adherents by the thousands as it is now to get single individuals" - Weekly People, 10th November 1902.

And it was at this time too that he wrote in an article, later to be incorporated in the first part of Socialism Made Easy:- "Revolution is never practical - until the hour of the revolution strikes. THEN it alone is practical, and all the efforts of the conservatives and compromises become the most futile and visionary of human beings". Socialism Made Easy, Plough Book Service, Dublin, 1971, p.28

then, but not till then, the party which represents the revolutionary idea is justified in taking steps to assume the powers of government and in using the weapons of force to dislodge the usurping class or government in possession and treating its members and supporters as usurpers and rebels against the constituted authorities have always been treated. In other words, Socialists believe that the question of force is of very minor importance; the really important question is of the principles upon which is based the movement that may or may not need the use of force to realise its object

"The ballot-box was given us by our masters for their purpose; let us use it for our own. Let us demonstrate at that ballot-box the strength and intelligence of the revolutionary idea; let us make the hustings a rostrum from which to promulgate our principles; let us grasp the public powers in the interest of the disinherited class; let us emulate our fathers and, like the 'true men of '98' place ourselves in line with the most advanced thought of our age and drawing inspiration and hope from the spectacle presented by the world-wide revolt of the workers, prepare for the coming of the day when the Socialist working-class of Ireland will, through its elected representatives, present its demand for freedom from the yoke of a governing master class or nation - the day on which the question of moral or physical force shall be finally decided." Ibid, P: P.55-57.

Of course Connolly was not to foresee the dreadful results that would accrue his class on those too frequent occasions when it did wait until it had "exhausted all the peaceful means at its disposal for the purpose of demonstrating to the people and their enemies that the new revolutionary ideas do possess the suffrage of the majority." The point is, however, that his approach does show a certain empiricism about the state which does not inevitably link his views thereon with the Marxist position and which, as a matter of fact, were to be superseded for him by the Anarcho-Syndicalist position that workers' control of the economy could force the capitalist state's liquidation. In other words, for Connolly, the workers could take over the capitalist coercive machinery. The Marxist formula was and is that, as an entity, it would have to be smashed.

In the Ireland Libre article already quoted he described the state power ("The political power of Government") as being simply, "The organised forces of the nation." He recognised, later in the article, that the "rapports of law and monopoly" provided strongholds for the propertied classes. But he remarked on this only to contest arguments on behalf of "non-political co-operative effort" (as through the co-operative of Sir Horace Plunkitt) as a means towards achieving Socialism. Connolly was not an Anarchist; his position derived from the Marxist one - but it was from the debased Marxism dominant in the Second International.

And, of course, just as this debasement affected the whole approach of the majority of sections of the Fourth International towards their organisations, so did it affect Connolly's organisational concept from the beginning. Conditions of bourgeois democracy both created the circumstances for the establishment of (at first, small) vested interests in the Social Democratic Party machines, and for excuses for loosening Marxist standards (as on religion) to expand recruitment quantitatively.

same words, yet even with them, it is clear what Connolly means by "revolution". There are quotations in his writings at this time that fill the gap.

In the Manifesto of the ISRP, it is declared:-

"That the conquest by the Social Democracy of political power in Parliament, and on all public bodies in Ireland, is the readiest and most effective means whereby the revolutionary forces may be organised and disciplined to attain that end" - Socialism and Nationalism, Op Cit. p.186.

And in the Belfast Shan Van Vocht, of August 1897, he stated:-

"In an independent country the election of a majority of Socialist representatives to the legislature means the conquest of political power by the revolutionary party, and, consequently, the mastery of the military and police forces of the State, which would then become the ally of revolution, instead of its enemy...

"Ireland not being an independent country, the election of a majority of Socialist Republicans would not, unfortunately, place the fruits of our toil so readily within our grasp. But it would have another perhaps no less important effect. It would mean that for the first time in Irish history a clear majority of the responsible electorate of the Irish nation - men capable of bearing arms - had registered at the ballot boxes their desire for separation from the British Empire. Such a verdict arrived at not in the tumultuous and, too often fickle enthusiasm of monster meetings, but in the sober atmosphere and judicial calmness of the polling booth, would ring like a trumpet call in the ears alike of our rulers and every enemy of the British imperial system. That would not long survive such a consummation. Its enemies would read in the verdict thus delivered at the ballot box a passionate appeal for help against the oppressor, the moral insurrection of the Irish people, which a small expeditionary force and war material might convert into such a military insurrection as would exhaust the power of the empire at home and render its possessions an easy prey abroad. How long would such an appeal be disregarded?" - Ibid, p.30

And, in his own party's Workers' Republic of 22nd July 1899, he stated, more fully than he had done before, his perspective for the workers' seizure of power:-

"It may be interesting then, to place before our readers the Socialist Republican conception of the functions and uses of physical force in a popular movement. We neither exalt it into a principle nor repudiate it as something not to be thought of. Our position towards it is that the use or non-use of force for the realisation of the ideas of progress always has been and always will be determined by the attitude, not of the party of progress, but of the governing class opposed to that party. If the time should arrive when the party of progress finds its way to freedom barred by the stubborn greed of a possessing class entrenched behind the barriers of law and order; if the party of progress has indoctrinated the people at large with the new revolutionary conception of society and is there representative of the will of a majority of the nation; if it has exhausted all the peaceful means at its disposal for the purpose of demonstrating to the people and its enemies that the new revolutionary ideas do possess the suffrage majority;

In turn this dilution improved conditions for the bureaucrats who encouraged further dilution and so on, ad infinitum. But, after all, the parties were working in conditions of comparative freedom. There was no obvious reason for developing revolutionary consciousness amongst their members.

Connolly was both victim and executor of this process. He had learnt his organisational theories in Britain where organisational degeneracy was as advanced as anywhere. In his first pamphlet Erin's Hope - The End and the Means, he gave his views the qualifications for membership of the "revolutionary" party:-

"On the working class of Ireland, therefore, devolves the task of conquering political representation for their class as the preliminary step towards the conquest of political power. This task can only be safely entered upon by men and women who recognise that the first section of a revolutionary army must harmonise in principle with those likely to be its last, and that, therefore, no revolutionists can safely invite the co-operation of men or classes whose ideals are not theirs, and whom, therefore, they may be compelled to fight at some future initial stage of the journey to freedom. To this category belongs every section of the propertied class, and every individual of those classes who believes in the righteousness of his class position. The freedom of the working class must be the work of the working class." - Erin's hope, The End and the Means/ The New Evangel, op.cit.P.P.23-24.

These views were developed in 1898 to form Connolly's nearest approximation to a Leninist position:-

"We are trade unionists, but we are more than trade unionists. The trade unionist who is only a trade unionist is to the socialist what the believer in constitutional monarchy is to a republican. The constitutional monarchist wishes to limit the power of the King, but still wishes to have a King; the republican wishes to abolish kingship and puts his trust in the people; the trade unionist wishes to limit the power of the master but still wishes to have masters: the socialist wishes to have done with masters and pins his faith to the collective intelligence of a democratic community." - (Workers' Republic) 7th August, 1898 in Workers' Republic Three Candles Press, Dublin, 1951, P.50.

But in an article republished in The New Evangel he exposed the limitations of his approach:-

"The great Labour uprising at the Irish Local Government elections of 1898 sprang up spontaneously without a leader, and despite the political parties; when the men who supported it have realised the futility of trying to effect any great improvement in their condition by the action of local bodies, they will seek for a political party which can express their class interests upon a rational basis - and seeking it find the Socialist Party, ready and equipped for the task.

By our action today we are preparing the ground for more aggressive revolutionary action when the working class of Ireland at least recognise (sic) in our principles the embodiment of their hopes; firmly grounded upon our knowledge of the economic basis of all political action, we confidently await the day when the ever increasing pressure of capitalist society shall bring the workers into our ranks - and the destinies of the nation into our hands". The New Evangel 1901 Opt.Cit p.37

It is clear that what Connolly did was adapt his Marxist analysis to fit his organisational perspective - although there is no reason to presume that he did so consciously. Although Connolly insisted that the members of the ISRP were more than just trade unionists its average level of consciousness was not qualitatively superior to that of the trade unionists of the time. The Party was, as indeed, its name implies, not consciously Marxist body, but rather a formally Marxist body including some genuine Marxists. When it split in 1903 its political divisions were overlaid by personalia. As the last quote expresses Connolly expected that the workers as a whole would develop steadily to become Socialists because of their objective situation (just as he expected the same to happen to even "unreasoning" Irish Nationalists). What he did not anticipate was that the Socialist Parties themselves might go the other way - which was in fact, what commonly happened.

Helped in this matter by the facts of a developed industrial proletarian and of undemocratic conditions Lenin prepared an organisation that would be a Marxist body in form and in substance and that would maintain a determined internal struggle to keep itself so. His works on party-building - What Is To Be Done and One Step Towards, two steps back - have been quoted by the present author in his introduction to Connolly's Socialism Made Easy. (See Op Cit p.12). Here it is necessary only to quote from them one passage which stands in stark relief against Connolly's somewhat fatalistic theoretical optimism:-

"There follows a reference to the concrete Russian conditions which fatalistically impel the working class movement on to the revolutionary path. But ... the revolutionary path of the working class might not be a Social Democratic path. When absolutism reigned, the entire West European bourgeoisie 'impelled' deliberately impelled, the workers on to the path of revolution. We Social Democrats, however, cannot be satisfied with that" - What Is To Be Done, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1969, pp 94-95 (Present author's italics.)

As an expression of the relevance of Marxist analysis to conditions outside the analysts immediate ideas, this can scarcely be bettered. In Ireland, "the Revolutionary path" was only marched by the workers, as far as a (26 county) bourgeois republic. No working class leadership appeared to carry over the workers' struggle into the achievement of a Workers' Republic. Indeed it could not have appeared, as it was not created.

Connolly was to discover the weaknesses in his parties in Ireland, Britain and America. But by training and environment, it was impossible for him to discover the cure developed by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. His own diagnosis would be in keeping with his original dependence on objective facts (the class nature of individual party members) as opposed to Lenin's recognition of the value of the subjective element (Marxist training and education). Instead of working to improve the quality of the cadres in his group, he would rely more than ever on the spontaneous (trade union) wisdom of the workers. The only vanguard parties of which he had knowledge were not able to make revolutions - even parliamentary "revolutions". He concluded that the concept of the Social Democratic Party as a revolutionary force was in itself wrong.

How he reached this position will be examined more closely in the next article of the series.

CONCLUSION

James Connolly came to the Irish working class as one of the most advanced political cadres of its British opposite numbers. He was, indeed, a cadre of the Second International. But for the International or, more precisely, the Marxist method that powered its theoretical life, he would not have been able to advance as far as he did Irish working class consciousness.

However, that quality was insufficient for the theoretical needs of his time and place. Connolly's centres of activity - Edinburgh, Dublin, the urban areas of the USA, Belfast - could not provide the environmental conditions for a spontaneous development of his thought further into Bolshevism than it went. Accordingly, Connolly by himself is an inadequate guide to the Irish workers. He points towards the October Revolution, but the path he shows has remained for too many as dark and hazardous, without the extra light provided from the teachings of Lenin, Trotsky and their Internationals.

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