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SEAN MURRAY



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THE IRISH CASE FOR COMMUNISM

By Sean Murray

Chapter I.

THE NEW SITUATION

IN the year 1896 James Connolly, the pioneer of revolutionary Marxian Socialism in Ireland, returned to Ireland and founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party, which set itself the aim of "The establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic based upon the public ownership by the people of Ireland of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange."

In pursuance of his policy of organizing the Irish working class "to meet their masters and destroy their mastership," Connolly and his associates encountered from first to last the violent opposition of the ascendancy imperialists, and all the forces of gombeenism and clericalism. A combination of all these brought his life of service to the Irish workers to an end in 1916—British bullets blessed with the editorials of the Martin Murphy capitalist and clerical newspapers.

Today the revolutionary workers of Ireland are confronted with the completion of the task begun by their leader at the end of the last century. The national oppression of the Irish people has taken a new form. "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" is no more; it has given place to the disunited Irish nation of the Irish Free State and the Six Counties. Leinster House and Stormont have taken the place of Whitehall. Donal Buckley, grocer, Maynooth, and the Duke of Abercorn, aristocrat, have taken the place of the Buckshot Fosters, the Balfours and the Birrells

as representatives of the imperial British yoke on the Irish nation. In this is embodied an important phase of Irish history, the new form of Irish national oppression. What has happened?

This: British imperialism, confronted with the organized power of the Irish working masses led by revolutionary Socialists and nationalists like Connolly, Pearse and Mel-lows, could no longer maintain its traditional form of Castle government. So it left Ireland, but in safe hands. It made a bargain—the 1921 Treaty—with a section of the Irish people, the Irish capitalist class. This bargain meant that the booty wrung from the Irish people for generations was henceforth to be divided among the English imperialists and their Irish allies—the capitalists—with a bigger share to the latter than they had hitherto been getting. The British imperialists got away with the farmers' annuities—the Irish manufacturers get tariffs. The Castle servants got their pensions, and the taxation of big incomes reduced. But the workers were deprived of social insurance and driven in thousands on to Poor Law. These are a few of the effects of the 1921 agreement on the different classes. In other words, the Irish capitalists on the basis of the revolutionary sacrifices of the Irish working masses have come to power in Ireland. They have reached this position by the betrayal of the Irish national cause, which betrayal has compelled them to share the power and plunder of the Irish toilers with the British ruling class.

And so today the task of winning Irish independence from British imperialism is directly linked with the struggle to abolish the rule of the present ruling class in Ireland—the Irish capitalists. Buckley has dislodged MacNeill from the Viceregal Lodge; the smaller Irish capitalists have—temporarily at least—displaced the larger Anglo-Irish imperialist capitalists in the political leadership of the State. But the task of winning national freedom and unity remains. What class is to lead the struggle? Only the class which can fight

the capitalists—the Irish working class in alliance with the working farmers and all toilers.

The generations old struggle for Irish freedom therefore enters a new phase, assumes the form of sharp class war between the main force of the capitalists who want inclusion in the Empire, or in the case of the smaller manufacturers represented by the Fianna Fail Party, more advantageous terms of association with imperialism; and the masses of the Irish workers and farmers whose future lies in an independent Ireland outside the Empire.

Because Ireland's struggle has entered this, its final phase, with the issue of the working class *versus* the capitalists and the imperialists high on the agenda, the cry of Communism is to be heard in street and valley. The capitalist Press, daily and weekly, lay and clerical, belches forth a steady torrent of propaganda against Communism, coupled with its campaign of pro-British sabotage on behalf of the ranchers and big capitalists, encouraging the organization of an army of White mercenaries to intimidate the workers and working farmers. "For England and against Communism" is the scarcely-disguised slogan of the capitalist crusaders. It is now necessary as never before for Irish workers and all national revolutionaries to get clearly in mind what this Communism is, from which their enemies are so anxious to save them. What does an Irish Communist Party stand for?

Chapter II.

IRELAND AND THE CRISIS

THE question of the Communist Party, the questions of Communism, capitalism, imperialism, are burning issues confronting all classes. These issues have to be faced by all classes and parties. They stare the workers in the face, whether in the daily battle for bread or on the wider issue of national independence. How does this arise now so sharply? There has been a struggle for national freedom for generations in Ireland; there has been unemployment always under capitalism; there have been fights for higher wages and against reductions of wages. Yet the issue of Communism was not before the classes in Ireland as today.

First, on the daily struggle for a livelihood, for work, unemployment insurance, relief, wages. How does this elemental struggle for a living call in question the capitalist system and raise the issue of a Workers' and Farmers' Republic now and not in earlier times?

The answer is to be found in the present state of capitalist society the world over. The capitalists who control industry, government, finance and commerce are unable to give work to millions of workers. They cannot sell what the workers have already produced. Their granaries are filled with grain, their warehouses are choked with food and clothing. These were produced in order to be sold by the capitalists at a profit. There is nobody to buy them, hence the workers who produced the goods are starving. This is what is called the economic crisis in which all capitalist countries, including Ireland, are involved in varying degrees.

This economic crisis differs from all preceding crises—for there have always been periodic crises under capitalism—in this respect. Such crises as those of 1825, 1847-8, 1869,

etc., took place in conditions of expanding capitalism. England was then practically the only highly developed capitalist nation in the world. Whole regions of the earth were not touched by the capitalist market—the so-called backward countries in Africa, Asia and South America. This meant that when the existing market became too limited and over-production ensued, it was possible for the capitalists to push into new fields and so solve the crisis for another period.

This state of affairs is now ended. All the principal European nations—France, Italy, Germany—plus the United States have overtaken, and in several cases passed, England as industrial capitalist countries. The era of world imperialism, in which the entire world is divided among the leading capitalist nations, has taken the place of the old period of capitalism. This means that the capitalists of a particular country in the scramble to solve their difficulties by finding new markets are inevitably led into conflict with one another. This was seen in the world-war of 1914-18 and is seen today in the fresh preparations for further conflicts now proceeding between the leading imperialist powers. This is what is meant by the Communists when they speak of the capitalist system being in decline.

But by far the most important factor in this situation has yet to be mentioned. A vast area of the earth—a sixth—comprising the nations of the former Russian Empire has broken away from the capitalist-imperialist world and formed a Union of Workers' Republics. This means that the capitalist system is challenged by the rise of a new system on top of the difficulties within itself.

These are the reasons why the Communists speak not only of the period of capitalist decline, of world economic crisis, but of *"the crisis of the capitalist system itself."*

The present economic crisis in which Ireland is deeply involved takes place therefore not as the crises of old, in conditions of growing capitalism, but on the basis of a general crisis of the entire capitalist system.

This is why the struggle for wages, work, and maintenance raises the issue of Communism, which is the capitalist way of saying that the workers are threatening the destruction of capitalist rule.

The relation between the economic struggle of the workers for bread and the battle of the capitalists to preserve their system at the workers' expense was illustrated in the recent struggle of the Belfast relief workers. Here an economic struggle of 2,000 workers for increased scales of relief with the Poor Law Guardians and Municipal Council brought on a general class conflict between the working class and the entire capitalist State.

The capitalists have two chief ways of overcoming the economic crisis—by economies at the workers' expense and by the struggle with other capitalist States for a bigger share in the plunder of the world's peoples. The first manifests itself in the capitalists' economy drive against the workers' wages and social insurance. The second in the increasing trade rivalries, tariff wars and the drive to new armed conflicts.

In Southern Ireland the policy of economy at the expense of the workers was responsible for getting the Free State set on its feet after 1922. Led by the Cosgrave Government, the Southern capitalists smashed down the standard of all social services—unemployment insurance, old age pensions—reduced the salaries and wages in all public services, rationalized industry on the railways and in the factories by getting more work done with less workers; reduced wages in every industry and occupation. This was the capitalists' road to the establishment of their Free State of Ireland. This is the capitalist way of staving off the collapse of their system—the placing of the burdens of the economic crisis on the workers' backs.

From the foregoing it will be clear why the capitalists, through their Press and other institutions, howl so frantically about the "Communist menace" when confronted with the

slightest stir among the unemployed, a strike, or any other manifestation of discontent among the workers. The fight of the workers to live is in conflict with the fight of the capitalist system to live. The hollowness of the capitalist propaganda that the Communists are "merely using" the workers' struggle for existence to further "an attack on the social (capitalist) order" is here exposed. Every penny won in a wage struggle, every extra loaf won by the unemployed workers is a blow delivered at a system whose continued existence depends on its ability to drive down the existing standards of living of the working masses. The fight for bread therefore leads the workers to the policy of the Communists—the fight against capitalism and for an Irish Workers' and Farmers' Republic.

And now the national independence struggle. How does it come that this ancient struggle of the Irish people for their right to rule their own country brings against it the wrath of the Press and pulpit as the most dangerous "Communist menace," a threat to civilization, religion and the family? This aspect has been dealt with in the first chapter, but it is necessary to give more illustrations here in the light of our survey of the situation of world capitalist-imperialism as a whole.

The forcing of economic concessions by the workers and poor farmers from the capitalists is, as we have seen, a blow against the capitalist system. The capitalists are not in a position to grant concessions without danger to the "social order." They are also at times unable to resist the granting of concessions without danger to the "social order." Similarly in the case of the national struggle for freedom. This struggle menaces the whole imperialist system. British imperialism can ill afford concessions to Ireland or any of its subject States and Colonies. The Irish national fight is therefore a menace to the social order (read capitalism) in England itself. By weakening the British ruling class it assists the British working class in its fight against the capi-

talists, stimulates the forces of social revolution in England itself, and paves the way for the British workers' advance to power and the establishment of a Workers' Republic over the grave of British imperialism on its own hearthstone. But to endanger the capitalist fabric in England leads in its turn to similar effects in Ireland—leads not to an independent capitalist Ireland but to an independent workers' Ireland. This is one reason why many who supported or sympathized with the national fight in the past are now howling against it as a "red menace." These Irish ladies and gentlemen deserve a certain amount of credit. They see or feel, or both, what many good Irish revolutionary fighters have yet to learn—that the national fight is directly linked with the issue of social revolution in both islands.

But the main reason for the national fight assuming a deep red color to the capitalists and their propaganda hacks and hirelings lies in the position of the classes in Ireland, economically and politically.

The economic interests of the great bulk of Irish capitalism are bound up with the maintenance of the Empire. From Southern Ireland alone over £200,000,000 of Irish capital is invested abroad, the greater part in Great Britain and the colonies. Normally these investments brought into Dublin in interest annually over £10,000,000!

This is what is called "invisible exports," or money received for which nothing was exported. In this we see a section of the wealthy in Ireland very directly interested in the maintenance of the Empire. The international "Red Menace" is something of more than moral or academic interest to this section of the "Irish people." This interest of the Irish investing capitalists in foreign lands will enable the Irish workers and farmers better to appreciate the full significance of the "symbol" of the Oath and the link of the Crown in the two Governor-Generals.

English capitalism is equally interested in the direct economic sense in maintaining Ireland in the Empire. According

to statements made recently by the Free State Finance Minister, upwards of £50,000,000 of English capital is invested in the Twenty-six Counties. In insurance, railways, shipping, there are huge British capitalist interests. All this, not to speak of the British financial interests in the North and the direct extraction of tribute in the form of land annuities and other payments from the Free State.

These, however, are not the main ties which bind Ireland, while she is ruled politically and economically by the capitalists, to the Empire. The entire banking system is tied to that of Britain. The Irish financial barons have deemed it wiser not to toy with a separate currency, but to remain linked to the Bank of England. Despite the collapse of the pound, the financial crisis in Britain and all the talk of Fianna Fail about breaking with the British currency, no move is made in this direction. Financial capital in Ireland stands with British imperialism and shares its difficulties as well as its loot.

The brewing and distilling interests, the biscuit manufacturers, the big commercial houses importing British goods, and, last but not least, the cattle export interests—all these sections of Irish capitalism are financially interested in the maintenance of the capitalist system in Ireland based on the present connection with Great Britain. These interests cannot do without the Irish workers and working farmers to exploit nor without the co-operation of the British bourgeoisie in the work of exploiting them. A burglar needs, not only a place and material to rob, but an accomplice who will dispose of the loot.

Because of this economic and political interlocking, the native capitalists acquiesce in the military and naval domination of the Irish nation—a domination expressed in the harbors at Cobh, Lough Swilly, etc.—which maintains Ireland as a war base for Britain.

The national struggle is thus in the stage when the great bulk of the capitalists have passed from opposition to im-

perialism, from sympathetic toleration of the national struggle, or benevolent neutrality, to the stage of active and violent opposition to every attempt at national advance.

It may be argued that the big capitalists were always against the national movement. In the case of the big imperialist interests (the "ascendancy") this is true. But before 1921 all the "national" bourgeois groups were in one form or another in opposition to the imperialists. Martin Murphy and his newspapers were championing Dominion status. True, Easter Week found this section against the insurrectionists. But Murphy and all he spoke on behalf of gave (albeit vacillating) support to Griffith and the Right Sinn Fein Wing of the movement against the old Nationalist Party. The Treaty finally brought the imperialist ascendancy group (financiers, brewers, etc.), the interests represented by the *Independent*, and the smaller manufacturers represented by Griffith and Sinn Fein, into coalition with the imperialists against the national movement now relying for sole support on the masses of farmers, lower middle class and industrial workers.

Since then there has been a regrouping among the classes. The smaller manufacturers have "broken" with the big capitalists. They have been disappointed by the Treaty which they found to serve only the interests of finance and big exporting capital. They have passed into constitutional opposition under the leadership of de Valera, whose party, with its high protective tariffs, better serves their interests. The position of all sections of the capitalists now stands:—Big capitalists—active opposition to the national struggle. Smaller "national" capitalists—constitutional opposition to imperialism. Big capitalism (Cosgrave) leads the fight against the national movement. Small capitalism (de Valera) refuses to lead a resolute fight against imperialism. The working class and working farmers stand in opposition to all sections of Irish capitalism in the fight for complete independence and in defense of their own class interests.

The further progress of the fight for national liberation is therefore bound up with the question: "Which class is going to lead the struggle?" And this in turn raises the issue: "Which class will rule in an independent Ireland?" The coalition of the big capitalists' interests (financial, manufacturing, and industrial), led by Cosgrave with imperialism; the hesitations and capitulations and compromises of the small capitalist and middle class generally, led by de Valera, give the answer. Only the working class in alliance with the masses of the farmers can lead the national struggle to the end. The struggle for national freedom leads inevitably to an Irish Workers' and Farmers' Republic.

This is why the Irish capitalist class and all their servants on platform, press and pulpit see in the national fight, quite correctly, the dreaded (for them) spectre of Communism.

Chapter III.

CLASSES AND POLITICAL PARTIES

"**O**NLY the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland," wrote James Connolly.

Classes are powerless without organization and leadership; capitalists and landlords equally with the workers and peasant farmers. The various kinds of class organizations can be roughly divided into two—economic organizations and political organizations. Both these forms of organization are equally necessary to the classes.

Take the capitalists. How are they organized? First of all they have their employers' associations and chambers of commerce, their trade unions so to speak. The employers in the building industry are grouped together in the Master Builders' Federation. There are federations of shipbuilding employers and factory owners, and merchants are organized in each city and town in chambers of commerce. They are all united in national employers' federations, etc. These organizations serve to bring together the capitalist class as a whole in opposition to the working class. Through such organizations the individual interest of particular capitalists and groups and the sectional interests of separate branches of industry and localities are co-ordinated and subordinated to the general requirements of the class as a whole.

These are the economic organizations of the employers. Their chief function is to conduct the struggle for higher profits by reducing wages, speeding up, lengthening hours and resisting demands for wage increases and better conditions of labor by the workers.

The workers have also their economic organizations—trade unions, unemployed organizations, tenants' leagues.

The workers are organized in numerous (far too numerous) trade union societies: laborers, craftsmen, clerks, etc. These are drawn together in such bodies as trades and workers' councils and nationally in the Trades Union Congress. The function of these economic organizations of the workers is to defend the daily interests, wages, hours, conditions of labor, and, in the case of the unemployed, relief and social insurance against the employers. That the present labor reformist leadership of the major part of the trade union movement does not carry out these functions does not disprove that these are the functions for which such organizations were formed by the workers.

Among the farmers there are similar organizations. The capitalist farmers (big ratepayers and ranchers) have their Irish and Ulster Farmers' Union and a multiplicity of leagues, while the working farmers are attempting to develop organization in alliance with the town workers in Working Farmers' Committees.

These separate organizations of workers and employers are the most elementary forms of class organization, the A. B. C. so to speak. They include and are open to all who have specific economic interests in common—rent, interest and profit in the case of the capitalists; and wages, conditions of labor, social insurance, and the fight against rents in the case of the workers and working farmers. They include the most backward and the most advanced members of the given class, irrespective of political or religious opinions.

The highest form of class organization, the X.Y.Z., is the political party. Politics are concentrated economics. Normally in every capitalist country each of the chief classes have their own political parties. In Ireland the big capitalists are led by the Cumann na nGaedheal in the Free State, and by the Unionist Party in the north. The smaller manufacturers and middle class generally are represented by Fianna Fail and the National League (Devlin). The farm-

ing population, because it is divided into different classes, capitalist farmers and working farmers, and because of the isolated and scattered character of agricultural economy in contrast to the highly centralized forces of the capitalists and the workers, cannot form a permanent, stable, independent political party. The big farmers have repeatedly attempted to form a political party to advance their distinct interests, but it would only function as an arm of the Cumann na nGaedheal, to be afterwards amalgamated with it. An important conclusion is to be drawn from this, viz., that it is the big centralized capitalists (bankers, industrialists, rail and shipping interests, etc.) who lead, politically, the capitalist farmers of the country.

Similarly in the case of the working farmers. They cannot act, politically, independently. They must act politically in alliance with one or the other chief classes. At present their alignment is, in the main, with the middle class party of de Valera. But the appearance of Working Farmers' Committees and the struggle over mortgages, annuities and taxes indicate that the working farmers are finding that their true class interests lie in alliance with the urban workers.

The Labor Party is a party of the working class in name, but it represents the interests and viewpoint of the higher permanent officials of the trade unions, and a very small layer of comparatively privileged workers, civil servants, and traders. It supports any and every section of the capitalists in turn. In the political field it served the interests of the Anglo-Irish imperialists (Cosgrave) against the Republican movement. It now supports the Fianna Fail Party against the Cosgrave imperialists. The Northern section pursues the same policy. One section represented by Midgley talks imperialist-labor, another section represented by McMullen plays a "National" role. In the economic field it is the same. The railway capitalists are supported against the road capitalists, or the manufacturers against the finan-

ciers. The only class not supported by the Labor Party is the working class.

The Labor Party's declared policy differs in no way fundamentally from that of the orthodox capitalist parties. Recently the Labor Party leaders complained that the Fianna Fail Party had "stolen their program."

This review of Irish politics brings out that the only class without a political party in Ireland is the working class, "the incorruptible inheritors," in Connolly's words, "of the fight for freedom in Ireland." In the highest form of class organization, the political, the workers are without leadership. This means that the Irish working class is being dragged politically in the wake of the middle classes. But the working class, as the present position and all past history proves, and as Connolly's teachings make clear, is the one class in Ireland which can lead the national struggle of the whole toiling population through to the end, to an independent, united Ireland. Therefore the task confronting the Irish workers is to break with the middle class parties and politics and build their own independent working class political party to lead the struggle for national and social emancipation. This raises the question which the *Irish Workers' Voice* and the Revolutionary Workers' Groups have been raising before the Irish workers for a considerable time, of the organization of the revolutionary workers in an Irish Communist Party.

Chapter IV.

THE IRISH COMMUNIST PARTY

THE organization of the Irish workers' party, the Communist Party of Ireland, is the only consistent answer of the Irish workers to the situation now facing them. The capitalist system is heading to collapse throughout the world. It is ruining the masses of the Irish people, depriving them of work, wages, and land. The working class and working farmers are the only classes in Ireland faithful to the Irish national cause, and these classes are without political leadership in the form of a powerful revolutionary class party. The organization of the Communist Party is the burning need, and it will work for these classes.

What are the objects and tasks of such a party? These have been outlined by the Irish Revolutionary Workers' Groups, and can be briefly stated as follows:

1. To lead the struggle of the Irish people for complete separation from the British Empire, and the establishment of an Irish Workers' and Farmers' Republic.

2. To wage a revolutionary class struggle against Irish capitalism, North and South, which is the social basis for British imperialism within the country.

3. To abolish the present division of the country, resulting from imperialist domination and Irish capitalist betrayal, and to establish a Workers' and Farmers' Government for all Ireland.

The immediate tasks are:

1. To win to membership of the Party all militant workers in the different industries, organized in trade unions and the revolutionary national movement. To build the Party from the foremost fighters in the Irish working class.

2. To win over in the course of the daily struggle of the workers and the national independence fight against British imperialism and by intensive agitation and propaganda of the revolutionary working class principles the majority of the Irish workers to support for the policy and aims of the Irish Communist Party.

3. To conduct a persistent struggle against the pro-imperialist political parties of Cosgrave and Craigavon and their allies. To win the working masses under the influence of the Fianna Fail Party to the policy of revolutionary struggle against British imperialism and away from parliamentary national reformism. This demands a ruthless exposure of the compromising policy of Fianna Fail in the national struggle and its capitulation to the ranchers and bankers and its socially reactionary policy towards the Irish workers and working farmers.

4. To fight for the elimination of all reformist labor influence in the trade unions, and for the development of a forward rank-and-file leadership in the factories and unions to replace the present anti-working class bureaucracy.

The Workers' and Farmers' Republic would take immediate measures along the following lines:

1. Nationalization without compensation of all landed estates and big ranches, and their division among landless laborers and small farmers, or, where this is not feasible or desired, the organization of State farms.

2. Nationalization without compensation of big industry, such as railways, insurance companies, breweries, linen and engineering.

3. Confiscation of the property of all national traitors, and imperialist British interests; deprivation of political rights of these interests.

4. Centralization of credit and finance in the hands of the Workers' State by means of a national bank with State capital and the suppression of all private banks and bankers.

5. Concentration of the means of transport in the hands of the nation.

6. Complete liberty of conscience in matters of religion; the right of all to hold and practice any beliefs without interference. To this end the Workers' and Farmers' Republic will abolish, where existing, all privileges attaching to any particular religious faith, and all disabilities imposed because of religious persuasion.

7. The Workers' and Farmers' Republic will establish free education, primary and university; entrance to the latter to be by merit. Abolition of denominational education in the primary schools, the chief weapon of the bourgeoisie in perpetuating sectarian animosities and divisions among the Irish people. Popular control of education.

8. Abolition of the present legal system and the establishment of workers' courts of justice.

9. The present parliamentary system of Government to be abolished, and legislative and administrative functions to be conducted through committees of workers, farmers and members of professional groups elected on the basis of occupation.

This is the Communist way out of imperialism's shackles to a new Ireland. This is the working class road to the elimination of capitalist robbery and wage-slavery, to the ending of all oppression of man by man, to the banishment of unemployment and insecurity, to the disappearance of the palace and the poorhouse, to the ending of national and social oppression for ever.

In place of the old capitalist society rent asunder with the division of its warring classes, the free Ireland of the future will be built on the principle of association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

To the accomplishment of this great task the Irish revolutionary workers' movement calls the manhood and womanhood of Ireland's workers and farmers.

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