

FREEDOM FOR IRELAND

Ireland's Neutrality & Irish Republicanism

The following article was written in response to an article in the 'Troops Out Movement' paper and has appeared also in their February issue:

'Class Struggle' correspondent.

The October 1986 edition of 'Troops Out' magazine carried an article by Anthony Coughlan on Irish neutrality. Two serious flaws occur in the article. One is the author's statement that the Irish struggle for liberation cannot become strong enough to eventually rid itself of British rule and the other is the statement that it is "Only the British people themselves, organised politically through Labour" that can change British policy on partition.

The author carries on saying: "Important though the struggle in Ireland is, it is the struggle in Britain for a change in government policy which will be the decisive one." This stands history and the present struggle on its head, reversing the true importance of the Republican Movement, both in the struggle for independence and in the struggle for neutrality. As will be shown, the two are inextricably linked but it is the question of neutrality that is the focus of this article.

Ireland's struggle for national independence and neutrality are inseparably linked. To trace all the roots would involve a lengthy article. But some discussion of historical events reveals the truth of this position.

Larkin and Connolly, struggling to develop fighting unions in Ireland, were constantly frustrated by the British trade unions, who were agents of imperialism, stopping fights just as they got started. Larkin and Connolly wanted trade unions that pursued both the class and national demands of the Irish working class. Only separate Irish unions were capable of this and so they formed the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. This union fought the great Dublin Lockout of 1913, saw the formation of the Irish Citizens' Army made up of union members and the disgusting treachery of the British TUC, when they sold the Irish workers down the river.

With the outbreak of World War I, protest began to develop but without a strong focal point. Great damage was done to the national cause by the bourgeois nationalist Redmond. On September 20th, 1915, he offered up the Irish Volunteers for the use of the English army. This was to split the Volunteers, leaving a revolutionary core, and eventually destroying Redmond as a political force.

On September 25th, Asquith came to Dublin on a recruiting drive. He held a public meeting at the Mansion House which was surrounded by police. Connolly, Larkin, P.T. Daly and Countess Markiewicz led 100 Citizens' Army men in a procession from Liberty Hall to Stephen's Green. The ICA men carried rifles with fixed bayonets. This echo of 1913 brought a huge cheer from the 10,000 Dubliners which drowned out Asquith's speech. The British authorities only got six recruits that night.

Connolly continued to struggle against the war and Irish participation in it. His slogan of "Neither King nor Kaiser" reflects his deep anti-imperialist understanding of the nature of the war and the road that the Irish revolution would have to follow for success.

Connolly stated: "We have no foreign enemy except the treacherous government of England -



1916 Easter Rising: Citizens' Army

a government that even whilst it is calling on us to die for it, refuses to give a straight answer to our own demand for Home Rule ... We want Ireland not for peers, or the nominees of peers, but Ireland for the Irish."

However, pre-1916, the British did manage to get a fair number of volunteers from Ireland. What should be recognised was that much of this was economic "conscription". Young men seeking to escape the poverty of Ireland joined up for a regular wage.

This picture was radically changed by the Easter Rising of 1916. Never again would Irish history be the same.

CONSCRIPTION

Although the Rising was crushed, it gave a massive impetus to Irish nationalism. This found expression in many forms but the rallying point that was to take the struggle forward again was the issue of conscription.

The British were experiencing a series of disasters on the war front. From October to December 1916, the average



James Connolly



Bobby Sands: first hunger striker: 1981.

amount of tonnage sunk was 300,000 per month. On the battlefronts, the fearful slaughter of the Somme, the Dardanelles and Jutland put heavy pressure on British imperialism. The War Cabinet estimated that conscription would net her 160,000 men from Ireland but virtually all the advisers in Ireland were sharply opposed to it. After 1916, the situation was drastically changed in Ireland and the Cabinet was told that any attempt to introduce conscription would cause too much political trouble to be worthwhile. By 1917, recruiting in Ireland had dropped to 80 men a week.

In the hope of pacifying the situation somewhat the British released 800 political prisoners who had been interned in England since the Rising. Among those released were Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith. Both became heavily involved in the anti-conscription issue and their influence rapidly increased because of this.

The first political test of their strength was an election in North Roscommon. Count Plunkett, father of the dead Irish hero, Joseph Plunkett,

stood for election campaigning on an anti-conscription ticket. A Catholic priest, Father Michael O'Flanagan, supporting his campaign, argued that those who died for Ireland in Easter week died to keep young Irishmen from being conscripted with the army of "the only enemy Ireland has had for the past one thousand years". Plunkett won and refused to take his seat. In another election shortly afterwards, in South Longford, Sinn Fein won the seat with an anti-conscription stand.

The importance of this should not be underestimated. The drive of the Irish people for national independence was directly linked to anti-conscription. What underwrote this position was the potential for another uprising. Even when, in 1917, it looked like Britain might lose the war and was desperate for more troops, the idea of enforcing conscription on Ireland was received with such trepidation that the Cabinet balked at the idea. Even the arch-reactionary Edward Carson stated "with great regret" that conscription in Ireland would cause so much bloodshed as not to be worth pursuing.

Continued on p.7.



EVENTS

1987 WOMEN'S DELEGATION TO IRELAND

All women welcome: booking by registration only.

Details from: Birmingham Women and Ireland Group, 91 Court Road, Balsall Heath, Birmingham B12 9LQ.

International Book Fair Radical Black 3rd World

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR OF RADICAL BLACK AND THIRD WORLD BOOKS

WILL FOCUS ON MOVEMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

LONDON
From March 26th to March 28th at the Camden Centre, Bidborough Street, Kings Cross, London WC1. 11.30 - 5.30

From 24th March to 29th March in venues around London.

Book Fairs and Book Fair events in MANCHESTER
March 18th - March 21st
BRADFORD
April 1st - April 5th

ALTERED IMAGES
Myths, Media and Misunderstanding
THIRD WORLD FIRST National Conference
10-12th April, 1987
LONDON

CHERNOBYL NEVER DISSAPPEARS
CND National Demonstration
LONDON

April 25th.

IRELAND'S NEUTRALITY & REPUBLICANISM

Continued from p.8.

The Cabinet expected to raise 555,000 men in Britain with conscription. Their problem was how could they convince the British public that this effort was necessary and good, when 160,000 potential soldiers in Ireland were not conscripted. Lloyd George commented on the anger that would be felt in Britain if taking "fathers of 45 and upwards to fight the battle of a Catholic nationality on the continent without deep resentment at the spectacle of sturdy young Catholics in Ireland spending their time in increasing the difficulties of this country by drilling and compelling us to keep troops in Ireland."

Any uprising would greatly increase the demands on British troops. The Cabinet agreed that with only 25,000 troops in Ireland, many of these in training, these forces would be incapable of suppressing a rebellion. In addition, it was felt that even with "adequate" military support, it would be almost impossible to enforce conscription. Only the arrival of American troops on the front took some of the pressure off the British. But this created its own inherent difficulties because the Irish national minority in the USA was agitating strongly about conscription calling it genocide. Britain had to keep American public opinion sweet.

Lloyd George had flirted with the idea of offering Home Rule for conscription. But it was too late. The nationalist struggle was too far developed to be stopped or reduced in scope by promises of Home Rule and, of course, the Unionists continued to threaten trouble if Home Rule was introduced. So, Lloyd George's public position became that the two issues could not be linked. However, so strong was the opposition in Ireland that when conscription for Ireland was discussed in Parliament, John Dillon of the constitutionalist Irish Party gave an angry speech saying that Britain would not get a single soldier from Ireland and "all Ireland as one man will rise against you".

A united front of all nationalist forces opposed to conscription was formed. De Valera addressed the bishops of Ireland who then put out a manifesto and pledge to be read at every parish. If conscription was to be forced on the Irish despite their protests then:

"We consider that conscription forced in this way on Ireland is an oppressive and inhuman law which the Irish have a right to resist by every means that are consonant with the laws of God."

On April 23rd, 1918, a General Strike was held against conscription for 24 hours. Everywhere was shut down except Belfast. The stage was set for a struggle for surpassing conscription, now Irish freedom was on the agenda. This struggle was based upon the same thing that had made the anti-conscription struggle a success - the Irish people's willingness to use armed force.

FAILURE TO ESTABLISH THE REPUBLIC

The Irish revolution was part of a world-wide upsurge against imperialism and, as with others, it had some success but was finally driven back. The failure of the Irish revolution has meant that inevitably the forward positions such as neutrality would eventually be up for grabs. Until the national question is finally resolved, there can be no further progress

in Irish politics. The struggle will only be resolved by the political and military strength of the Republican Movement.

WORLD WAR II

In 1940, Britain opened up negotiations with De Valera proposing a united Ireland in exchange for the Free State dropping its neutrality and joining in the war effort against Germany.

De Valera was trying the impossible, to negotiate a peaceful re-unification of Ireland and to maintain her neutrality. However, even in the face of war, he had nothing to force Britain to change her position. Britain was worried because of military disasters on the continent and was seriously considered that Hitler would invade Ireland as a way of strangling Britain. It was this that caused Britain to raise the question of a united Ireland. It may well have been that Britain saw a "loyal" Ulster inside a united Ireland as a bulwark against any further drift towards Republicanism. Britain wanted a united Ireland at war with Germany, the Treaty ports returned to British use for the duration of the war and Irish troops under allied control. In addition, this united Ireland was to come back into the Commonwealth and give recognition to the King. Really the old offer of Home Rule resurrected.

Oglaigh na hEireann.

ENROL UNDER THE GREEN FLAG.

Guard your rights and liberties (the few left you).
 Secure more.
 Help your Country to a place among the nations.
 Give her a National Army to keep her there.
 Get a gun and do your part.

JOIN THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS

(President: EON RAC NEILL).
 Ireland shall no longer remain disarmed and impotent.
 Propaganda poster by Thomas O'Donnell, Home Rule 1912

With the occupied six counties at war with Germany, Ireland could not be said to be truly neutral. By 1940, the British were seriously contemplating an invasion of Ireland to counter the German threat. For their part, the Free State authorities believed that the German threat was very real and De Valera considered asking for British help in repelling an invasion.

NEW ANTI-CONSCRIPTION STRUGGLE

If the occupied six counties of the north destroyed Ireland's neutrality, the nationalist community of Ulster destroyed Britain's efforts to suppress the neutrality struggle. As in World War I, it was conscription that became the rallying point.

In 1941, a conference of Nationalist MP's from Stormont and Nationalist Senators was held to fight conscription. A pledge was drawn up to be signed by Catholics throughout the North. It denied the right of Britain to enforce conscription on the nationalist people and stated that the struggle against conscription was to be carried out "by the most effective means at our disposal, consonant with the laws of God." Exactly the same as the pledge of World War I. The revolutionary implications were not lost on the British. A British officer reporting to the Cabinet said:

"Conscription will give new life to the IRA and will attract into its ranks many who today are keeping well clear of it. It will provide it with a new



De Valera inspecting Irish troops, 1940's.



was the stand against Britain during the Malvinas War. But this was forced upon the Irish government by the Hunger Strikers and their effect on the Irish populace. Once again, it was the existence and activity of the Republican Movement that was central to the defence of Ireland's independence and neutrality.

Britain would probably not complain too much about a united Ireland as long as it was a bourgeois united Ireland well attached to NATO. However, such an Ireland would not only have to prove her military preparedness by smashing the Republican Movement. In this way, Ireland would become much as Churchill's original vision - in other words an Ireland truly alien to the goals that the Irish people have committed themselves to over the years. It is deeply ironic that whilst the Irish ruling class is seeking to join foreign military alliances for the "protection" of Western Europe, that self same ruling class is having to go to such lengths (Anglo-Irish Agreement, American money) to get help from her "allies" to fight the Republican Movement.

The Republican Movement has much potential to draw on in the anti-imperialist struggle. The deep feelings aroused by the USA and its activities in the Philippines and Nicaragua, the Dunnes store anti-apartheid struggle and the vast courage of the nationalist peoples of

strength and prestige which may last a long while after the war is over."

In the North, rallies of over 10,000 people were taking place in Belfast with all taking the pledge. In the South, public opinion was increasingly mobilising around the issue. The British government was worried that the conscription issue would cause disaffection among the Irish troops already serving in the British army. De Valera agreed with all the above, for he knew that if the conscription issue built up, the opposition would be run by the IRA and he would be forced to follow them and support the nationalist Community. The IRA, and the Republican Movement in general, cannot be seen simply in their role as defenders of the nationalist people, but that the very existence of the IRA has to be seen at the centre of the issue of Irish neutrality as they are its main defenders.

As in World War I, the pressure from the Irish national minority community in America played an important role in Britain's thinking. The role of the overseas Irish was noted by the British representative at the American office in Eire.

"So long as he (De Valera) can work his mystique over Irishmen in all parts of the world, Mr De Valera does not worry about the rest of humanity."

However, De Valera had to worry about the Republican Movement. Its very existence limited his ability to manoeuvre. Because of his apparently "strong stand" on the issue of conscription and neutrality, De Valera was rewarded with re-election in 1944, as the Free State electorate thought he had and would defend Irish neutrality. However, pressure remained strong on the Free State and they were asked to join NATO in 1949 when the US was establishing hegemony over Western Europe. Ireland's strategic position remained important in British thinking as this Commonwealth Relations Office memorandum of 1951, revealed:

"Historically, Ireland, which has never been able to protect herself from invasion, has been, as she is today, a potential base for attack on the United Kingdom... Failing some firm and satisfactory assurance to the attitude in war of a United Ireland of which the present Republic was a major part, there are strong strategic arguments for the retention of the friendly bastion of the Six Counties."

EEC/NATO/IRA

The formation of NATO, and later the EEC, has increased the pressure on Ireland's neutrality. The Irish bourgeois parties are well aware of the potential of the situation. When Eire applied to join the EEC, the then Foreign Minister, Hillery, said:

"It will involve inevitably a willingness to participate in common action, if the need

should arise, in the defence of the new Europe. It would be as ridiculous for Ireland as an integral component of this new Europe, not to join, if called upon and if needed, in its own defence, as it would be for us to forestall our present commitment to the defence of our own territory."

The long term goal of the EEC is political unity. Haughey, then Taoiseach, noted that if the EEC became a full political union, that Ireland: "would accept the obligations even if these included defence". All other EEC members are also members of NATO making it difficult for Ireland to resist joining. Even the changing relationship between Western Europe and the USA means that it is quite possible that a form of military unity could be achieved without "formally" joining NATO. Ireland's neutrality is not greatly respected as it is.



It is well known that the American ambassador to Ireland was given a 65 million dollar budget to counter the European Peace Movement's campaign against Cruise and Pershing missiles. A leading British Conservative noted in 1978 that an independent Ulster or a united and neutral Ireland would deprive the western powers of seaports and early warning systems that would leave a "hole" in NATO's defences.

Ireland's political independence from the rest of Europe, and therefore Britain, has already been seriously compromised. Ireland's position as an oppressed nation does not keep her ruling class from wishing for an increased share of the loot taken from the exploited Third World nations by Europe's big powers. They would, self-admittedly, be prepared to sell Ireland's neutrality for a share in the booty. The most celebrated and most recent assertion of Irish political independence

the North, show that anti-imperialism is alive and well amongst the Irish people. The anti-imperialism of the Republican Movement has a specific anti-British dimension but it also has the general characteristics of all anti-imperialist struggles.

One of the most important of these characteristics is the demand for neutrality and the joining of the Non-Aligned Movement. This is highlighted now when Leinster House is on the verge of ratifying the Single European Act. In a world rent and torn by the conflicting ambitions of the superpowers the demand for real neutrality is clearly a revolutionary demand. Only the Republican Movement can seriously put this forward and develop it. It is the IRA, and the whole of the Republican Movement, that underpins Ireland's independence and neutrality and nothing else. Most certainly not the British.