

Nationalism and Socialism

If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. – 1897

The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dissevered. – 1916

These two above quotes, in brief, show the basis of Connolly's Marxist philosophy and tactics with regard Ireland, freedom, and socialism. But more than that, as they can be applied to the colonial and oppressed nations more generally and so stand as a tremendous contribution to Marxist theory and practice.

Connolly was continuing and developing the struggle of Wolfe Tone, Fintan Lalor and Davitt by giving it a more scientific and material basis on top of the moral or sentimental struggle. Connolly's well researched and thought out arguments can be best found in his short book 'Labour in Irish History.' Here he more clearly shows the struggle for Irish freedom in the current age of imperial capitalism is the struggle for a working class republic and for socialism. Ireland, as has been proved by the use of Shannon airport against the peoples wishes or the recent case of the 'Rosport 5', can never be free while subject to global capital.

Connolly maintained nationalism in an oppressed country was very different to nationalism in an imperial country. Nationalism in a oppressed country can be, indeed must be, a socially liberating force for it to achieve national freedom. At a time when right-wing nationalism was dominant on the continent and narrow-minded nationalism was splitting the socialist international Ireland, the Irish Citizens Army led by Connolly was showing the world the positive, just, liberating side of working class nationalism. What he called Socialist Republicanism, a term still largely used in this country, internationally is now called Communism that is the right of all nations to self-determination and national freedom as a prerequisite and part of the struggle for socialism in your own country and more globally.

Without Socialism, Connolly argued, you would be merely changing the nationality of the oppressor from an outside to an insider but you would still remain oppressed. Without Socialism, national freedom is a mere ideal to the vast majority. Without Socialism national or political

independence will only benefit the few elites who leach onto global imperialism.

Ireland today, and only part of Ireland, stands as a fine example of the impotence of national freedom without socialism. Does anyone really dare oppose the use of Shannon airport by yankee murderers when the US represents over 30% of the Irish economy through foreign direct investment. According to an OECD report we are the most heavily dependant country on foreign direct investment in the world, it representing 71% of the southern economy.¹ This of course is coupled to the enforced privatisation of national industries to meet the EU's straight jacket economic requirements. We continually sell off 'public' company's to private owners at a fraction of their cost in order to appease the European elite and maintain our 'model economy'. Ireland's modern history, in more ways than one, has proven Connolly correct.

Ireland as distinct from her people, is nothing to me - 1897

If more evidence is needed, the wave of communist and leftwing liberation movements throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America throughout the 60's and 70's, and re-emerging today where they were unsuccessful, stand as fine examples of the soundness of Connolly's Marxism. The Bolivarian Movement or FARC-EP in Latin America see their struggle as one of freedom from 'yankee imperialism' as well as from their own class oppressors, it is both a national and social struggle. There are countless more examples in Palestine, the Basque country, and elsewhere to serve as evidence.

Ireland, north and south, are subject and dependant state's but they are also part of global imperialism. The elites, both north and south, benefit from Ireland's position within imperialism. The bosses and the owners, north and south of the border, are tied to the European Union and benefit from its existence. They cannot and will not deliver Irish freedom. Ordinary people across Europe are exploited and dominated by the EU elite. Neither national nor social freedom can come about in the context of the European Union. We must break away from all forms of imperialism to achieve Connolly's vision on a Workers Republic.

¹ OECD. International Direct Investment Statistical Yearbook. Paris.

We desire to preserve with the English people the same political relations as with the people of France, of Germany, or of any other country; the greatest possible friendship, but also the strictest independence. – 1897

Connolly on Nationalism and Socialism

If the national movement of our day is not merely to re-enact the old sad tragedies of our past history, it must show itself capable of rising to the exigencies of the moment.

It must demonstrate to the people of Ireland that our nationalism is not merely a morbid idealising of the past, but is also capable of formulating a distinct and definite answer to the problems of the present and a political and economic creed capable of adjusting to the wants of the future.

This concrete political and social ideal will best be supplied, I believe, by the frank acceptance on the part of all earnest nationalists of the Republic as their goal.

This linking together of our national aspirations with the hopes of the men and women who have raised the standard of revolt against that system of capitalism and landlordism, of which the British empire is the most aggressive type and resolute defender, should not, in any sense, import an element of discord into the ranks of earnest nationalists, and would serve to place us in touch with frost reservoirs of moral and physical strength sufficient to lift the cause of Ireland to a more commanding position than it has since the day of Benburb.

It may be pleaded that the ideal of a Socialist Republic, implying, as it does, a complete political and economic revolution, would be sure to alienate all or middle-class and aristocratic supporters who would dread the loss of their property and privileges.

What does this objection mean? That we must conciliate the privileged classes in Ireland!

English rule in Ireland is but the symbol of the fact that English conquerors in the past forced upon this country a property system founded upon spoliation, fraud, and murder: that, as the present-day exercise of the 'rights of property' so originated involves the continual practice of legalised spoliation and fraud, English rule is found to be the most suitable

form of government by which the spoliation can be protected, and an English army the most pliant tool with which to execute judicial murder when the fears of the propertied classes demand it.

If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain.

England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs.

Nationalism without Socialism – without a reorganisation of society on the basis of a broader and more developed form of that common property which underlay the social structure of Ancient Erin – is only national recreancy.

Shan Van Vocht, January, 1897

As Socialist we are not imbued with national or racial hatred by the remembrance that the political and social order in which we live was imposed on our fathers at the point of the sword; that during 700 years Ireland has resisted this unjust foreign domination; that famine, pestilence and bad government have made this western isle almost a desert and scattered our exiled fellow-countrymen over the whole face of the globe.

The enunciation of facts such as I have just stated is not able today to inspire or to direct the political energies of the militant working class of Ireland; such is not the foundation of our resolve to free Ireland from the yoke of the British Empire. We recognise rather that during all these centuries the great mass of the British people had no political existence whatever; that England was, politically and socially, terrorised by a numerically small governing class; that the atrocities which have been perpetrated against Ireland are only imputable to the unscrupulous ambition of this class, greedy to enrich itself at the expense of defenceless men; that up to the present generation the great majority of the English people were denied a deliberate voice in the government of their own country; that it is, therefore, manifestly unjust to charge the English people with the past crimes of their Government; and that at the worst we can charge them with a criminal apathy in submitting to slavery and allowing

themselves to be made an instrument of coercion for the enslavement of other. An accusation as applicable to the present as to the past.

We desire to preserve with the English people the same political relations as with the people of France, or Germany, or any other country; the greatest possible friendship, but also the strictest independence.

L'Irlande Libre, Paris, 1897

... No amount of protestations should convince intelligent workers that the class which grinds them down to industrial slavery can, at the same moment, be leading them forward to national liberty. True patriotism seeks the happiness of each in the welfare of all, and is inconsistent with the selfish desires for worldly wealth which can only be gained by the spoliation of less favoured fellow-mortals. It is the mission of the working class to give patriotism this higher, nobler, significance. This can only be done by our working class, as the only universal, all embracing class, organising as a distinct political party, recognising in Labour the cornerstone of our economic edifice and the animating principle of our political action.

Shan Van Vocht, August, 1897

'Let us free Ireland.' Says the patriot who won't touch Socialism. Let us all join together, and cr-r-rush the br-r-rutal Saxon. Let us all join together, says he, all classes and creed. And, says the town worker, after we have crushed the Saxon and freed Ireland, what will we do? Oh, then you can go back to your slums, same as before. Whoop it up for liberty!

And, says the agricultural worker, after we have freed Ireland, what then? Oh, then you can go scraping around for the landlord's rent or the money-lenders' interest same as before. Whoop it up for liberty!

After Ireland is free, says the patriot who won't touch Socialism, we will protect all classes, and if you don't pay your rent you will be evicted same as now. But the evicting party, under the command of the sheriff, will wear green uniforms and the Harp without the Crown, and the warrant turning you out on the roadside will be stamped with the arms of the Irish Republic. Now isn't that worth fighting for?

Workers' Republic, 1899

In every discussion on the aims and objects of a Socialist Party some one is sure to bring up the objection that even if the Socialist Party were to

conquer their opponents, and make an effort to establish their ideal as a political and social edifice, the difficulties which would arise out of the inability of the common people to understand the complexity of the social system they were called upon to administer, would infallibly produce the downfall of the new order.

It is not at all necessary that everyone, or even a large number, of those engaged in labour should be able to give an intelligent account of the multifarious processes of production, nor yet that they should be qualified even to trace the passage of the commodities upon which they are employed through all their stages from the crudity of the raw material up to the perfection of the finished product as it eventually reaches the hands of the purchaser. It is only necessary that each worker should perform with due skill and scrupulosity his own allotted task; to the few required as organisers of industry may be left the work of adjusting and interlocking the parts. Even this latter function – formidable as it may look when thus baldly stated – may be reduced to a mere automatic function to be executed as a part of the routine work of a clerical staff.

Workers Republic', 3 June, 1900

We wrote last week of the Difficulties of Socialism; this week we propose to treat of a few of the Difficulties of Capitalism. In this connection new would point out that the critics of Socialism invariably devote their energies to demonstrate how far a Socialist system would fall short of ideal perfection, and, having so demonstrated to their own satisfaction, they affect to conclude that the last word has been said, and argument is at an end.

It does not assume that with the advent of Socialism all the evil of our nature will immediately disappear, that love, hate, ambition, lust, envy, and all the forces which in our complex nature make for the stirring up of strife and discord, will be instantly eradicated, and the earth take on the aspect of Paradise. But it does contend that Poverty and the crimes born of poverty may be banished, and that the elimination of the economic struggle from our life the intellectual forces which today expend themselves in striving for mastery will find expression in avenues of greater helpfulness, and individuals seek renown as benefactors instead of exploiters in their species.

Workers' Republic, 16 June, 1900

... This is precisely what their [the so called 'internationalist' socialists] adoption of Socialism has caused in the great majority of cases amongst Irishmen. Led away by foolishly sentimental misrepresentations of the Socialist doctrine of Universal Brotherhood, or Internationalism, they generally began by dropping out of all Irish societies they were affiliated with, no matter how righteous their objects were, and ended by ceasing to mix in Irish gatherings or to maintain Irish connections.

Had the convert to Socialism showed that his conversion did not operate to make him hold aloof from his fellow countrymen, or to decry their cause, he would have become a medium for attracting the Irish, instead of repelling them, and each fresh Irish recruit to our cause would have meant an added power of convincing the Irish worker that Socialism made its devotees better equipped mentally and morally to combat oppression than any scheme evolved by the invertebrate Irish middleclass politicians...

The Harp, January, 1908

It is often said that the Irish flag is a green flag to suit a green people, but the Dublin workers are not so green as to believe that a party which voted against the Right to Work Bill, the Minimum Wage for Miners, and the Minimum Wage for Railwaymen, which intrigued against the application to Ireland of the Feeding of Necessitous School Children and the Medical Benefits of the Insurance Act, can be described as anything other than a treacherous 'friend' of Labour.

Forward, 7 June, 1913

It is only when Socialism is brought down from the clouds and is shown to have a direct bearing upon the political life of each country as a reflex of the economic history of that country, and to have a message bearing upon the political problems of that day, it is only then that Socialism has an opportunity of developing from being the cult of a few to becoming the faith of the many.

Forward, 9 August, 1913

... The first social right of man is to live, and that he cannot enjoy that right whilst the means of life for all are the private property of a class.

The Re-conquest of Ireland, 1914

What is a free nation? A free nation is one which possesses absolute control over all its own internal resources and powers, and which has no restrictions upon its intercourse with all other nations similarly circumstanced except the restrictions placed upon it by nature.

A free nation must have complete control over its own harbours, to open them or close them at will, or shut our any commodity, or allow it to enter in, just as it seemed best to suit the well-being of its own people, and in obedience to their wishes, and entirely free of the interference of any other nation, and in complete disregard for the wishes of any other nation. Short of that power no nation possesses the first essentials of freedom.

A free nation must have full power to nurse industries to health, either by government encouragement or by government prohibition of the sale of goods of foreign rivals. It may be foolish to do either, but a nation is not free unless it has that power...

A free nation must have full power to alter, amend, or modify the laws under which the property of its citizens is held in obedience to the demand of its own citizens...

The most perfect world is that in which the separate existence of nations is held most sacred.

Workers' Republic, 12 February, 1916

We are out for Ireland for the Irish. But who are the Irish? Not the rack-renting, slum owning landlord; not the sweating, profit-grinding capitalist; not the sleek and oily lawyer; not the prostitute pressman – the hired liars of the enemy. Not these are the Irish upon which the future depends. Not these, but the Irish working class, the only secure foundation upon which a free nation can be reared.

The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dissevered. Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil. Labour seeks to make the free Irish nation the guardian of the interests of the people of Ireland, and to secure that end would vest in that Irish free nation all property rights as against the claims of the individual, with the end in

view that the individual may be enriched by the nation, and not by the spoiling of his fellows.

Workers 'Republic, 8 April, 1916