

Ireland's Partition:



Coda to Counter- revolution

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About the author

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About the book

This is a book about Ireland's partition, but it is not a history. It is a polemic which sets out to refute the idea that the arrival of the peace process in some way will lead to an Irish democracy and to argue that working class mobilisation is required to expel the British and overthrow the existing capitalist order

Chapter one

Partition: A last stand against Democracy

It's difficult to pin down the time when Irish partition became fully established. An Ulster volunteer militia was established in 1912, the newly created Stormont Parliament declared allegiance to Britain in May 1921, but the new statelet was not fully secured until 1925, when proposals to amend the border resulted in a boundary commission report being hidden and the issue dropped by the Irish government. The whole period was wrapped in a confusion of shifting alliances, with the unionists abruptly dumping their supporters in the South and their own demands for Ireland as a whole to remain with Britain and the Irish Party dissolving into Sinn Fein, only to

re-emerge as the pro treaty faction and launch a counterrevolution.

What was invariant throughout the turmoil was the undemocratic nature of the Unionist and British interventions and the inherent instability and violence of the settlement. Having failed to destroy the Irish demand for independence, partition was a last gasp mechanism to hobble the further progress of democracy. Ireland was a giant laboratory where a series of strategies designed to subvert the global waves of anti-colonialism were hammered out.

The bedrock of the new settlement was a British decision to resolve an irresistible demand for independence in such a way that many of its objectives would be frustrated and British interests defended. This policy was not sitting on the shelf and was evolved as part of an intense internal struggle in Britain going back before the first Home Rule bill of 1886 and reaching its most intense level with the Curragh mutiny by a section of the British army in 1914. Just how radical the eventual policy was can be seen by the fact that the partition of Ireland, seen as outlandish and unthinkable, in a few years became the central plank of British peace proposals.

The new imperial strategy, a template for dealing with anti colonial struggles across the globe and widely copied by other imperial powers, rested on a promise of immediate and terrible war. Partition was baked in, crippling the new society, as also to a large extent was the consequent civil war through making

the terms of settlement so limited that it would inflame the divisions in the nationalist movement, divisions well understood by the British.

In 1922, within 6 months of the Anglo-Irish treaty ending the war of independence, the British were supplying field guns to the provisional government to crush republican forces in Dublin's Four Courts and a savage civil war was unleashed.

The strangest thing about the conflict from a modern perspective was the lack of focus on Partition. Why was this? Both sides, Free Staters and Republicans, opposed partition. Michael Collins, the leading military figure on the Free State side, continued to supply the northern IRA in the face of ongoing pogroms. In part, the lack of division on partition itself was as a result of the low level of politics within the nationalist movement, itself fed by the relative abstinence of the Labour movement and the trade unions. The Labour reformists played the role of peacemakers and referees and the remaining revolutionaries of the Irish Citizen Army were largely absorbed into the republican forces during the civil war. A final element was the weakness of the Northern nationalists. A minority under siege, the popular front structure of the old Irish Volunteers remained, as did the leadership of the old Irish Party and the Catholic Church. The Labour influence here was violently suppressed by the unionists.

The IRA, a largely militarist organisation, fought the war on the obvious fact that the treaty fell well short of independence and on legalistic issues such as the oath to the King required from Irish parliamentarians. Both sides believed that a boundary commission would redraw the border in a few years and make a northern statelet unviable, illustrating a continued Irish willingness to fall for tall tales from perfidious Albion.

If the British did not foresee the evolution towards partition, neither did the unionists. A movement founded to prevent home rule for the island had to switch 180 degrees to propose a separate state. They immediately abandoned southern unionists. At one stage the Catholic prelates suggested a 4 county area that would at least have been relatively homogenous, but the debate within unionism was whether or not they had the military force to hold 9 counties of the historic Ulster or just the 6 of the new loyal Ulster.

The way to secure the new state was to unleash terror and that was what Unionist forces did. A Protestant militia was loosely incorporated into the state and formed into the "Specials." The "A" specials were incorporated into the new RUC, formed directly from the RIC. The "C" specials dissolved into loyalist paramilitary forces. The "B" specials became an official terror force with the blessing of the state. When they were eventually dissolved in the Civil Rights era it turned out that no full account of membership or armaments was available.

The combination of the Special Powers act and the B specials suppressed resistance. In the 1920s the local nationalist paper carried a front page about the "midnight knock" being heard in nationalist areas, remarking ironically that luckily, nothing worse than internment without trial, such as summary execution, was being contemplated

But anyone who views the North through the lens of Catholic suppression is missing much of the story. Catholic business owners and the church were cushioned against much of the repression while a minority of Protestant workers who were socialists and trade unionists faced a high level of violence.

On 21 July 1920, following a call for violence from Unionist leader Edward Carson, loyalist mobs launched a pogrom in the shipyard.

Around seven thousand five hundred workers were expelled, roughly a quarter of the workforce. About a quarter of that faction, one thousand eight hundred, were "*Rotten Prods*" including many socialists who had successfully organised strikes the previous year.

The labour and trade union movement had opted to take a back seat on the national question and pose as neutral peacemakers who pursued bread and butter issues. That suppressed a revolutionary turn that could have united the

most radical workers but did not prevent the reformists themselves from being targets of the Orange mob.

In the new statelet the Catholic Church opted for peace, denouncing resistance. The sectarian environment cemented its power in the nationalist community and it was not slow to strengthen its hold even when this exacerbated division. The "*Ne temere*" doctrine demanded that children of mixed marriages be brought up in the Catholic faith and the prelates fought to bring down a secular school system and win control of catholic schools in a new divided education system.

In the aftermath of the Civil War the new Free State government was largely indifferent to the fate of the North. They agreed to suppress the boundary commission report that proposed transfer of border areas to the Stormont administration and in return for debt relief agreed to recognise the existing partition boundary.

The scale of the defeat and betrayal suppressed class differences. The Church and the Nationalist party (a remnant of the old Irish party), ruled the roost among northern nationalists. The slogan of the elite was that half a loaf was better than no bread.

Silent and stratified, with violence never far away, the North settled to its fate. It was truly a carnival of reaction. An utterly undemocratic and sectarian state, established by going

through parish records and counting the Prods, and maintained by discrimination and state violence.

Before partition the North was an area where sectarianism happened and was used by employers to divide the workforce. The same was true, on a smaller scale, in many British cities. After partition it became a sectarian state, defined by repression of nationalists and Orange triumphalism.

As premier Lord Craigavom said later:

"A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people".

Chapter two

Independence

Irish unionism was once nationalism.

It was always anti-democratic.

Their nationalism grew out of the pre-1800 Irish parliament. Their distaste for democracy came from the fact that the parliament represented the tiny population of Anglo-Irish landed gentry and clergy and excluded Catholics and Presbyterians. As calls for Catholic emancipation grew alongside Presbyterian radicalism the gentry saw the dissolution of the parliament and the Act of Union as preserving ascendancy by diluting Catholicism in a wider British context.

So the main reason for the act of union was the emergence of a genuine democratic alliance of Catholics and Dissenters. Inspired by the French revolution, the 1798 rising of the United Irishmen was a real threat to British rule. The revolution had been defeated following a British military mobilisation. The Presbyterians were a minority in the North and met savage repression. A section of the southern movement, led by reactionary Catholic clerics, indulged in sectarianism and helped divide the democratic movement.

The United Irishmen live on in Republican mythology as representing the possibility of unity around the national question, but their defeat saw that possibility recede. In part this was due to the especially heavy repression of the Presbyterians. A common punishment was the pitch cap, boiling pitch poured over the heads of the victims. Many who were spared that fate were transported to Australia. Militancy faded with a local industrial revolution. The linen trade was excluded from the general suppression of Irish industry and led to economic growth. New opportunities opened for Presbyterians as mediators between the aristocracy and industrialists and a new influx of Catholic workers. In the South the burning question became Catholic emancipation, with an Irish party led by moderate parliamentarians. The republican component, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, became organised in the Irish Diaspora, especially in the US, and turned towards conspiracy and militarism.

The next revolutionary opportunity would include a growing working class movement. It was a minority but was at the forefront of emerging class struggles and was also a doorway to a massive international movement. However, that movement was fragmented. Most industrial growth was in the North, led by the British imperial market and local unionist industrialists. This led to Walkerism, a "*gas and water*" municipal socialism denounced by James Connolly. Also within Ireland, Britain, and the wider international labour movement there was a sharp division between revolutionary and reformist currents.

In 1913 the Irish revolutionary workers current faced a major setback. The great Dublin lockout for union recognition had ended in a qualified defeat, with the workers forced back to work. Having successfully resisted the unions, the intensity of the struggle saw the employers gradually give way to union organisation, but it also convinced a large section of the union and labour movement, especially in the British headquarters, of the dangers of radicalism. It was in response to labour conservatism that Connolly moved between unions, socialist parties and the Irish Citizen Army. He was by far the most charismatic and articulate of working class leaders in Ireland, but he was also in a minority.

Setbacks for the workers and a growing tide towards imperialist war (ironically proclaimed as being in defence of the freedom of small nations) shifted the balance of forces towards the revolutionary nationalists, organised in the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB).

There is a tendency to run together the revolutionary nationalists and the workers as "*men (sic) of no property*". It would be better to call the IRB "*men of little property*" concentrated in the middle classes.

This had a number of consequences. Many nationalist radicals strongly sympathised with the workers, but they saw the nation, not class, as the central focus of struggle. "*Labour must wait*", became a slogan. Methods of conspiracy and militarism moved centre stage. Above all an enduring concept of the nationalist family, still a major force today, made the republicans largely blind to class differences with the nationalist bourgeoisie.

For Connolly the 1916 rising did not hold out the prospect of a military victory. Alongside his support for Irish self-determination ran a desire to strike out alongside the revolutionary elements associated with the second international in opposition to imperialist war. In the aftermath of 1916 the reformists criticised him for supporting the rising, while Lenin and Trotsky believed he had risen too soon.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood did dream of victory, but this involved a complicated conspiracy. They were hidden inside the nationalist Irish Volunteers and hoped to convert a mobilisation into a rebellion. The more moderate majority leadership countermanded the mobilisation and the rising

became an act of defiance rather than a realistic attempt to take power.

Irish capitalism was riven with division. The Irish Volunteers were formed as a defensive response to the Ulster Volunteer Force and did not foresee rebellion. The political leadership was the Irish Parliamentary Party, committed to Home Rule via parliamentary action. Their leader, John Redmond, accepted the postponement of home rule because of the war and then supported mass enlistment into the British army in down payment of future good behaviour by the British.

British savagery after 1916, the execution of the leadership and the naval bombardment of Dublin, blew the old order apart.

The old nationalist party collapsed and a new Irish resistance cohered around Sinn Fein, until then a minor force. The mass political support led the majority of those elected in 1918 to convene the first Dáil and to organise both Dáil and local councils to run Ireland as an independent country. Parallel to the political movement ran a military organisation, the IRA, waging a guerrilla war against British forces. The republican imagination sees the IRA as the decisive transformative force on the war of independence. In reality the alternative state set up by the resistance was far more important. Military action was important also but in the countryside its main role was to disperse the concentration of British forces. In the cities, along with the civilian population, it managed to break much of the

intelligence apparatus the British depended on. The militarist focus allowed much of the manoeuvring of constitutional nationalism to take place in the shadows

What happened to the Irish Party and to the capitalist interests it represented? Many joined Sinn Fein. The Nationalist divisions did not go away. They were subsumed in one movement.

When the British offered a settlement of limited Home rule and partition the hidden fractures re-emerged as pro and anti treaty forces.

The divisions led to violence and the British immediately provided the pro treaty forces with field guns. A savage civil war filled with reprisal, torture, and massacre led to the defeat of the Republicans.

The result was a confessional state in the South. The hospitals, social services and the schools were left to the tender mercies of the church. A ruling class determined to protect existing property relationships and cut off from the industrialised North could not bring about a truly independent economy. Ireland exported its people. The poor fled in search of work. The rebels and intellectuals fled the stranglehold of the church.

Republican revolutionaries never came to terms with the role of constitutional nationalism. They ignored the constant repression by Fianna Fáil and launched a doomed border campaign; "*Operation Harvest*" that was repressed on both sides of the border. Even when Provisional Sinn Fein emerged as the leadership of a mass movement in the 70s the eventual outcome was capitulation to the interests of Irish capitalism. If the national question was the only dominant question then by definition the capitalists were part of the nationalist family. A class policy, based on all the issues facing the workers, was the only ground on which revolutionary independence could have been found.

Chapter three

The worker's movement: Revolution and reform

As capitalism expanded in the 19th century so also did the workers movement, and at the beginning of the 20th century a mass international movement, the Second International, linked workers movements in many of the European powers. That international movement began to diverge, with leading figures arguing for reformism – that is, that the power of the workers movement could successfully transform capitalism into socialism – with a minority opposing this policy and arguing for the revolutionary transformation of society.

The debate echoed through the Irish movement with a pro-union tendency in sections of the labour movement, a reformist wing that tried to step back from politics and a revolutionary wing aiming for a workers republic.

The debate was resolved with the collapse of the international and with the majority of national sections supporting their own capitalist class and the slaughter of the 1st world war. The Irish rising of 1916 was both a nationalist rising and a blow against imperialist war by revolutionary socialists led by James Connolly.

In the aftermath of the rising reformism came to the fore and labour voluntarily took a back seat in the evolution of the national resistance.

The working class were a minority in a population of small farmers and landless labourers. This numerical weakness can be compensated for by the concentration of labour in large manufacturing, as happened in Russia, but in Ireland the major industries were concentrated in the North. They were linked to the British market and unionist employers, who used sectarian division to maintain a tight hold on the workers. In response a unionist labour stratum developed in the North that saw working class progress as linked to the British presence and expressed through municipal reform. Some of these actively supported unionist reaction. Others tried to avoid suppression by avoiding any public position.

Hiding did not save the reformists. The victory of the unionist oppression of labour did not reach fruition until the 1920 pogrom against nationalists and socialists in the Belfast shipyard, openly organised by unionist leader Carson, but the sectarian grip in the years before the pogrom was an enormous counterweight to the possibility of a socialist party.

The leadership of the workers movement moved towards Dublin and towards the transport and general unions as the next most concentrated source of labour power. However the union movement remained weak; slow to organise politically, reluctant to include broader social forces such as farm labourers, ignoring a radical feminist movement that was supported by the Citizen Army and by radical republicans, protective of differentiation between skilled and unskilled labour, holding to links with the British union bureaucracy and to a definition of worker's unity that attempted to avoid conflict with unionism.

James Connolly fought desperately to establish a political organisation of the workers. He launched the Irish Socialist Republican Party, supported the "*One Big Union*" theory, built a socialist press, launched the Labour Party, and formed a workers' army, the Irish Citizen Army.

In all these enterprises he was fighting against the current. The 1913 lockout by Dublin employers, led by Irish Parliamentary Party MP William Martin Murphy, ended in defeat and union membership fell in the aftermath, although class antagonism

grew greatly and the employers did not again attempt to eliminate trade unionism. Connolly entered the Easter Rising commanding only a few hundred ICA fighters and was executed in the aftermath.

That was far from the end of the working class. The 1917 Russian Revolution saw wide solidarity in Ireland. The period following 1916 saw a growth in trade unionism, labour party membership and in working class combativity. General strikes were held in support of political prisoners, against conscription and a strike by railwaymen refused transport to troops. Local action saw seizure of enterprises and the declaration of soviets. In the case of Limerick the entire city was declared a soviet. The fallout of war saw the birth of the USSR and abortive revolutions in Germany and other parts of Europe. Even the conservative British TUC managed the 1926 general strike before rapidly retreating. However the dominant response of the fragments of the second international was towards reformism

This was the case with the majority of the Irish Labour leadership. They avoided radicalism, any formal links with feminism and failed to organise landless labourers, controlling a movement through advancing the pallid politics of the union bosses. In the aftermath of 1916 the union leadership passed a spineless resolution commemorating all the dead rather than a direct support for the insurrection. They later called an unsuccessful anti-militarism strike in 1922 in an attempt to force the anti-treaty republicans to concede.

Spontaneous movements generally do not succeed. Despite the undoubted combativity of many workers, in the absence of Connolly an already conservative and reformist leadership had already avoided expanding Labour into wider social movements. Heavily influenced by the British movement and trying to avoid the maelstrom of political forces around it, it sought to blend into the background.

Nothing could illustrate this more clearly than the decision not to contest the 1918 election – this an election where women over thirty and working class men had their first opportunity to vote. The party stood in the 1922 election and won over 21% of the vote. This shows that Labour had the capacity to exercise a great deal of power and could have mobilised a working class current. However by 1922 the party was standing as a pro-treaty party and was settling into an ongoing role as valet to the bourgeois parties, serving as ballast in coalition governments.

Much is made of the 1st Dáil programme, drafted by labour party leader Thomas Johnson and amended by Sinn Fein. In fact this was another turn of the screw, encouraging a worker's vote for Sinn Fein and assuring them that they did not need an independent programme.

Supporters of the programme focus on phrases within the programme: "*the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland.*"

And: "*..all right to private property must be subordinated to the public right and welfare*".

In fact the declaration was much less radical than the programme of the United Irishmen of 1798 and was quickly forgotten. It is clung to today by left republicans, but who believes that the Ireland of vulture capitalism and housing famine cherishes all of its children equally?

There was one further opportunity for the working class. Against a background of general radicalism the Communist Party of Ireland was formed in 1933. By then the revolutionary tide had turned. In the USSR most of the Bolshevik leadership had been purged by Stalin and his doctrine of "*socialism in one country*" forced communist parties towards a role as instruments of soviet foreign policy. The Irish party was to become notorious as one of the unquestioning "*Tankie*" parties, fervently supporting Stalin.

In the North, labour and trade union organisations had to contend with the direct physical threat of loyalism. Political meetings were broken up by loyalist mobs. Socialists were intimidated in the workplace. Serious attempts were made to organise a loyalist trade union movement and loyalist labour organisations. ICTU was not recognised by the local administration because of its all-Ireland structure.

However the seeds of defeat lay within the labour organisations themselves. The British Labour Party, whose members were generally supportive of Irish independence and who wanted to avoid a sectarian quagmire, banned organisation in the Northern statelet. The local activists copied their Southern counterparts in attempting neutrality on the national question. However in a reactionary settlement where there were constant demands for expressions of loyalty, this proved impossible. The labour movement moved steadily to the right, with one figure, Harry Midgley, becoming a minister in the unionist government.

The Northern Ireland Labour Party eventually collapsed as the civil rights movement was formed, having split earlier because some members supported evangelical Protestant objections to public parks opening on a Sunday. The Second World War saw the Irish Communist party riven by the same tensions, with the Northern section splitting to offer fulsome support for the British War effort following the Fascist invasion of the USSR.

The weakness of the workers movement saw the carnival of reaction foreseen by Connolly. The North evolved as a one party state, with sectarianism and unionism dominating political life. In the South education, health and social services were handed over to the Churches and the dominant Catholic Church led a confessional state from which both workers and intellectuals fled in a constant wave of migration.

Chapter Four

The struggle for women's rights

There is an intimate connection between the rise of the working class movement in Ireland, the growth of demands for national self-determination and the rise of the struggle for women's rights. Certainly, of the three areas, the rights of women have proved a litmus test, mirroring the rise and fall of struggle. In the century of Irish partition they have mostly measured, through savage repression, the failure of democratic and socialist goals.

The links between socialism and women's rights was demonstrated by many women activists, but nowhere more dramatically than by Countess Markievicz, one of the

foremost activists in Ireland, the first women to be elected to the British House of Commons and later a Labour minister in the Dáil, a member of the Irish Citizen Army and a participant in the Easter rising.

Markievicz was not alone. There were many working class and radical women around the ICA who brought together in their person a unity of women, workers and national self determination. However, alongside the fall of the ICA went a decline in the struggle for women's rights.

The pro treaty forces were reactionary, suppressing women and supporting the growing role of the Catholic Church. They refused Markievicz a state funeral when she died destitute in 1927.

For the anti-treaty forces the mantra "*labour must wait*" was supported by an understanding that women also must wait. Women were suffocated in a green flag, portrayed as virginal martyrs serving in support of male volunteers.

The victory of reaction on the one hand and the incapacity of republican politics on the other led to a dystopian nightmare. Poorer workers found their children brutalised and assaulted in industrial schools. Pregnant working class women were sent to mother and baby homes and to Magdalene laundries. Their story lives on today, as stories of mutilation of women, kidnap and sale of children and the dumping of infant's bodies in

cisterns emerge, running alongside ongoing tales of cover up and suppression of records. At the time of writing the Dublin government is pressing ahead with plans to hand over a new national maternity hospital to a private company linked to the Sisters of Charity, a group of Nuns linked to many tales of abuse.

In Belfast a strong suffragette movement existed but, as with labour, it lived in a hostile Orange environment. Also, as with labour, it was unable to take a clear position on the national question. Then, as now, many believed that the generally more open British laws and practices would somehow leak across to Ireland if the union were maintained.

In the event the unionists annihilated the women's movement. An official unionist women's movement was set up under the leadership of Lady Londonderry. When the men signed a counterrevolutionary covenant in 1912 the mass of unionist women signed a separate declaration, underlining their subordinate position.

The outcome was a mirror of southern society, with repression, clerical control of delinquent women and children involving Protestant and Catholic churches, a long search for truth and ongoing cover up of crimes. The story was partly mitigated by the establishment of the British National Health Service but the clerical establishments lived on in the new dispensation.

The feminist movement re-emerged alongside the civil rights movement in the 1960s with a high point for the southern movement being the contraceptive train of 1971 from Belfast to Dublin protesting the ban on reproductive control for women. In the absence of a mass movement the feminist movement was weaker, embedded in parliamentary and reformist milieu, and progress was slow. The import of contraceptives was banned until 1979 and open sale made legal in 1985. Limited abortion legislation was passed in 2018.

In the North the movement was divided on the national question. The nationalist faction was far more active and radical but as the mass struggle declined they were absorbed by the republican movement and eventually abandoned an independent feminist policy, including the issue of support for abortion, where that might conflict with the interests of Sinn Fein.

A reactionary definition of femininity was used by pro-imperialist peace movements to call for republican demobilisation, but these movements did not take up feminist issues.

Other feminist currents were smaller and less radical, with a number, supported by the Communist Party, mobilising around quite right wing electoral bodies such as the Women's Coalition of the late 90s. The core belief was that peace was a good even if masking imperialist victory, that political participation of women was a good in itself no matter how

reactionary the political position they espoused, and finally that there was no need for a feminist programme as British liberalism would eventually extend the benefits of metropolitan civilisation to Ireland. This strategy appeared to bring fruit when Westminster passed legislation in 2019, following another Stormont collapse, and ratified it in 2020 with an obligation on the renewed administration to implement the new law. However structures to enable the legislation have not yet been put in place and this issue seesaws between Stormont and Westminster without any independent mobilisation of women to force a solution.

The absence of independent feminist organisations in the North is mirrored in the South, as existing movements are incorporated into NGOs and government sponsored community bodies. In 2020 a number of gender critical feminist organisations formed in response to a wide ranging legal framework supporting transgender self identification. The new legal framework removed the idea of women's spaces or any rights for women on the basis of their sex. The movements include: *The Countess didn't fight for this*, *Radicalilín* and *Women's Space Ireland*. Other gender critical groups have formed in the gay community. The new movements have been savagely criticised by many traditional feminist organisations, now part of a partnership between unions and government and operating through NGOs, lobbying groups and government committees. In an astounding development in 2020 these groups united behind the Irish branch of Amnesty International to demand the suppression of the new organisations, demanding the denial of

democratic rights, refusal of space in the press or public representation.

It is not difficult to imagine the first woman MP in the Westminster Parliament, Irish Citizen Army member Constance Markievicz, today looking around in horror at the carnival of reaction that partition has wrought. Generations have struggled to achieve any form of women's rights, only to find them under attack on the one hand by the growth of reaction on both sides of the border and, on the other hand, by a new ideology that denies the very existence of women as biological entities.

Today the women's question remains a litmus test. In the North the major parties do not support women's rights. Westminster now and again indicates an aspiration for progress but clearly will not risk another collapse of an unstable settlement. The feminist movement has largely demobilised in the face of a strategy of waiting for the British to act.

Dublin has a much more rosy complexion. Has it not passed legislation on abortion, legalised gay marriage, advanced the most liberal trans ID laws in Europe? In reality the abortion legislation is limited and owes its existence to a revulsion against church control rather than any radicalization of the ruling class and its operation disadvantages working class women. The effect of current trans legislation is to remove the category of women from groups entitled to rights. Their

right to organise separately is challenged and they are redesignated as “*people with cervixes*”.

The greatest threat comes from the state’s determination to hand over a new National Maternity Hospital to a private agency linked to the Catholic church, continuing a long history of outsourcing health and social services to religious bodies, who apply their own reactionary rules to the treatment of women.

It is around issues like this that we can begin to see how women’s oppression is baked into the partition of Ireland. The Northern component seated in power a reactionary evangelical coalition that continues to maintain a veto in politics. A dependent economy in the South was led both by counterrevolutionary ideology and economic weakness to outsource health care to the church and continues with this practice today.

Emancipation of women will involve the smashing of partition and advancing towards socialism and an Irish democracy.

The last thing that woman and workers should do this time around is wait.

Chapter five

The nationalist forces and their discontents

The struggle for an Irish democracy is defined by the heroism of the Easter rebellion of 1916. However, behind the banner of revolution the period before and during the rising, including the 1913 lockout, involved extreme class struggle and widely divergent goals held by the different forces.

Connolly and ICA were a minority in the forces involved in the Easter Rising. The leading movement in the struggle was the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), itself a minor and

secret force of revolutionaries within the Irish Volunteers. The division between the two is well established. The IRB were a military faction within the capitalist Home Rule movement, its political wing being the Irish Parliamentary Party and its military organisation the Irish Volunteers. The volunteers were a defence formation established in response to the Unionist Ulster Volunteer Force. They were never intended to be a challenge to Britain and in fact the Irish Party leader, John Redmond, encouraged a majority of the volunteers to fight for Britain on the promise of a Home Rule bill afterwards.

It is common to run the republican currents together as the "*men of no property*" and lump them with the Connolly current. However the leadership and programme of the IRB were defined by revolutionary nationalism and it was essentially a petty-bourgeois movement.

Its class nature and politics, veering between workers and capitalists, defined much of the future history of revolutionary nationalism, leaving it open to division and unable to effectively counter the capitalist counter-offensive that led to civil war and partition.

Ireland's status as a colony rested on economic oppression. With the exception of the North East, economic development was suppressed by the British in support of its own industrial development. The development of manufacturing in the North as part of the imperial market was a base for unionism. That doesn't mean that there wasn't an Irish bourgeois, but they were largely characterised as "*Gombeen*", based on the

money lenders, publicans and land agents within a largely agricultural economy.

That meant that their interests were narrow and their fear of the workers and the landless labourers great. They wanted political power and greater autonomy, but the gradual drift towards a limited devolution largely met their needs.

The 1916 rising and the British reaction meant that events were constantly slipping out of their hands, a situation only resolved by the bloodbath of the civil war and eventual victory for bourgeois counterrevolution.

The engine of the revolution, in the absence of a sizable revolutionary worker's current, was republicanism. Economically it required a republic, free from Britain and able to fully develop an Irish economy. They were filled with fervour, immensely brave and determined, but with many inherent weaknesses.

The first weakness was lack of policy. Veering between capitalist and worker, there was a portmanteau of policies and programmes. Many were radical and progressive, but few were universally accepted. There was a wide reliance on legalism, calling vainly on the international community to extend the rights of small nations to the Irish.

The absence of policy meant that the structures of the incipient state, set up to nullify the official structures of British rule, did not provide a new social direction beyond the assertion of national sovereignty and self determination.

Arising from this lack of policy was a blindness to the danger posed by the Irish capitalists. A sign of this blindness was the rise of Sinn Fein, an obscure and quite right wing group, to become the broad vehicle of nationalist sentiment, an issue that was to become critical before and during the civil war.

Also there was a general sentiment of the triumph of the will. If class was not the mechanism for victory then it was the individual members of the nation exerting maximum force. As a result the Irish Republican Army was never under the control of the Dáil and the guerrilla war was fought largely separately from any political mechanism.

Then as now militant republicans were convinced that one last push could have defeated the British. For their part, the British actions were focused fairly directly on splitting and demobilising mass insurrection. In this they were successful.

The treaty gave the Irish bourgeois the settlement the British were willing to offer and they were content. The division in the nationalist forces was immediate and it is almost certain that the republican forces had the support of the majority of the population. However the pro-treaty forces had the British field guns and munitions.

It was not military superiority or the barbarism of the state torture and executions alone that led to the defeat of the republicans. They wrapped themselves in legalistic arguments. They searched in vain for an effective military response. Where the "Statists" moved rapidly to the right, they failed to

move left, with IRA courts ruling in favour of the landlords and the employers.

The victory of the Free State forces and the de facto acceptance of partition strengthened and crystallised reactionary forces on both sides of the new border. In the North a state based on sectarian hatred and suppression, in the South a confessional state where the power of the church was enormously magnified.

A long winter of poverty, emigration and savage oppression of the poor, especially for women and children, set in.

Chapter six

The British: A model for decolonisation

Insofar as the words imperialism and colonialism figure in political discourse in Ireland today they are seen as referencing the distant past. We have moved on to a place where only culture and identity are important, the ancient enemy is now our best friend and Sinn Fein leaders offer paeans of praise to the British Royal family.

Even among critics who accept the terms the words are loosely used simply to register opposition. Colonialism and imperialism are part of a long historical process and crises arose for both rulers and ruled. The new rulers are always a

minority and normally they create native administrators and supporters to divide the members of the subject nation.

In its earlier phases colonialism is simply piracy and robbery. The next step is to steal the land and create a landlord class alongside a landless class to work the land. Alternatively the colonial power carries out genocide and imports a slave class. Cheap agricultural and mineral wealth are exported and native industry suppressed in order to facilitate industrial growth in the colonial power. The colony becomes a market for the surplus production of the metropolitan power.

Eventually the impoverished workers become themselves a resource and the imperialist country exports capital to the colony to extract hyperprofits from the native population.

The colonial setup becomes subject to diminishing returns. The cost of administration and control of an increasingly restless colony is not justified by the low levels of productivity resulting from previous economic suppression. On the other hand the imperial power seeks to retain overall control of the resources of the colony in the interests of geopolitical strategy.

This shift to export of capital into the colony marks a new stage, the stage of imperialism.

Imperialism incorporates colonialism, but marks a new phase of capitalism. It becomes the overwhelming global system. Banking and industrial capital combine to form finance capital. Monopoly becomes the dominant form of organisation. The imperialist powers at the end of the 19th

century were battling to seize control of global resources only to subsequently launch a decolonisation drive that would continue to preserve their rule.

Ireland was Britain's first colony. Where Wales and Scotland were eventually incorporated onto the developing capitalist society, developed a somewhat subordinate bourgeoisie and saw those bourgeois join with the English in the plunder of a colonial empire, Ireland was drained of resources and left in relative penury. The state was used to suppress local industry with the exception of areas of the North East.

Ireland saw the decay of a landed gentry and the rise of a local gombeen bourgeois starved of capital and the freedom to expand. The Unionist bourgeois in the North were tightly bound to the British imperial market and were able to form an alliance with the aristocratic layer, with the middle classes and with the upper layers of a workforce that was defined on caste and sectarian grounds.

The British response to changes in Ireland was wrapped up with a broader issue. The old colonial market across the globe was bound up with the straightforward expropriation of wealth, the suppression and distortion of local manufacturing in the interests of the colonial power and the dumping of produce to a captive market. Economic systems were shifting towards imperialism, defined by the export of capital, dominance of finance capital and the growth of monopoly. The British were debating a shift in their relationship with Ireland based on these changes. That does not mean a kindly

or progressive attitude to Ireland. All sides in the British ruling class were anxious to preserve their dominance.

This is the mechanism that led to a series of limited home rule bills put forward by British capital which were then delayed or postponed for fear of the consequences of any relaxation of control in Ireland. It is how they were able to join a global war, ostensibly for the freedom of small nations, while obliterating the centre of Dublin through naval bombardment to prevent Irish freedom.

So, in Ireland colonial suppression morphed into a post colonial settlement through a series of experiments and adaptations. A loyalist army is set up and supported by the military establishment. Pogroms in the North suppress nationalist and socialist groups. An all class alliance, based on sectarian division, is ruled by capitalists and the aristocracy. After an initial application of military terror, divisions in the nationalists between constitutional and revolutionary wings were exploited by the British.

An Irish state is born, but the new state is crippled by economic underdevelopment, the retention of the industrial base in the partitioned North and the victory of reaction in the new Dáil. The shift is from colony to neocolony. There are many crises, but the generally democratic content of capitalist revolution is fading. Successful republicanism in the form of a Fiánna Fail government immediately morphs into constitutional nationalism. A confessional state grows in the south. When the experiment to build a native industry is

undertaken it largely fails. In the North, sectarianism fuels suppression of the minority.

The Irish experiment is repeated across the empire. The British forces leave, but they leave genocide, partition and division behind, weakening the future development of the former colonies.

In the aftermath of war the new American century begins. Britain is diminished but remains a major imperial power, to the fore in military adventures alongside the US and with a growing appetite for national chauvinism and racism at home. The interests of unionism are disregarded in the push for Brexit, but withdrawal from Ireland is not even an issue in discussion.

Chapter seven

Unionism

Irish unionism was always a diverse coalition united in their opposition to democracy. At the very top stood the landed aristocracy, essentially a part of the British ruling class. Below was the Anglo Irish; the Church of Ireland, the state bureaucracy, police, military and so on. The whole edifice was held together by the British state forces.

Things were different in Ulster. The Ulster custom of tenant protection gave grounds for support for the state among Protestants. That in turn encouraged rural terror gangs that suppressed Catholics and that morphed into the Orange Order.

Democratic revolt by Presbyterians in the United Irishmen was savagely suppressed.

By the middle of the 19th century Ulster had industrialised around linen, engineering and shipbuilding, supplying Britain's imperial market. A new class structure developed. The landowners were joined by a new industrial bourgeoisie and a growing middle class. Protestant workers were employed as skilled workers or as overseers. The enemy of the revolutionary Presbyterian, the former agrarian terrorist organisation, the Orange Order, was baked into the new dispensation. Masses of rural Catholics flooded into Belfast to take up mostly unskilled jobs. The Orange order preserved apartheid in the workplaces, disciplined Protestant workers and inspired frequent pogroms against Catholics.

So when the Home Rule movement grew an organised counterrevolutionary force was already in place. In many ways it had its counterparts across the empire, elements of the empire linked to local allies whom they had separated from the general population by offering a different status..

At the top was a landlord class, all Ireland in scope and specialising in administration, the military and the established church. This layer was too small in numbers to hold against a nationalist rebellion. It was only in the North that the mass base existed for a successful struggle against Irish independence. The Southern unionists were abandoned without a glance backwards, and those isolated in the Southern

state had no difficulty in adapting to the new circumstances when they were left behind in the run up to partition by their northern compatriots.

Below the aristocracy was a class of overseers, found in all the colonies, that had expanded greatly in the North because of industrialisation. Many of these were Presbyterians co-opted to oversee a new working class of Protestant skilled workers and a mixture of Catholic and Protestant unskilled workers. Again, division of the workforce on caste or religion was a standard feature of the empire. In Ireland the industrial caste system was greatly enhanced by the existence of a pro-imperialist terror organisation, the Orange Order. This sort of organisation existed in many colonies, but the order was more entrenched because it had been carried over from previous agrarian struggles.

The all-class Protestant alliance was not built without a struggle. There was friction between establishment Protestants and Presbyterians, seen in sections of the trade union and Labour movement and in an independent Orange Order that kept its distance from the mainstream. Even more importantly the support of Protestant workers was not automatic and required terror against "*rotten prods*" as well as Catholic workers. Where the national struggle in the South was characterised by mass strike, boycott and guerrilla war, the unionist campaign rested on intimidation, state violence and pogrom and was held together by a guarantee of sectarian privilege. Labour, Liberals and democrats held back from the

raw sectarian menace of the Orange and hence were unable to mount an effective opposition.

The class alliance of unionism generated a majority in four counties, hardly enough to produce a partitioned state. What guaranteed partition wasn't unionist votes. It was an impunity for counterrevolutionary forces guaranteed by the British and the continued British military and administrative presence.

Partition was to be deployed by the British with different minority groups, usually associated with the colonial administration, across the empire. It succeeded in crippling new nations. It's weakness for its supporters is that the alliance with the imperial power is linked to specific, time-limited interests. Eventually the loyal workers find themselves trapped, joined with their class enemy in an alliance that delivers less and less. However even when the material interest of the link with the empire has decayed the violence and division can continue to block working class mobilisation. In the 60s the decline of the traditional industries and the imperial market were well understood, but because of the static nature of class domination straightforward measures - trade with Dublin, expansion of infrastructure, were not undertaken successfully.

Irish nationalism and republicanism, in the past and today, gave to unionism a power it never had and largely ignored the role of the main actor, Britain. The British role in enabling and constructing the initial division of the country, their role in

blocking all examination of the Northern state, their armed suppression of the civil rights mobilisation, the dirty war against republicans and the careful construction of a peace process that retained partition and sectarian division - all these elements are ignored and the defeated republican militants now ascribe to imperialism a progressive role in the future of Ireland. The task forward to achieve Irish unity is defined as conciliation of unionist culture rather than the defeat of an imperialist power.

However it is in defining the tasks needed to defeat capitalism and imperialism that an alternative role can be offered to working class unionists - part of the Irish working class, acting in solidarity to achieve liberation, not only in Ireland, but in Europe and across the globe.

Brexit has offered a glimpse of this. The Democratic Unionist Party suffered greatly because of its support for a hard Brexit and subsequent betrayal by the British, leading to a *Northern Ireland Protocol* that left the North with access to the European zone. Attempts by unionism, with the support of paramilitaries, to recover support through the traditional mechanism of unionist unity and sectarian mobilisation with the threat of violence have attracted little interest. Rather there has been bitter criticism of the DUP and a fall in electoral support.

The effect of the unionist crisis is somewhat limited by the decay of the opposition. The small left groups cling

desperately to a dogmatic left Brexit and Irexit, Sinn Fein offer full support to the European Union, a body that forced Ireland to pay almost half the European banking debt following the credit crunch of 2008.

The solution to the Irish question today is posed in terms of petitioning the British to hold a border poll and offering concessions to unionism in a shared island. This produces no interest among unionists and apathy on the part of nationalists.

Chapter eight

Stability at a price

James Connolly saw partition as ushering in; "a carnival of reaction". He was proved right. Religious sectarianism was a common feature of the major British industrial cities, partially overcome by the Labour movement. The North went from a state within which sectarianism was a major force to becoming a sectarian state - actually defined by counting the Protestants and operated by assigning a lesser level of citizenship to Catholics. To make things worse, to reach economic viability the border was drawn as widely as possible and included two nationalist counties. The minority was so large that it could only remain a minority through the most

open and aggressive discrimination and oppression. As the unionists openly boasted; "*a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people.*" Discrimination, an armed protestant militia, the special powers act and the economic, military and political support of the British state instituted a permanent state of siege.

In Dublin the 1916 rising saw a rise in support for nationalism and growing working class and republican militancy throughout the war of independence. The weakness of the left and the reformism of the union leaders led to a unification of the classes in Sinn Fein, with reformist labour taking a back seat. The treaty with the British divided nationalism into constitutional and revolutionary camps.

The civil war and the rise of a pro-treaty government was a counterrevolution that saw the political inheritors of the Irish Parliamentary Party gain power. How to explain the new state? The major element was the fact that the British did not leave. They held and controlled military bases at the ports and a number of sectors of the Irish economy. The impoverished agrarian society that emerged centred around export to the British market. The role of the Catholic Church was greatly amplified, converting the new society into a confessional state, but although this was a convenient ideological crutch for the administration, it also had a material base because of the extreme poverty of the new society outside the elite. The state simply could not afford a welfare system and education and health were outsourced to the church.

The outcome is probably best understood by the slew of recent reports on Magdalene laundries, Industrial schools and mother and baby homes. The care of the poor was handed over to the Catholic Church, where they were treated with cruelty, coerced by religious dogma and by sexual repression and misogyny.

The republican wing of the independence movement came to power in 1932 as the Fiánna Fail party under Eamon de Valera. They began the experiment of attempting to build an independent Irish economy, but did not challenge the property relations that protected British capital and were unable to achieve the primitive accumulation of capital necessary for an independent economy.

The country remained in poverty. The migrant boats remained full. The Church had an iron grip. However the generally democratic element of the aspiration for independence produced a loyalty to the state and gave it a long term stability.

The Whitaker report of 1958 essentially saw the abandonment of the nationalist economic project. Influx of transnational capital saw a boom in the early 60s followed by stagnation and decay in the 70s and 89s.

Access to the European market and European bank loans alongside a later influx of US capital led to the “Celtic Tiger” boom and then to the credit crunch and national bankruptcy. Ireland today remains deeply indebted and operates as a tax haven. Wealth has accumulated in the hands of a comprador

capitalist class, as in the past public services are outsourced, leading to the intervention of vulture funds in the Irish housing market and an overwhelming housing crisis. Heath remains a source of conflict, with plans to hand the national maternity hospital to a private company based on the church.

The trajectory of the two states was quite different. The sectarian Northern state, through special powers acts and an armed militia became an area of absolute repression. However it had seized a large tract of nationalist ground in order to give it the area to survive as an economic entity. The nationalist population growth rate was somewhat higher than the Protestant, so discrimination and repression had to be high enough to force a surplus of nationalists out of the state. The militarised state was able to easily suppress "*Operation Harvest*", an IRA border campaign in the 50s. The unionists were constantly worried about the Protestant working class breaking towards Labour, but that party was usually neutral on the national question or actively pro union and never presented a serious threat.

Yet the reactionary nature of the state impacted all workers. Protestant workers had higher employment rates and greater access to skilled jobs, but wage rates were at the very bottom of UK rates. Housing was abysmal and the unionists fought tooth and nail against health and social reforms from Britain.

The state was extremely fragile, with preservation of sectarian privileges ranking over other considerations. This led to a deformation of the economy, with the West of the province

deprived of higher education, government offices, and transport links.

When the traditional industries began to decline Stormont was given a subvention by Westminster to restructure the economy. The obvious steps were transport and infrastructure links to Derry and, more importantly, to Dublin. Instead a motorway was built to a new town, Craigavon. Even today it's hard to find this metropolis or document its role in economic development.

Many young unionists were frustrated by the closed society they lived in and called for modernisation, but the right wing had begun to mobilise through the Ulster Volunteer Force and through Paisleyism. A 1965 meeting between Unionist leader O'Neill and Taoiseach Sean Lemass led to a Paisleyite attack on the delegation and the gradual erosion of the O'Neill leadership.

The long period of the troubles were marked by British military repression and by a constant movement to the right by unionism alongside its fragmentation and decay, by the decay of the imperial market and the engineering and shipbuilding base on which the local economy rested. Ironically the IRA threat meant state investment in security and an unwillingness to dismantle the large public sector counteracted industrial decline to some extent.

The settlement eventually crafted by the British gave nationalists entry into the local administration but it retained partition and the sectarian base on which it rested. At one level

it continues to be unstable as the unionists continue to resist accommodation with nationalists and the administration frequently collapses. On the other hand the Good Friday Agreement was a stunning defeat for revolutionary nationalists and socialists. Opposition to imperialism has been replaced by belief in cultural reconciliation, in a progressive role for the British and US and in a culture of social partnership that espouses unity of capital and labour. There is a great deal of poverty and want, but expressing these fully may require a new generation and the decay of the currents leading Sinn Fein and the trade union bureaucracy.

Chapter nine

Partition stumbles

It is difficult to communicate how regressive the northern statelet was.

Internment without trial was a tool in the arsenal of the state, as was assassination. It was impossible to tell where the state left off and the Protestant militia began. Inquests could be banned and the Special Powers Act had a final clause allowing the minister of home affairs to declare illegal anything he had not thought to include in the act.

Assembly of more than three people could be declared illegal.

The period was summed up in the Irish News the nationalist paper, in an ironic headline. To paraphrase: *the midnight knock was heard in many areas, but luckily nothing worse than internment was contemplated* (there were mass arrests but no-one assassinated).

But repression was not enough. The large Catholic minority could not be allowed to increase and that meant ferocious job discrimination and a steady flow of nationalist workers to the migrant boats.

Unionist premier Basil Brooke;

'had not a Roman Catholic about his place'... 'He would appeal therefore, wherever possible, to employ good protestant lads and lassies.'

State repression and denial of jobs was linked to voter suppression in council elections and consequent denial of council housing, as this was tied to the vote.

It is important to have a detailed picture of the sectarian state. The Catholic Church, once it had secured control of Catholic education, were satisfied and the Catholic middle class were offered some deference and class privilege while excluded from any extensive political power.

Within the unionist community there was a great deal of disdain for the working class and a savage repression. A

Lundy or rotten Prod was considered a greater danger than the nationalists and the Orange Order and the twelfth of July demonstrations were used to ensure that everyone in the unionist communities publicly expressed their loyalty to the state. Papers released later show a great deal of worry about the local Labour movement, but in the event a ritual accusation of disloyalty was enough to send the labourites into panic, partly explained by the impunity of violent loyalist gangs.

In the early 60s the old industrial base was beginning to decay and there was a discussion of modernisation. This began within unionism. Many found the old order stultifying, there was a brain drain from the universities and some understanding that the system would have to be modified.

It would have been possible to extend infrastructure towards Derry in the West or build a motorway to Dublin in the South and the fact that unionism was unable to take these rational steps was a clear sign of stasis and decay. Economic modernisation was seen as an existential threat to unionism and instead a motorway was built towards the imaginary city of Craigavon. Talks attempting to expand trade with Dublin and dialogue with the most reactionary elements of Catholicism in the North as a gesture of reconciliation led to violent Paisleyite demonstrations and a revolt against even the mildest of changes.

An alliance of trade unionists, nationalists and moderate unionists, supported by a left section in the British Labour party, pressed for reform - for British rights in a British state. The civil rights movement met with the same response as the Dublin talks had; denial linked to loyalist and state violence. In 1966, when the reform movement was still being born, the Ulster Volunteer Force killed a Protestant pensioner and two Catholic civilians. In 1969 they carried out a false flag operation by bombing the Silent Valley reservoir, meant to convince unionists that the new Civil Rights Movement was an IRA front.

Attempts to use paramilitary and state violence failed. The uprising was simply too big. Eventually the British state stepped in with military force through Operation Banner, designed to offer specific changes and holding out the prospect of a place for nationalists within the political system, but with the overall goal of "*aiding the civil power*" and ensuring that the partitioned state survived.

What is not fully understood is that that military intervention led to the defeat of the Civil Rights Movement. Torture, internment, assassination, collusion with loyalism and massacre, reinforced by the division between revolution and reform within the CRM, led to the reformist wing withdrawing. Rather than leading to a lull, the violence intensified as revolutionary nationalists retained mass support and led a mass campaign and military action to force the expulsion of the British.

It is still denied that that struggle in its turn was defeated - in fact defeated so comprehensively that the former poachers of the IRA leadership became gamekeepers in the new partition.

Over decades the mass character of the Republican movement declined and their military capacity was eroded.

The end phase of that struggle was the hunger strikes of the 1980s. The IRA abandoned the failed military strategy and took over a spontaneous movement supporting the prisoners. The movement expanded to build a mass anti-imperialist current across Ireland with a large international movement in solidarity, but was not sufficient to defeat the British and it was not until long after the deaths of the prisoners that it became clear that the republican leadership had simultaneously been running a diplomatic track through the Catholic church and the Dublin government that led out their road to surrender.

The key to that defeat was focused in the Southern state. The struggle in the North posed a problem for the Irish state. The ideological link between the ruling class and the workers was nationalism. In theory everyone stood behind the aspiration for a United Ireland. In practice the Dublin government collaborated with the British, ignored British crimes and atrocities in its own jurisdiction and unleashed state terror against republicans.

The hunger strikes by republican prisoners led to an electoral intervention by their supporters in the 26 county state. Nine hunger strikers were nominated for the Dáil. They attracted significant support and two were elected.

Irish capitalism was determined that the national question be buried for good and The New Ireland Forum of 1983/84 led the groundwork for a settlement designed to renounce the claim for Irish unity and advance a powersharing administration in the North. This in turn led to new talks with Britain summed up by the Downing Street declaration. The republicans were given an opportunity to support the new initiative or face much greater pressure from both governments.

When they climbed aboard, the fight against partition for their generation was over. A new partition, shaped by Britain and not substantially different from proposals offering the Catholic middle class political representation in a northern administration that were advanced at the start of the civil rights period, was installed.

Chapter ten

A new Partition

At the height of the 1968 revolt in Ireland a major theoretical dispute arose between the "*new left*" Peoples Democracy organisation, of which I was a member, and the Communist Party.

Peoples Democracy argued the irreformability of the Northern state. It was not a state that was inhabited by sectarianism, but a state structured on sectarianism. Unionism, with the support of the British, had stepped back from a political programme

arguing that Ireland should remain attached to Britain. At the time of partition it endorsed a sectarian all class alliance based on Protestant privilege and that was the basis of the state.

In response to the civil rights movement the British could, and did, institute many reforms. However an overall reform that negated sectarianism would prove to be impossible. If brought forward, it would inevitably mean the dissolution of the state.

This theory drew an angry response from the Communist Party and their supporters, who in many ways provided the political foundations for the moderate civil rights leadership. The CP applied a Stalinist "*Stages theory*". The immediate aim would be a democratic Northern Ireland, with equal rights. When this was stable we could advance arguments for a United Ireland. In a stable United Ireland we could eventually put forward the case for a socialist society.

With the British repression of the Civil Rights movement at Bloody Sunday the reformists left the field, leaving a substantial and militant mass movement to be led by a revolutionary nationalist current, for a United Ireland but agnostic on the programme for workers (Labour must wait) and led by a culture imbued with militarism.

The eventual defeat of the Provisionals represented an opportunity for Irish capitalism. The Southern state had a more generally popular support base than their northern

counterparts. Despite the counterrevolution, the end of the British occupation was a cornerstone of society and a step towards democracy. This did not overcome an inherent instability. The government operated a state of emergency for much of modern Irish history and special judicial measures remain in place today, but some stability rested with the populist myth of a nation united in the struggle for Irish unity, reinforced by a regular deployment of the Green card of nationalist rhetoric and fulsome expression of that goal by Irish capitalists.

The hunger strikes had convinced Dublin that this card was too dangerous and must be expunged from Irish politics. Through the Catholic church they had won a commitment from the republican leaders to join the negotiations as a component of the constitutional nationalist team. A key element of the proposals was the elimination of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution asserting Irish sovereignty. In return Dublin was granted a Secretariat in Belfast, but this was purely advisory and the overall agreement was an amendment of the government of Ireland Act that asserted British sovereignty. The claim of national unity was replaced by all sorts of North South, East West, Irish British councils, most of which have fallen into disuse. The overall theme was of a shared island and respect for unionist culture. In reality the new proposals were a graveyard for the democratic aspirations of the Irish people.

Dublin's proposals were amplified by the US. US imperialism had adopted a policy of resolving outstanding national

struggles through a peace process mechanism and an ideology of conflict resolution. That process had failed in Palestine and they were keen to rehabilitate it. In addition the right wing of Irish America had embraced the new compliant IRA and the full force of US power was applied to force agreement.

The collapse of revolutionary nationalism was complete. The leadership waged a campaign of disinformation and intimidation against internal critics. Cyril Ramaphosa of the African National Congress, now president of South Africa and defender of the Marikana massacre which saw the killing of 34 miners by the South African Police, toured Ireland to assure republicans that the ideology of conflict resolution would bring peace and justice.

The republicans recommended support for the Good Friday Agreement. A poll held in the North gave 71.1% voting in favour. A simultaneous referendum held in the Republic of Ireland produced an even larger majority (94.4%) in favour.

This result led to different processes on each side of the border. In the South we saw a triumph of revisionism. Pro-British elements were able to let their hair down, especially following a royal visit. The new ideology of cultural division, conflict resolution and an acceptance of the progressive role of British, European and US imperialism led to accelerated rewriting of history and suggestions on the right that Dublin rejoin the commonwealth. Attempts to commemorate the Black and Tan forces who led the reign of terror during the

War of Independence led to popular revolt but generally ideas of the North as a fourth nation have gained currency. There is however sharp division between young and old, the middle and working classes and between East and West coasts on acceptance of a future as a shared island with permanent partition.

The Downing Street declaration and the Good Friday Agreement had seen the British step forward with their own reform. Ulster must say yes to something. The absolute veto would be overruled and they must accept the inclusion of the nationalist minority in government.

The project of nationalist inclusion had been an early reform suggested by the British and a power sharing parliament in the North and a Council of Ireland had in fact been implemented through the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973. However that agreement had at its foundation an assumption of unionist acceptance and when, after a few months, the unionists organised a mass lockout (the so-called Ulster Workers Council strike), the British immediately capitulated and wound up the Sunningdale structures.

The major difference this time was that the British had new experiences of the level of support in Dublin and their willingness to resolve the issue on British terms. As one British minister grimly remarked; "*this time the unionists must say yes to something*" (a reference to an earlier "Ulster says No" campaign led by Paisley).

The circle of irreformability was to be squared by allocating the major share of patronage to the Unionist majority. The major contradiction was that the Unionists wanted to continue with absolute control of the state apparatus. The British, having pressed them once, were willing to indulge further demands and these cumulatively began to erode the settlement. Success in shifting the goalposts meant that the DUP moved steadily to the right and with each cycle an even more bigoted and reactionary clique took power. The programme of unionism was, and to a large extent still is, the suppression of nationalism. A figure of over 94% voting for the GFA in the South basically wiped out any opposition. When we examine the 71% vote in the North and take into account that the nationalist vote was likely over 90%, the unionist yes vote was quite slim. Immense pressure had to be applied to David Trimble to force acceptance and Tony Blair issued a letter of confidence to unionists in advance of the vote, assuring them that their position was secure. Even then the unionist right in the Democratic Unionist Party were able to unseat Trimble and demand a major shift in the settlement (The St Andrew's Agreement) before they would sit with Sinn Fein.

The outcome was that the state became even more structurally sectarian. The routine fact of apartheid in housing is never mentioned, nor is the loyalist intimidation, supported by state impunity, that maintains it. The administration collapsed frequently and each time major concessions to unionism were needed to restore order. The price of these concessions had to be paid by nationalists and this has led to a growing apathy

towards the new institutions and a corruption and decay of the Sinn Fein organization.

However, growing sectarianism does not mean collapse. The partition settlement of the 1920s lasted 70 years before facing a serious challenge and there are many class interests in support of the current setup. The most visible one is the self satisfaction of the Catholic middle class. Their substantial demand in the civil rights period was for a share of political power and patronage and that they have achieved. Job and business opportunities have expanded and the middle class benefited from a flood of patronage. A new grantocracy has formed in unionist and nationalist communities in receipt of government subvention.

The impact of Brexit and DUP bigotry and incompetence have launched a new crisis and unionism has celebrated its centenary in chaos, with both major parties seeking a new leadership. There is a great deal more de facto unionist acceptance of the situation than is supposed. In Stormont they cannot afford to be seen working with Sinn Fein and for their part the Shinners have to appear slightly radical in some of their statements. At the council level there is a quiet and business-like sharing out of funds and moves to exclude the smaller parties from decision making, alongside economic policy which sees public resources transferred to private hands. Sections of both northern and southern nationalism, including the government parties, have made it clear that a majority vote for Irish unity in the North would be far from sufficient and would be an oppression of unionist culture. Sinn

Fein echo the need to reach out to unionist culture but reassure their supporters with happy clappy stories of a border poll, organized willingly by the British government, that will see a sweeping majority for unity and immediate agreement to a United Ireland.

Internally Sinn Fein argues for electoral victory in both states. They are in government under British dispensation in the North, with the largest share of the vote as opposed to a divided unionism. They now have the largest vote share in polls for the Dáil. The theory is that this multiple majority will force a British withdrawal. It's not clear why the 1918 all-Ireland majority was not sufficient at the time. Of more importance however are the concessions that Sinn Fein have made today to smooth their road to power. In the North this involved unconditional support for the police and judicial elements in the British zone. More recently the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis moved towards acceptance of the Special Criminal Court and emergency laws, rules that underline the limited nature of the 26 county democracy. In the background the party has close links to both local and international capital. It's no accident that the passive aspiration for a United Ireland has replaced the active struggle for an Irish democracy.

That's probably the main point. Identity has replaced democratic rights, self determination and opposition to imperialism as the narrative through which Irish politics is defined. The language of the peace process justifies sectarianism today, can be used to block unification and could

even provide a fake unity (a shared Island) with a continued veto by a unionist enclave supported by the British.

The fundamental issue is British interest. The GFA defines the issue of partition as based on unionist culture, but it is the material support from Britain that maintains the separate state. Again the narrative assumes a benign role for Britain, but there is no evidence to support that. The British fought a 30 year dirty war, engaged in mass repression and poured in hundreds of millions of pounds each year to keep a foothold in Ireland. When it came time to frame the peace it was in the context of the Government of Ireland Act, with the retention of partition and sectarian division. In the period since the content of the Good Friday Agreement has been constantly redefined in the interests of Britain and the Unionists. Brexit has seen a reckless playing of the Orange card, alliances with paramilitaries and open threats of violence.

The British reform of partition has failed in terms of democratic rights and succeeded in terms of embedding reaction and support for partition across the island. It has not succeeded in stabilising unionism, the base of its occupation. In addition the shift to the right in Britain itself and the Brexit campaign has led to instability and decline in the UK and weakened its structures.

However even the most decayed structures will not fall without a push. One local professor of Peace Studies explained brightly that the central secret of conflict resolution

is to include everyone. The British government and local administration sat up a network of grants, payments, and community organisations that included many of the nonelected elements of civic society. Former paramilitaries fill community organisations and NGOs and vie for peace grants. The trade union leaderships so fervently support the political settlement that they agreed to accept austerity proposals and there have been no significant union protests for almost a decade.

The violence and sectarianism of the partition of the 1920s, turned out not to be a solution but it buried the Irish question for 70 years. The current settlement has held for 3 decades but has managed only fleeting moments of stability.

The motor forces of the impasse in Irish politics are apathy and disillusionment, aided by the retreat of traditional workers organisations in many areas of the globe. Breaking this mould involves presenting a new political alternative, a revolutionary break from today's more or less universal corruption in favour of renewed calls for a workers republic.