

IRELAND – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Introduction

It is commonplace to read news reports of killings on the streets of Ulster. The media present the bombs and the barricades, the internment camps and the rubber bullets as unfortunate hiccups which can be overcome by sensible politicians applying their thoughtful solutions. But there can be no solution to 'The Irish Problem' as long as it is regarded as such. There is nothing particularly Irish about it. The poverty which forms the material basis of discrimination and fratricidal strife is inevitable in the framework of the present social system - capitalism. Under capitalism, production takes place not with a view to satisfying the needs of wage and salary earners - the working class - but to serve the profit requirements of a minority class who own and control the means by which wealth is produced. It is the problems arising from this situation which face workers in Ireland today just as they face workers throughout the world.

But while the basic problems are the same throughout the world (even in the so-called 'communist' countries where capitalism functions through the medium of the State), the contradictions of the system manifest themselves differently and in varying degrees of viciousness according to historical, political and economic conditions obtaining in different areas.

It is to capitalism then, as it developed in the historical circumstances peculiar to Ireland, that we must look for an explanation of the problems of today.

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1 The origins of sectarianism

THE ULSTER PLANTATION

The Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century resulted in the native Gaels, who were Catholics, being dispossessed of their lands by the incoming planters who were largely, but not exclusively, Protestant. The Plantation itself was undertaken by the English government as part of its defensive strategy and to advance its political and economic aims in Ireland. Both planter and native were undistinguished pawns in the scheme.

The conflict of interest between the planters and those they dispossessed would have occurred even if both parties had belonged to the same religious faith. But the fact that the opposing sides in what was essentially an economic conflict differed also in religious beliefs inevitably became identified with the ensuing struggle. Catholic and Protestant became labels associated with victories in battle, killings and persecutions: labels that buried the profane self-interest of the contending parties in a struggle over land under the emotion and fanaticism that religious superstition can imbue in its adherents.

The politics of religion had been introduced; the circumstances that had produced it would also bring about conditions that would ensure its permanence as a useful instrument in the hands of the landlords and, later, the capitalist class. Down the centuries it would protect the exploiters, Catholic and Protestant, from the dangers of unity among those, Catholic and Protestant, whom they would exploit.

Following the Plantation, the anger of the dispossessed natives festered on ignominy and privation and they rose up in a vain attempt to drive out the planters. Given the anger and frustration of the natives and the fear and insecurity of those who had dispossessed them, together with the nature of the disorganised violence, the short conflict and the reaction it provoked were marked by atrocities that became even grimmer in the telling. Again the struggle was about land; but the contending parties were Protestants and Catholics. It was this fact that would be woven into the folk memory of death and atrocity and feed the legend that would help to shape the future history of Ireland.

THE CROMWELIAN SETTLEMENT

Outside Ulster, the miseries of the great mass of the Irish people continued throughout the seventeenth century.

The Civil War in England between the emerging capitalist class and the landed aristocracy overspilled into Ireland. In 1649 the victorious Cromwell arrived to deal with the last bastion of royalist support and 'settle the Irish problem' in an orgy of bloodletting, transportation into slavery and forced eviction of the Catholic landowners of the east and south to the barren west of the country.

It is arguable that the Cromwellian settlement was harsher in the rest of Ireland than the Plantation was in Ulster. Certainly it was attended by more bloodshed. Unlike the Ulster Plantation, however, where the new landowners brought in thousands of their own tenants, the Cromwellian Settlement parcelled out the land to absentee English landlords. As for the Cromwellian soldiery who were granted land, they were too thin

on the ground not to require the cooperation and labour of the natives – thus thwarting the Cromwellian aspiration to drive the Irish 'to hell or Connaught'.

Nevertheless, the Cromwellian settlement did establish the basis of the social system that was to last into the late nineteenth century. Most of the land was to become the private property of English landlords - who were Protestants. Largely absent and uncaring, they exploited their new found property through the medium of middle men – sometimes Irish and Catholic -who, in turn, let the land in small parcels to the natives under conditions that guaranteed their absolute poverty and allowed them no security of tenure or other interest in the property they worked. They were tenants-at-will who contributed their labour to the working of their masters' lands. If they were unable to pay the arbitrarily fixed rents the middle men determined, they were evicted.

CATHOLIC VERSUS CATHOLIC

When King James II, a convert to Catholicism, fled to Ireland after the English parliament had replaced him in 1688 with William Prince of Orange for trying to usurp its authority, he sought the assistance of King Louis XIV of France. But Louis had earlier marched on Rome and humiliated Pope Innocent XI. The Pope had then, with William of Orange and other European monarchs entered into the Treaty of Augsburg to defeat Louis.

When James arrived in Ireland, the Catholic ex-landowners there, notwithstanding his association with Louis *the arch enemy of the Pope*, allied themselves to James in the hope that, by helping him to victory over the English parliament's newly appointed King William, he would restore their lands and privileges.

Again Ireland became the cockpit of a struggle for power between contending forces in England. The struggle between James's forces and those of King 'Billy', though it was not a military clash between opposing religious forces, found identity in the opposing religious beliefs of James and William. Despite the fact that history attests to what Catholics and Protestants would traditionally regard as the utter 'moral' depravity of both men, the legend makers - the fakirs who use history, suitably distorted, to ensure the continuing confusion of the subject class - would fabricate slogans of bigotry from the sordid bloodletting of King Billy and his worthless father-in-law, King James.

Catholic James was the trusted ally of Louis, the Pope's bitterest enemy; the army of King William which defeated James at the battle of the Boyne was equipped by the participants in the Treaty of Augsburg, *including the Pope* - who celebrated King Billy's victory over James with the singing of a Te Deum. James, for reasons of self-interest, enshrined the religious liberty of Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters in the Treaty of Limerick.

At the same time King Billy established the Episcopalian Church, proscribing both Catholicism and Presbyterianism. Yet, ironically, he is the political patron saint of thousands of Presbyterian Orangemen who annually revere him as their deliverer from Popery. The 'civil and religious liberty' that William is alleged to have won meant discrimination against Presbyterians as well as against Catholics and, by 1691, had forced a quarter of a million Presbyterians to seek refuge in America where they were to play a distinctive part in overthrowing English colonialism.

It would be difficult to find a more blatant example of a subject people being manipulated by leaders and their lying propaganda. At the time it led to the poor butchering the poor in the interests of their masters. Today the fictions of 1690 still move thousands of working class Protestants, whose political knowledge has been deliberately fashioned into the slogan 'To hell with the Pope', into the belief that their poverty, their slums, their mean living on low wages or miserable dole is somehow threatened by their working class brethren who are Catholics -equally miserable, equally deceived.

2. The roots of nationalism

ULSTER CUSTOM

The Protestant planters of Ulster did not accept the miserable conditions of life endured by the native peasantry in the rest of the country. They were not a defeated people; they had not come to Ireland to endure conditions worse than they had left behind in their homeland. Many of them had skills like spinning and weaving and a reasonable standard of literacy; and, generally, they represented a more determined and articulate opposition to the pressures of their Protestant landlords than did the demoralised Irish. They demanded leases for their farms at fixed rents and the right to sell such leases and so profit from the improvements they had made to their lands and homesteads.

Apart from their skill and determination in pressing their demands, the planters had at their disposal a weapon that the natives did not possess: the government's Plantation strategy was dependent on the planters remaining in Ireland. Their masters had to concede their demands and, while these concessions did not receive the force of legislative enactment, they did, under what became known as Ulster Custom, effectively give the Ulster planters security of tenure at fixed rents and the right to convey their leaseholds.

Under the relative protection of Ulster Custom the settlers were enabled to develop their lands and homesteads and increase their productivity without the fear that any improvement in their fortunes would be appropriated by rack-renting landlords and their agents. It was not all sweetness and light of course: the landlords tried, often successfully, to circumvent the Custom and did not disdain to use the threat and actuality of the land-hungry Catholics against their tenants and co-religionists.

Nevertheless, as they developed their lands the settlers were able to accumulate a surplus of money beyond their basic needs. This surplus gave them purchasing power and, thus, created a primary requirement for the establishment of local capitalism, a market.

So, despite earlier attempts to establish manufacture in the south of the country - attempts which failed largely because of the absence of a locally based market - capitalism first gained a firm root in Ulster and was well established there before the rest of the country emerged from the slough of feudalism.

THE PROTESTANT INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

As capitalism developed in Ulster, so did English resistance to the competition it offered. The English capitalist class might share the exploitative and religious aspirations of the emerging Ulster capitalist class, but they saw nothing wrong in

using their political influence to inhibit the commercial activities of their brethren in Ulster. The response among a significant section of the latter was the demand for Irish independence from England - thus setting the path that, for the same reason, would be followed a hundred years later by the emerging 'Catholic' capitalist class of the South. Then, as now, patriotism and loyalty were adjustable to the demands of good business.

The movement for Irish independence among the Protestant capitalists was by no means a united one. Though it was generated by the embargoes and restraints imposed by the London parliament on Irish trade and commerce, two distinct strands of separatist thinking emerged. On the one hand, the Protestant landlords and a section of the capitalist class were concerned that an English government that invoked economic sanctions against them could not be trusted to preserve the Protestant Ascendancy - the constitutional basis of Protestant political and economic power in Ireland. This element saw in independence not only the ending of trade restraints but also the guarantee of their political power to maintain the Ascendancy. On the other hand, a sizeable proportion of northern Presbyterians - themselves often the victims of English rule - were inspired by the French Revolution to opt for an Irish Republic which would unite Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. It would sweep away English rule and the Protestant Ascendancy and create in Ireland the conditions for the development of a modern capitalist state.

Under the guiding influence of Wolfe Tone, a Dublin lawyer of Protestant parentage, a society called the **United Irishmen** was established in Belfast in 1791 and soon spread throughout the country. The claim of the new movement was to unite all classes and creeds under a common banner, in a constitutional struggle for an Irish Republic.

The government permeated the new movement with spies and informers forcing it to become a secret oathbound society which, in 1794, launched an abortive rebellion. In the north, most of those who took up arms to fight for it were Protestants. Ironically, it was a largely Catholic government force, the Monaghan Militia, which played a major role in suppressing the northern insurgents with great violence - during and after the short conflict. In the south-east of the country the dream of freedom was mainly the desire of the peasants to throw off the yoke of brutally oppressive landlords - who were mostly Protestants. The result was a vicious, seemingly sectarian, conflict fraught with murder and atrocity.

Within the context of its historical period, the United Irishmen, if the movement had succeeded, might well have removed the shadow of feudalism from Ireland and created conditions in which the working class could have developed its own political consciousness without the religious sectarianism that subsequently obstructed, and continues to obstruct, its class unity. Instead, the crushing of the rebellion, together with the naked sectarianism that had revealed itself in the south-east, sounded the death knell of Protestant Republicanism. With hope gone in failure and brutal reaction, the northern republicans receded into the mists of history while their reactionary co-religionists satiated their anger in a fearful retribution.

The phase of Irish Protestant nationalism passed, its ideology overtaken by the ending of the proscriptions on trade and commerce which had created its material base. Henceforth, as the nineteenth century brought the emerging Catholic capitalist class of the south to the realisation that its interests would be best served by Irish

independence, the northern economy was becoming increasingly integrated with, and dependent upon, a rapidly industrialising Britain.

CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

In 1801 the impotent Irish Parliament, a purely Protestant body, was dissolved by the British government and an **Act of Union** was imposed upon a people the majority of whom were hardly conscious of any fundamental constitutional change.

On the lean back of the peasantry outside Ulster rested the whole weight of absolute exploitation. The Penal Laws inhibited Catholic religious practice and were made much of by the Catholic Church; but they were a mere irritant to the peasantry. The denial of their bodily needs was far better policed and enforced than the denial of their 'spiritual' welfare. It was on the aspiring Catholic capitalist class that the Penal Laws imposed real restrictions, for they prohibited its access to the more important offices of state and administration, along with its entry into parliament and advancement within the judiciary, and imposed limitations on its accumulation of wealth. And this is why the Penal Laws became a burning issue in the Ireland of the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Led by Daniel O'Connell, himself a landlord and vehement opponent of the incipient Irish Trade Union movement, and abetted by a Catholic hierarchy traditionally subservient to the 'divine rights of property', the movement for Catholic Emancipation organised the peasantry on a massive scale. What really beggared the peasantry - the vicious system of land ownership - did not become an issue at all.

So it was that the passing of the **Catholic Emancipation Act** of 1823 opened the door to greater wealth and privilege for the Catholic capitalist class but left intact the legal structures from which flowed the miseries of the Catholic peasantry.

THE CATHOLIC INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Following the granting of Catholic Emancipation, O'Connell turned to the question of repealing the Act of Union. His weapon was, as it had been in the emancipation struggle, the mass rally. Huge gatherings demonstrated the anger of the participants and carried the threat of disorder if their demands were not speedily met. Now, as before, the Catholic clergy were a ubiquitous presence. But, whereas in the days of the struggle for Catholic rights liberal Protestants had been sympathetic and could understand the Church's interest, now the fundamental constitutional change being demanded could put the Protestants in the hands of a government which, given the overwhelming Catholic majority in the country, could only be Catholic.

The scenario was one that played into the hands of those Protestant capitalists whose economic interests were being increasingly best served by the continuance of the Union. They had little difficulty in convincing the Protestant workers and farmers of the north that the demand for Irish self-government was a Popish plot. The Repeal movement suffered a massive defeat when the government called O'Connell's bluff and banned a planned monster rally at Clontarf in 1843. O'Connell pleaded his aversion to bloodshed and called off the rally.

By 1845 the country was in the throes of the Great Hunger which was to last for some three years and reduce the population by almost thirty per cent. One and a half million people died in the famine and a further million took the 'coffin ships' to America and Britain. The famine was caused by the potato blight, but the one

and a half million deaths were purely and simply the sacrifice of the Irish poor on the altar of capitalist Free Trade. Even as the wretched poor died of starvation by the roadsides, beef and cereals sufficient to feed twice the number of people in Ireland were being exported abroad for sale and profit.

Just as the Repeal movement and its association with the Catholic Church provided an impetus for those who later organised the northern Protestants against Irish home rule, so did the Great Famine create in Ireland and America a new dynamic for Irish independence and one that would be fully exploited by the Catholic capitalist class when independence became a necessary ingredient in its further economic development.

TENANT RIGHT AND FENIANISM

The progress of the nineteenth century saw first the Tenant Right League and then the birth of Fenianism.

The **Tenant Right League** came into being in the late 1840s with the aim of organising the peasantry and creating a cohesive opposition to landlordism in place of the disorganised violence that had become an almost permanent feature of Irish life. The League got little sympathy from the Irish Catholic hierarchy but it did attract considerable support from the Protestant tenant farmers whose protection from the rack-renting activities of their Protestant landlords had been steadily decreasing despite the Ulster Custom. Its moving spirit was Gavin Duffy, a leader of the short-lived **Young Ireland** movement which had unsuccessfully tried to organise a rebellion in 1848. For a time the League became sufficiently powerful to worry the government and the landed interest, particularly so because of its partial success in uniting Protestant and Catholic small farmers and peasants in pursuit of a common aim. But that unity was destroyed, and with it the power and influence of the League, when some of the leaders became prominent in a Catholic Defence Association (established to oppose the English Whigs' *Ecclesiastical Titles Act*, 1851, which made it illegal for members of the Catholic clergy to take up the bishoprics of new sees then being created by the Pope).

As the League died, the Fenians emerged. The Fenians, or **Irish Republican Brotherhood**, were dedicated, in the tradition of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen, to establishing an Irish Republic by force of arms. Their leader, James Stephens, was a member of the International Workingmen's Association and the movement was approved of by both Marx and the International. (Such support was, of course, consistent with the view held by Marx that Irish independence was a necessary precursor of working-class revolution in England. It must be said that Marx was incorrect in this political conclusion -arrived at a time when, unlike now, the economic conditions for the establishment of Socialism as defined by Marx did not obtain. Regrettably there are those in Ireland and elsewhere today who would call themselves socialists and communists and yet are fond of quoting the view expressed by Marx in 1869 in support of Irish nationalism. But, like all other forms of nationalism, this is wholly incompatible with the aim of worldwide Socialism as expressed by Marx.)

The relatively sophisticated ideas of the Fenians, imported largely from America and coloured by the political and economic philosophy of Louis Blanc, had little appeal to the Irish peasantry at large. Denounced in the most vicious terms by the Catholic Church, and defeated in a number of overly ambitious military adventures, the

movement - with many of its leaders in jailor on the run - lapsed into the twilight of Irish political mythology. It was to surface again in 1916 as co-agent of the **Easter Rising**.

In its failure, it left the word 'Fenian' as a term of abuse to be used until now by Ulster Protestants against Catholics. The fact that the Catholic Church had even less love for the Fenians than the Fenians had for the Catholic Church is largely unknown among Ulster Protestants and Irish Catholics.

THE LAND WAR

The first salvo of the Land War, as the agrarian-based struggle of the last quarter of the nineteenth century became known, occurred in 1879 when a mass meeting was summoned by a Home Rule member of parliament to oppose the threatened eviction of tenants in County Mayo by a local priest who was also a landlord. The protest was in keeping with the mood of the peasantry; it resulted in some 7,000 people coming together to demonstrate their opposition to the effects of landlordism. It was a signal, too, for Michael Davitt, an ex-Fenian who had earlier returned from imprisonment in England, to join with others in organising the peasants in the **Land League**.

Davitt had been trying to get the Irish Home Rule Party, now a power in British politics with 59 seats won in the elections of 1874, to make the land question a major issue of policy; but the Home Rule Party was not opposed to the system of landlordism in Ireland. With the death of its leader, Isaac Butt, however, Charles Stewart Parnell became leader of the party. Although a landlord himself and a magistrate, Parnell was a sufficiently shrewd and ambitious politician to realise that refusal to support the peasantry would be political suicide. After some initial hesitation he gave his considerable support to the cause of the Land League.

He supported an arrangement for 'fair rents' and the taking into account of the fluctuating fortunes of tenants in the paying of arrears, but, inevitably, he was also led by events to support resistance to eviction. He and his party had an uneasy relationship, however, with the leadership of the Land League who had quickly moved from the aim of 'fair rents' and security of tenure to a fundamental opposition to the basic structure of land ownership.

The Land League developed a strategy of ostracism against landlords and their agents who attempted to evict tenants. The first use of the weapon, in September 1880, against a landlord's agent called Captain Charles Boycott gave a synonym for ostracism to the English language. Boycott had sent his bailiff with a police guard to evict some of his master's tenants at Lough Mask in County Mayo. The tenants drove off the eviction party and, two days later, Boycott's labourers and servants walked off his estate and the local tradespeople refused to provide supplies or serve Boycott in any way. Some time later, almost a thousand troops escorted into the area a group of Orangemen from the north who had volunteered to save Boycott's crops. No one opposed them; they were shunned by the local populace and after doing the work they had come to do they returned unmolested. The peasants had found a formidable weapon and one which, in general use, the government could not oppose. The 'boycott' was successful and the man whose infamy was thus immortalised left Ireland.

The tenants achieved a remarkable solidarity in physically opposing evictions and ensuring that no one of them gained from the eviction of another. But agrarian

violence increased and the country seemed on the verge of open revolt. One incident in Tipperary resulted in thirty tenants being shot by the police. Death and violence became a common occurrence in the south and west of the country.

The government passed a series of Coercion Acts to suppress the Land League and the leaders of the movement were arrested and imprisoned. But the government was forced to move on the land question and, in August 1881, Gladstone's Bill to introduce the Three F's - *fixity of tenure, fair rents and freedom of sale* - became law. The new Act was too full of loopholes and legal complexities to afford the peasantry the protection they needed, but it did provide considerable amelioration of their condition, and their unity and solidarity blunted the edge of landlord reaction. It was the beginning of a settlement of the age-old land question which had formed the basis of conflict in Ireland.

Subsequently the government introduced a series of **Land Purchase Acts** between 1885 and 1903 which made available public loans for the peasantry to buyout their holdings. Repayment, with interest, was to be made by fixed annuities. The worthless landowning class, financially emasculated by their traditional thriftless extravagance and the more recent resistance of their tenants, offered a token opposition but were, in most cases, glad to salvage a final settlement from their ill-gotten plunder.

With the land question largely settled, Ireland entered fully into the new age of modern capitalism. But the ghost of the land question hung grimly over its future. The north-east of the country, with its Protestant capitalist class, was already a centre of highly industrialised capitalist enterprise; the south, with its nascent Catholic capitalist class, was still in the birth pangs of industrial development. It was the land question, more than any other single issue, that had given rise to this *uneven development* of capitalism in Ireland; and it was out of the land question that the religious fictions and bigotries had come.

By the time the southern capitalists found the strength and influence of political assertiveness, the friction between the Ulster capitalist class and its English counterpart had largely passed. Ulster was virtually integrated into the British economy, dependent on its economic link with Britain for much of its raw materials and its market - not only on the British mainland but, under the system of Imperial Preference, throughout the colonies. There was no talk now of independence: Ulster was soundly British! This was the patriotism of the northern capitalists; and their pensioned political hacks would rummage the cesspits of religious bigotry and hatred to ensure that the working class got the message.

3. Partition and the consequences

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the southern capitalists and the Irish Nationalist Party were becoming increasingly voluble about 'English and other foreign capitalists squeezing out the home manufacturer and producer' - an emotive distinction between the 'foreign' and home-based exploiters, despite the fact that the latter, due to their fledgling status, were, if anything, even more rapacious than the former.

In 1905, **Sinn Fein** was established by Arthur Griffith (who rarely concealed his contempt for the working class and their organisations) and other representatives of native capitalism. Sinn Fein was a dynamic, burgeoning force that made no secret of the fact that it sought, if necessary by non-parliamentary means, the right to establish

an Irish parliament with legislative power to create such trade protection as was required by a struggling capitalist class, to develop its trade and industry.

The published policies of Sinn Fein and the speeches and writings of its leaders openly showed Sinn Fein's real area of concern. Of course there was all the usual patriotic rubbish about 'freedom' and the subsequent 1916 *Proclamation of the Irish Republic* claimed that the new Republic, for which working people were being asked to fight and die, would place the land and resources of Ireland in the hands of the Irish people. A year later Sinn Fein's policy statement made it clear that the 'Irish people' who would benefit from their ownership of Ireland would be the Irish capitalists. The rhetoric, the feigned concern for 'the people', the patriotism of the advocates of blood sacrifice was all good stuff for the ideological consumption of the workers, who would be called upon to make the sacrifices; but the political architects of the new Republic were planning for capitalism and, indeed, capitalism was the only master they could serve.

The result of independence for the south was that the small farmer and the wage worker, through high prices due to inefficient home production and tariffs on imported goods, subsidised the development of the native capitalists' fledgling enterprises; and a native government took legislative action to curb the response of organised labour.

No one making a dispassionate assessment of the situation that resulted in the establishment of two separate states in Ireland in 1922 can escape the conclusion that the primary cause of conflict was the imbalance of economic development between the north and south. The struggle was about the political needs of the capitalist class in Ireland, and that class, and its political representatives, were willing to sacrifice the lives of the working class, in the north and in the south, in defence of a system that offered the working class, as a whole, only the continuation of its poverty.

BRIDGE BUILDING

The Ulster Unionists - whose traditional contempt for the working class even Ian Paisley now plays for advantage in his power struggle with the Official Unionist Party - gathered an illegal army in 1912 called the **Ulster Volunteer Force**, played with treason and were willing to ride roughshod through their beloved 'law and order' in order to achieve their political ends. The southern nationalists also gathered an army, the **Irish Republican Army (IRA)**, and waged war in pursuit of their political ends. Neither side was concerned with social change; the flag-waving, the slogans, the killings were not even publicly related by the leaders of either faction to working-class conditions. What was at stake were the political interests of a divided capitalist class.

And as we have seen, history has provided the capitalist and their political representatives with the means of disguising from the working class the true nature of the conflict. The south was overwhelmingly Catholic, the north mainly Protestant. The northern politicians swept the gutters of history and recruited the holy men of the Church and the Orange Order to whip up a vicious reaction to the threat of Home Rule. Their southern counterparts used the same tactics to infuse a vicious anti-working-class patriotism. The legend makers and the liars were at work; money and effort were both available to imbue the working class with hatred, bigotry and patriotic rubbish and, sadly, the putrid concoction was to last until the present - to

inflict its miseries on a divided working class and, ironically, to disturb the sensitive political nostrils of the heirs of the class that introduced it on to the political scene.

By the 1960s, the factors which divided the capitalist class had changed. Capitalism in the south had developed to the point where trade protection was being counter-productive and the new economic strategy was concerned with attracting foreign investment. In the north, the traditional industries were in decline and the Unionist government too was fighting vigorously to attract foreign capital. A new economic pattern was appearing in both states, involving multinational firms which, as often as not, operated on both sides of the Border. There was a growing interchange of capital and personnel and both states stood on the threshold of the profitable commercial markets of the European Economic Community.

The old bigotries were no longer required; the capitalist priorities that had dictated their use had changed. There was to be a new era of 'bridge-building' and 'reconciliation'. Unfortunately, however, the poison had been injected deep into the veins of the working class, and its political toxicity had been boosted at every election and every economic crisis. The warnings, the fears, the naked hatred nurtured over decades by businessmen, politicians, churchmen and even judges, could not be so easily wafted away. In the north, the Unionist Prime Minister tried to accommodate the new mood of capitalism with a tentative policy of political reform and reconciliation. But the echo of yesterday's hate chants still rung in the ears of the mass of his followers; nothing had happened in the avenues of slumdom to assuage the hatred and bigotry that had been deliberately infused into the mass of the working class. Nor was there a shortage of aspiring politicians willing to capitalise on the new situation and snap up the mantle of bitterness being hesitantly abandoned by the Government party. Ian Paisley, a hot-gospeller on the lunatic fringe of Protestant Unionism, emerged as the strong man and had little difficulty in building a substantial alternative Unionist party on the ignorance of the most oppressed section of Unionist supporters. Such was the measure of his success that the Official Unionists jettisoned their new 'liberalism' and returned into their earlier intransigence and bigotry.

4 Civil rights and political violence

Events had not stood still on the Nationalist/Catholic side. Before the advent of British 'Welfare' capitalism in 1945, a Catholic youth from the working class faced an even bleaker employment future than his or her Protestant opposite number. Politicians, businessmen, clergymen and members of the judiciary had been remarkably candid in indicating to the employers that they should not employ Catholics. The purpose of the ploy was twofold: it ensured that the higher birthrate among the Catholics would not ultimately affect Unionist electoral fortunes because doleless unemployment would force them to emigrate; and, equally important, it reinforced the absolute fiction that Unionism served the interests of working-class Protestants.

The post-war period of 'welfare' capitalism altered the balance to some extent. Family Allowances and welfare supplements offered Catholic teenagers an alternative to unemployment and emigration; they could remain at school and, perhaps, become better equipped for wage slavery. It may have been the more socially aware elements among the Catholics who took this course, but their numbers were significant enough to affect events in two respects.

The first of these was that, by the sixties, a peripheral change had taken place in the employment prospects of many Catholics. The traditional indigenous industries were in decline and the Unionist government's policy of attracting foreign investment was having some effect. The Unionists were anxious to direct the bulk of new industry into those areas that would reflect the traditional imbalance in employment between Catholics and Protestants; but, wherever they were, the new multinational undertakings were less likely to be concerned with a job applicant's religion than they were with his or her education, and there were now a significant number of Catholics able to compete in these areas. Enough were successful to heighten Protestant fears and bring a new degree of confidence and expectation to the Catholic community. This was, in turn, reflected in a partial breakdown of the traditional segregated housing pattern; there was considerable movement away from the old religious ghettos.

The second feature, which interacted with the first, was that the Catholics were becoming more politically articulate, less inclined to continue in the role of protesting martyrs withdrawn from the mainstreams of life in Unionist Ulster, and enmeshed in the futile dream of salvation in a United Ireland. Now they were showing a greater willingness to participate at all levels of society. But, if they were to participate, they would only do so on an equal basis with the Protestants.

For the Catholic capitalists, this equality was seen in terms of easier access to the richer pickings of the profit system; their vision was a more equitable sharing of the spoils, in profits, positions, power and privilege, with their Protestant class brethren. For working-class Catholics, 'equality' was necessarily limited to the vision of a council house or job - to equality with the Protestant poor in the struggle for a more tolerable existence at the low end of living.

CATHOLIC DISSENT

The growing demands for these different standards of 'equality' coalesced in the birth of the **Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association** which, in turn, gave a fillip to the new forces of Unionist extremism headed by Paisley. The Unionist government of Prime Minister O'Neill was caught in the middle; the government would not now in any way be undermining the priorities of capitalism by conceding the demands of the Civil Rights movement. The British Government, embarrassed abroad by the anachronistic survival of religious intolerance in the Ulster part of the United Kingdom, was applying some pressure for reform, and there was prosperity enough for the Protestant capitalists to allow their Catholic opposite numbers a more generous entry into the club. Bigotry and intolerance were no longer required, and if some peripheral swapping of its mean favours among the working class would placate the Civil Rights people, then the government was open to change. But they still had to consider the threatened loyalist backlash to such a course and, with Paisley yapping at their heels, the loss of their working-class power base.

The demands of the Civil Rights movement amounted to no more than an insistence that the miseries of capitalism - its inadequacies in housing, jobs and education - be distributed among the working class without regard to their religion - as if other factors bearing on selection and rejection for these things were not also discriminatory. They saw the problem in *religious* and not class terms; the enemy as *Unionism* and not *capitalism*. The Catholics were seen as 'second-class citizens' rather than as members of the working class. The argument was about who would get the crumbs from capitalism, because the people who made up the Civil Rights movement

had no conception of the system which produces profit - or the alternative to this system.

In fact, the reformist fervour of the Civil Rights movement was reactionary. Because of its inability to analyse the situation in class terms, it inevitably became more and more identified as the campaigning arm of Catholicism; it became the fuse in the bomb of Unionism and, when that bomb exploded, it was the working class, irrespective of religious association, who were its victims.

The leaders of the various shades of Unionism, the new leaders of Catholic nationalism, and the other offshoots of the Civil Rights days, often reaped reasonable rewards from the artificially created positions established by the British government to demonstrate its non-discriminatory intent. In the grass roots, the workers faced one another across the barricades; frustrated, cheated and confused, they became the pawns of paramilitarism, the candidates for the jails and the graveyards. The politicians, the churches' spokesmen, the business community, the entire host of those elements who had played midwife to violence would jostle one another in the queue to condemn 'mindless violence'; and heap scorn and condemnation on the sad, pathetic figures foolish enough to believe that the colour of the rag at the masthead had some bearing on their poverty.

IRELAND TODAY

Since the mid-sixties, the Irish border and the factors that gave rise to it have become largely irrelevant to the capitalist class of Ireland, north and south. They used it to promote their political interests by dividing the working class. But they now share a more or less united approach to their class problems. They pursue common ambitions in relation to questions like energy, tourism and political and economic co-operation. They deplore the current political violence, as it imposes strains on their revenue and inhibits the flow of investment from abroad. In the south, there is even a fevered attempt to rewrite history in a way that will distance the bloodshed of the Home Rule movement from that of the current violence.

The interests of the British ruling class have visibly shifted too. The Republic is now a safe haven for British capital - safely policed and nurtured by the Irish state; and the Republic is the third largest importer of British goods. On the strategic front, Ireland is covertly coming closer to NATO; and a satisfactory resolution of the Irish question would remove the last barrier to full and open membership of the Western Alliance. All in all, apart from the hiccup in relations at the time of the Falklands violence, Britain and the Republic are good capitalist neighbours, equally embarrassed by the ongoing violence in Northern Ireland which occasionally spills over into each other's territory and which, in a period of recession, bites deeply into taxation.

The politics of Unionism and Republicanism have become meaningless in terms of the interests of the now largely unified capitalist class; and, certainly, neither Unionism nor Republicanism - despite the latter's flirting with the vocabulary of Socialism - have anything to offer the working class. It is because Unionism, the Border and Ulster are no more than a source of irritation to capitalism - the issues involved having no logic in class terms - that more effective moves for a solution of the Northern Ireland problem have not emerged.

The violence and bitterness defeat solution because they are the weapons in a war over fictions; groundless, baseless lies, mythology and half-truths created to serve the

erstwhile divided interests of the ruling class. Now that ruling class, in its unity, despairs at the earlier success of its efforts in creating a violent politico-religious tribalism. Ireland since 1970 has reflected this despair. The British government's 'power sharing' experiment of 1974 failed; and the more recent attempts to create 'rolling devolution' by an elected Stormont Assembly will fail too.

THE CAUSE OF VIOLENCE

In the competitive jungle of capitalism, violence can, and often does, achieve political results. That is why nation states maintain armed forces and spend staggering amounts of wealth on providing them with the most devastating means of killing their fellow human beings. These armed forces exist to preserve the nation's interests and, frequently, that preservation requires armed action against other nations.

Class society was founded on violence; and the competition that capitalism generates creates the material conditions for permanent ongoing violence and conflict. The state of permanent war and preparation for war - and there is war going on somewhere in the world every day - as well as crime and racial and religious violence, arise from the fact that we live in a society with a built-in requirement for competition and conflict. 'Expand or bust!' may be more diplomatically expressed in the advice given to the young executive that a viable business cannot stand still; if it is to remain viable it must go forward. Expressed either way, it acknowledges the fact that capitalism, with its competition, its lust for markets and raw materials, and its imperative for political conditions that will facilitate its plunder of the working class, is a system which inevitably causes war.

It is the working class who are mustered to fight the wars. In 1912 it was the working class in Ulster - or that section of it that could be emotionally appealed to as 'Protestants' - who were urged and intimidated to form themselves into the battalions of the Ulster Volunteer Force. Not in order to remove working-class poverty or even a particular feature of that poverty, but in order to ensure that the class that lived well on the fruits of their exploitation continued to enjoy a political association that gave them access to British and colonial markets. Similarly in the south, between 1916 and 1922, it was the working class who were organised into the IRA by their exploiters to fight for 'the cause of Ireland' - an Ireland in which wealth was owned and controlled by a bunch of plunderers whose cause was the extension of its wealth and privilege.

In a world of H-bombs, cluster bombs, gas and germ weapons, a world where, amid potential abundance, 30 million human beings die annually from hunger, it is the sheerest hypocrisy for those who support the present way of life, capitalism, to denounce political terrorism. The terrorists get their rules and their weapons from capitalism. The numbers of their victims are only a small fraction of the numbers of innocent victims of capitalism in 'peace' or war. Socialists totally repudiate political violence. Just as the murder and brutality of capitalism generally must be condemned, so must the murderous and brutal activities of both the Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries. Their assaults are on the working class, whose interests they can never represent - indeed they no longer even represent the interests of capitalism as they did in the past.

The working class has no country. The national state is the product of class society and all forms of nationalism are inimical to the interests of the working class. All that workers possess is their mental and physical ability to work and the degree of real

poverty or mere want they endure is determined by whether they can find a market for that ability, and the terms under which they sell it.

Events elsewhere in the system of world capitalism are often more relevant to the situation of the worker in any particular country than changes of government in the country where he or she resides. Behind the flag-waving and the emotional claptrap, this is acknowledged when governments offer the excuse of 'world conditions' -the conditions of world capitalism -for the failure of their policies, as do, for example the British labour and Tory parties and the Fianna Fail and Fine Gael/Labour coalition governments. With one voice, they eschew responsibility for mass unemployment, and acknowledge the irrelevance of national governments in determining the trends of a world system based on the anarchy of a wages-money-marketing scheme.

5 Socialism

Just as capitalism is a world system, so must the alternative to it be a world system. In capitalism the means of living are owned and controlled directly or through the medium of companies, corporations or the state, by a minority class, and function solely for the purpose of enriching that class and protecting its ownership. In Socialism the entire means of producing and distributing wealth will be owned and controlled in common by the whole of society, and will function solely for the purpose of satisfying the needs of humanity.

Since all will be owners of the productive processes and the resources of the world, and all will freely participate in the production of all the things the human family requires, so all will have free and equal access to their needs. There will be no requirement for a market or the use of money as a measurement of wealth or means of exchange.

The appalling waste and destruction of capitalism will disappear. There will not be a need for armed forces or millions of people to spend their working lives producing the instruments of death and destruction. There will be no need for the vast armies of people who service capitalism's market economy in banks, finance and insurance palaces, in shops and stores; no need for armies of salesmen chasing one another around the blocks or for ad-men or the mass of people in the 'social' services doling out rations of money and crumbs of comfort.

Certainly there will be no shortage of people to do the work in Socialism, and, unlike now when computer and robot technology threatens the mean security of a worker's wage packet, the application and development of technology will simply ease the general burden of producing and distributing society's goods.

HUMAN NATURE

The priest and the parson will tell you that such a scheme of things is against what they call 'human nature'. According to this theory, 'God' created us as a weak species without the co-operative instincts of many lower forms of life and, as a result of our weakness, greed and envy - our 'human nature', - we could not have a society based on human co-operation.

The theory is not very flattering to 'God', but it has always won the approval of ruling classes and they have not been slow in encouraging the priests and parsons in their work of convincing the great mass of 'have-nots' in society - the people who produce

all wealth and own virtually none - that their condition is the result of their greed and weakness, and that these defects put the idea of a sane society based on harmony and co-operation beyond their reach. We do not have to look far to discern the reason for the invention and promotion of this quite untenable theory.

The success of *homo sapiens* as a species is found in its ability to co-operate in overcoming the obstacles presented by nature, and there is an abundance of evidence to show human beings living co-operatively and harmoniously in a condition of social equality before the advent of a society based on class ownership of its means of wealth production.

What we call 'fresh air' is the most essential prerequisite of human existence, but no one complains about another's respiratory consumption of it and no one attempts to hoard it. In most urban communities there is easy access to the second most important requirement of human life, clean water. As long as it flows freely, people avail themselves of it rationally and do not fight over it or hoard it.

People who have consciously opted for Socialism would not be compelled by their nature to hoard, steal and kill. In a world of socialist co-operation, men and women will give according to their abilities and take according to their needs.

The vision of a world without poverty, without slums and unemployment, without crime, racism and war, without the starvation, degradation and alienation of most of the people on our planet almost defies the imagination. The insanities of capitalism have become a way of life to us; we can immediately see the absurdity of starvation in a world of potential plenty, the absurdity of collecting charity for research into diseases while devoting multibillions to research into more sophisticated methods of dispensing death. These, and the other myriad contradictions of capitalism, make it a system that is incapable of being rationally defended and yet, because we have been conditioned into believing that this is all life has to offer, our initial reaction to the idea of Socialism is incredulity. And, when that incredulity is analysed, it usually boils down to the objection that, while Socialism is a highly desirable condition of life, it is not feasible because others, not ourselves, would be unable to co-operate to bring it about or make it work.

Given the death and destruction that capitalism now causes and the vastly greater destruction that it holds in readiness, can any rational human being argue that Socialism, the only alternative to capitalism, is not worthy of examination and effort?

THE MEANS

It is true that there are many groups, organisations and political parties that use the word 'Socialism' to describe their policies or ultimate aspirations. But only rarely do they define what they mean by Socialism and, when they do, they use the term to enlist the support of workers for some scheme which they hope will improve capitalism by removing one or more of its grosser features. We do not need to go into political or economic theory to demonstrate the fallacy of thinking that the problems caused by capitalism can be eradicated while the system itself is left intact - that an effect can be removed without its cause. The fallacy of such reasoning is amply demonstrated in the number of Labour, Social Democratic and 'Communist' parties that have presided in government, and continue to preside, futilely grappling with the same old problems and legislating for the continuation of those problems and not their abolition.

The first thing we should notice when we consider how society will be changed is that capitalism does not exist simply because the capitalist class wishes it to. On the contrary, it is the great mass of capitalism's victims, the working class, who allow it to exist. Not only do they run the system from top to bottom, producing its wealth and policing their own robbery but, because they have no knowledge of any practical alternative to capitalism, they vote for political parties and leaders committed to its continuation. *Capitalism simply could not continue to function without the support, active and passive, of the working class.*

We cannot overemphasise this point for it demonstrates not only the path forward to Socialism but the lunacy of those who preach violence or opportunism as a means of overthrowing the system. Those advocating political violence or subterfuge are in practice saying that they will force or deceive the workers into Socialism. But this is impossible, as Socialism is a system of free and voluntary co-operation dependent for its success on the precondition of the majority consciously opting for it in the full knowledge of the implications of such a form of society.

There are two classes under capitalism: a majority non-owning class who produce all the wealth; and a minority capitalist class who monopolise the resources of the earth and have the legal right to appropriate rent, interest and profit as a result of the exploitation of the wealth-producers. It is worth emphasising the legality of capitalism because it illustrates the point that it is the **state machine**, with its legislative processes, its judiciary, its police forces and, ultimately, its armed forces, which endows the capitalist class with the right, the authority and, if required, the coercive capacity to carry out its exploitative function. The role of the state as the force behind the private or corporate ownership of wealth production and distribution or, in starker terms, the state's role in excluding the great majority of human beings from ownership and control of their means of living - to the point where they often perish from starvation in the rich, or potentially rich, lands of their birth - is one that has to be concealed, mystified and generally obscured from the working class. The law, with its judges, policemen and soldiers, must be made to appear as the guarantor of the just to sleep peacefully in their beds and enjoy their freedom; in fact the law that enshrines the right of capitalist ownership denies millions a bed to sleep in and keeps the great majority of people in the position of wage slaves.

It is the task of the **World Socialist Movement** to combat the political ignorance on which the foundations of capitalism rest. It is the task of Socialists to show that capitalism, with its market economy, its wages and money system, its anarchy of production and appalling destruction of the earth's resources, can only hold the promise of poverty, unemployment, war and all the other evils which are an undeniable and permanent result of that system.

It is the task of the **World Socialist Movement** to expose the fallacy spread by Labour and 'Communist' parties, and the myriad disaffected offshoots of such organisations, that they can run capitalism in such a way as will alleviate or eliminate its problems. Those problems originate in capitalism; they are an inevitable consequence of capitalism; and the idea of political reformers trying to run a system based on the exploitation of the working class in the interests of the working class is laughable in theory and tragic in fact.

And it is the task of the **World Socialist Movement** to show that a wageless, classless, moneyless world, in which the resources of the earth are owned and

controlled in common by all and used to satisfy the needs of all, is a practical and pressing alternative to the miseries of capitalism.

THE VOTE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION

In many parts of the world, workers are afforded the opportunity from time to time to vote for the type of society they want. Up to the present they have used that vote to determine the political complexion of the party or personnel they wish to administer capitalism. With Socialist understanding and Socialist organisation they can use the vote as an instrument of social revolution - to elect Socialist delegates mandated to abolish capitalism: to end government over people and establish the democratic administration of things.

It is a monumental task, one that strains the imagination and credulity of many who see the need to replace the poverty and cruelty of capitalism with Socialism. It seems an impossibly daunting task for a small Socialist movement to acquire the strength to offer a serious challenge to the mammoth organisations that defend and promote capitalism. But the Socialist movement is only part of our strength. The rest of that strength is in capitalism itself; capitalism proving by its own anarchy and caprice that it is a system not fit for human beings. The evidence grows more abundant every day.

IS SOCIALISM RELEVANT IN IRELAND?

The short answer to that question is that, if Socialism existed, the present situation in Ireland would not and could not exist.

When we look at the impotence of *all* the political parties and reformers in Ireland today and at the bankruptcy of the slogans behind the gunmen, legal and otherwise, we can only be impressed with the urgent necessity of Socialism.

The working class in Ireland, like workers elsewhere throughout the world, can waste their time supporting parties that openly stand for capitalism; they can delude themselves into believing that there is a half way house between capitalism and Socialism; or they can bury their heads in the sand and say they are not interested in politics, even though 'politics' is interested in them and condones their exploitation and impoverishment.

Alternatively they can study the case for Socialism and help to build a strong Socialist movement motivated solely by the desire to achieve World Socialism. How that movement will progress and when Socialism will be achieved will be important questions which they will then be helping to resolve. More immediately relevant than these questions, however, is the fact that, if they were pursuing any other political course, they are wasting their time.