



CONNOLLY AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

In the experience of the Irish working class, the role of the Leninist party has not been great. That this has been so is no accident any more than was Russia's development of such a form of organisation and its enjoyment of that organisation's success. The comparative causes of Russia's achievement and Ireland's failure lie in the two countries' different levels of economic development. The highly socialised, (if not, relative to total population, large) Russian proletariat was more suited to develop its socialist consciousness than was the working class of Ireland. The latter's most socialised elements (in Ulster) had their division of skills reinforced by the religious issue. As a whole its members lost their natural leaders on the emigrant ships. The Russian working class produced the Bolshevik Party; its comrades in Ireland could not (until faced with the example of October 1917) advance beyond the I.T.G.W.U. and the Irish Citizen Army. Except for brief periods, the Irish worker could not look for revolutionary leadership to any vanguard political body, whether for his own island alone or for both the British Isles.

This last point is relevant. In Connolly's time, all Ireland was part of the single State of the United Kingdom. There was the possibility that a revolutionary party might develop to lead the workers of both Britain and Ireland. Such a development would have been in line with the organisational strategy of Bolshevism, which Trotsky summed up as follows; "whereas in nationally homogeneous states the bourgeois revolutions developed powerful centripetal tendencies, rallying to the idea of overcoming particularism, as in France, or overcoming national disunion, as in Italy and Germany - in nationally heterogeneous states on the contrary, such as Turkey, Russia, Austria-Hungary, the belated bourgeois revolution released centrifugal forces. In spite of the apparent contrariness of these processes when expressed in mechanical terms, their historical function was the same. In both cases it was a question of using the national unity as a fundamental industrial reservoir. Germany had for this purpose to be united, Austria-Hungary to be divided. Lenin early learned the inevitability of this development of centrifugal national movements in Russia, and for many years stubbornly fought most particularly against Rosa Luxemburg - for that famous paragraph nine of the old party programme which formulated the right of nations to self determination - that is, to complete separation as states. In this, the Bolshevik Party did not by any means undertake an evangel of separation. It merely assumed an obligation to struggle implacably against every form of national oppression, including the forcible retention of this or that nationality within the boundaries of the general state. Only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities.

"But that was only one side of the matter. The policy of Bolshevism in the national sphere had also another side, apparently contradictory to the first but in reality supplementing it. Within the framework of the party, and of the workers' organisations in general, Bolshevism insisted upon a rigid centralism. implacably

warring against every taint of nationalism which might set the workers one against the other or disunite them. While flatly refusing to the bourgeois states the right to impose compulsory citizenship, or even a state language upon a national minority Bolshevism at the same time made it a verily sacred task to unite as closely as possible, by means of voluntary class discipline, the workers of different nationalities. Thus it flatly rejected the national-federation principle in building the party. A revolutionary organisation is not the prototype of the future state, but merely the instrument for its creation. An instrument ought to be adapted to fashioning the product; it ought not to include the product. Thus a centralised organisation can guarantee the success of revolutionary struggle - even where the task is to destroy the centralised oppression of nationalities." - History of the Russian Revolution, Vol. III p.p. 40-41, Sphere Books Ltd. London, 1967. (Present writer's emphasis).

"In contrast to this, it is a good idea - following the method of contrasts - to compare it with the policy of the Austrian social democrats. Bolshevism based itself upon the assumption of an outbreak of national revolutions continuing for decades to come, and instructed the advanced workers in this spirit. The Austrian social democracy, on the contrary, submissively accommodated itself to the policy of the ruling class; it defended the compulsory co-citizenship of ten nations in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and at the same time, being absolutely incapable of achieving a revolutionary union of the workers of these different nationalities, fenced them off in the party and in the trade unions with vertical partitions." Ibid P. 59, emphasis as before.

"History has provided an incomparable checkup of the two policies on the national question. Whereas Austria-Hungary, whose proletariat was educated in the spirit of a cowardly halfway policy, went all to pieces under a formal shake-up, and moreover the initiative in this process was taken in the main by the national sections of the Social Democratic party, in Russia on the ruins of Czarism a new state composed of nationalities has been formed, and has been closely welded together both economically and politically by the Bolshevik Party.

"Whatever may be the further destiny of the Soviet Union - and it is still far from a quiet haven - the national policy of Lenin will find its place among the eternal treasures of mankind." Ibid P. 62.

THE STILLBIRTH OF UNITED KINGDOM BOLSHEVISM.

Though less dramatic, the national policy of the revolutionary left of the British Isles before October 1917, may be as much as that of the Austro-Hungarian Social Democrats, an example of how not to go about it. The only Labour political organisation that tried to bridge the Irish Sea was the petit bourgeois and reformist Independent Labour Party. For the remainder, so far were circumstances from those of Czarist Russia, that it was a sign of progress rather than otherwise for Socialists to form separate organisations for Britain and Ireland - not only in the political, but also in the industrial sphere. This was shown by the fact that in forming the I.T.G.W.U., James Larkin was not only breaking from British but from bureaucratic control. By his act he created the nucleus of what would be the leading pace-setter in industrial action in the British Isles for years to come, even after 1918. In the British Isles, the situation was an early manifestation of what was to prove a frequent international occurrence through the twentieth century; the undeveloped working class of the colony, advancing and outpacing the ancient metropolitan proletariat.

That this was so was due to the British worker's position as employee of the world's first industrial capitalism. From this they were able for a long time to enjoy the benefits (puny in relation to capital's ; grandiose compared to their foreign comrades') of their country's monopoly position. Lenin summed up the effects of this :-

"1. a section of the British proletariat becomes 'bourgeois'; 2. a section of the proletariat allows itself to be led by men bought, or at least paid, by the bourgeoisie." Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, p.103.

This result developed in Britain and (if anything, more) amongst the Protestant workers of North East Ireland. Amongst the workers elsewhere in Ireland, matters developed much more slowly. Partly this was because the British super-profits were spent on subsidising the more numerous peasants' purchase of their farms. Partly it was because the modern Irish Trade Union movement developed after that of Britain. Without the industry of the other islands, its workers were either skilled artisans and unskilled transport employees; workers in heavy industry, the vanguard of labour in countries where it existed, was conspicuous by its absence outside the North East. The organisation of the Irish unskilled was, then, first placed in the hands of the British unions with their growing bureaucracies, and with only pitiful interest in Ireland. From 1907, it was run by the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in opposition to the United Kingdom labour-bureaucracy. The I.T.G.W.U. was, as events were to show, an unsatisfactory and inadequate opponent of the Labour Pakers in the long run. It certainly could not advance the cause of workers' power beyond the limits of a "One Big Union". Nonetheless, its circumstances made it an inevitable development and the best that could be done by the labour movement of the U.K.

The imperfections in the two wings of the U.K. labour movement, the rise of the British proletariat, the world's first industrial country and the lack of development of the Irish working class movement, meant that a Bolshevik type party was if anything more vital than it was in Russia. It also ensured that such a party could not be developed without the example of the original.

These two facts affected decisively the greatest of the Marxists in the islands : James Connolly. Connolly's theoretical pre-eminence is undoubtedly connected with his back ground among the Irish emigrants of Edinburgh, in effect, giving him a foot in both Irish and British working classes. Nonetheless, even he could not create (or learn the need to create) a political unit of the cadres of both these classes that could lead them to victory in the class war. In fact, Connolly's whole approach to the question of the political organisation of his class was an empirical one centred on his personal contacts. As will be seen, he had a rudimentary idea of what is termed Democratic Centralism, though he saw it mainly as means to keep his group at a minimum efficiency, rather than to help develop this efficiency to even higher levels.

In this empiricism, Connolly's attitude to the territorial extent of his organisation, fitted naturally. His first attempt (and his only one in Ireland) to set up a distinct vanguard party was the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896. This was an entirely Irish body, as its name reveals. As far as he had a British perspective, it was through his personal connections with the British Social Democratic Federation, and, later, the Socialist Labour Party.

With his successive disillusionments with the independent socialist parties, and his adherence to the the new industrial unionism (of the I.W.O. & the I.T.G.W.U.), Connolly's cross-channel political links became still less formal. By the end of his life they were restricted, practically, to his articles in the paper "Forward!"

In this matter, he has been criticised correctly enough both by the ultra-Stalinist B.I.C.O. in its policy statement No. 4 (Party Organisation in Ireland & Britain pp 7-8, 1971.) and by Stewart Crehan of the ultra-sectarian "Trotskyist" Socialist Labour League (in their then journal "The Newsletter" of May 18, 1968). Without a doubt, his failure was one of decisive importance to the socialist movement in the U.K. All that can be said in his defence is that he was not alone; nobody else tried to build a revolutionary party for that area. It can be argued reasonably then that even had he seen the need for a U.K. Bolshevik, he would have had extreme difficulty in convincing any of the sort of people necessary to such a movement that such a need existed.

But had he been able to do so, it is equally clear that history would have changed for the better. The Easter Rising might not have occurred, and had it occurred, it would certainly not have had the same effect it did have. With an immediate all-British strategy Connolly would not have needed to concentrate on one national issue. But this could have been offset by the victories of the workers of Britain and Ireland, the avoidance of the defeats that they suffered in actual history and their eventual seizure of power. The trouble (and it is very big trouble is that all this is conjecture. In fact, the real economic and social divisions between the workers of Britain and Ireland (far greater than those between the Russian workers and any equivalent working class in the smaller Russian nationalities) made such a party a practical impossibility. When the lessons of the October Revolution were available to be learnt, the time for a Bolshevik section for the whole U.K. was already passed; the national difference between Britain and Ireland had developed into the latter's liberation struggle.

BOLSHEVISM : INTERNATIONAL OR ONLY BRITISH-IRISH ?

This fact must be remembered when considering recent revivals (or, rather introductions) of the idea of a single Bolshevik Party for the British Isles. Until 1968, the self-styled "International Committee of the Fourth International" practiced such a strategy, its British section the Socialist Labour League, or aiming to cover both Britain and Ireland. However, for the last five years, it has left Ireland to a separate section: the League for a Workers' Vanguard. Meanwhile, theoretically, a more serious defence of the continuing relevance of the organisational form concerned has been presented by the British & Irish Communist Organisation, most recently on its adoption of its present name in November 1971. Its statement is entitled "Party Organisation in Ireland and Britain".

In considering the arguments of the B.I.C.O. (and the previous practice of the I.C.F.I.) it is necessary, too, to consider the developments since Connolly's time, not only nationally (the separation of the state machines of Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and the autonomisation of the Northern Irish state) but internationally. For the fact is that since Bolshevism began and since the U.K. labour movement was, as has been shown, handicapped in developing it, a further limitation has been given the principle. Bolshevik Internationalism cannot logically be confined within single states. Its principle requires nothing short of a world-wide

organisation. This was shown first by Lenin and the Bolsheviks when they led the most advanced elements of international Social Democracy out of their state groups and into a new, Bolshevik, Third International. True, orthodox communists (Trotskyists) insist that Stalin's conversion to the will-o'-the-wisp "Socialism in one country", led inevitably to a degeneration of the democracy in this Democratic Centralist International till it could be ended and started again at the first of the bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. But they do not see this as an argument against Bolshevism per se. Rather, they maintain: "The International is dead; Long live the International" They are currently working to build a fully developed Bolshevik Fourth International. The practical difficulties in this are real; they cannot be accepted as reasons for permanently confining party development within state or other regional limits.

Part of the difficulty with the B.I.C.O.'s theory of organisation is that the principle of internationalism over and above the British Isles is treated in much the same casual manner as Connolly dealt with the actual question of the Party. In a debate with fellow adherents of (Marxist) of "Socialism in one country", the idea was put that the B.I.C.O.'s arguments for a British and Irish group (literally that Ireland is a British neo-colony and its state power is in reality a part of Britain's) could be extended to a single group for the British Empire. The Organisation replied (Party Organisation pp 10-11) by remarking on the practical difficulties (distance, travel restriction, language, labour mobility, economic separation) in the way of such a unit. The trouble is that, at least the first three of them could have been used as arguments against the original Bolshevik Party. The arguments for the principle of party unity in Britain and Ireland do not stop either at the English Channel or the Atlantic Ocean, or at the boundaries of those bits of map marked Imperial Rel. Nor indeed, does it limit itself to the borders of the states of the E.E.C. Despite the sneers of the B.I.C.O. at the traditional Marxist concept of Imperialism, it does mean that the struggle for revolution must be waged on an international scale. Britain controls the economy of Ireland. But, then, the U.S.A. dominates the economies of Britain, of the other European States, of the capitalist countries of the world, (except Japan - and this empire is tied militarily). To fight for a socialist society in the British Isles alone is even more stupid than to fight for such a thing in Russia alone (at least Russia had greater resources.) Any workers' state needs the support of the workers of the world; and this is too important to be left to spontaneous combustion.

But if revolution in the British Isles will be most effective if supported by the revolutionary actions of workers elsewhere, this does not mean that it must be organised in a single section for the whole region. The Leninist concept is not one of nationally limited revolution (though struggles against national oppression must be supported by the Bolsheviks). But nor is it one decided organisationally (as the B.I.C.O. would have it: Party Organisation p.6) by trade relationships, citizenship rights, or even inspection of armed forces and supply of munitions. The terms for territorial action are those of the borders of the immediate state power that is to be smashed. In the last resort, Britain can inspect the Irish Army, it has a monopoly of its assassination, but though it sets certain limits, the decision of how to use the forces and arms within those limits lies not with Ted Heath, but with An Taoiseach. As long as he is ready to serve British Imperialism ultimately, Britain won't interfere however much it may feel impatient (as it did until last year no doubt) with his methods of doing so. If British Capitalism fell, Irish Capitalism could survive relatively easily, no doubt backed

and blessed by American capitalism. The constitutional forms that the B.I.C.O. dismisses contemptuously (Ibid. pp 5-6) express a political reality that divides state power in the British Isles as it does not between England and Wales and Scotland.

But, then, why a 32 county section? Surely the B.I.C.O. is correct when it says (Ibid. p 5) "If only the constitutional form of the state is taken into account, it leads to a United Kingdom party, which includes Northern Ireland, and a party of Southern Ireland". Superficially perhaps, it is correct, but here too we are dealing with a political reality, and one that was not unknown to the Bolsheviks. The Northern Irish Protestants had their own state power until 1972. If the current crisis ends without a Proletarian Revolution, they will enjoy it again. Their subordination to Britain was noted more in the economic than in the military or the political fields. As far as the mechanics of state power was concerned, the Unionists had a free hand to 1969, and a considerable influence to 1972. Logically then, it might be concluded that the correct form of organisation would be that of the Stalinists up till 1970; one Communist Party each for the Six and the Twenty Six Counties.

Here again, there is a snag; the relationship of forces in the Six Counties means that a Workers' Republic Of Northern Ireland with any real authority over that territory could exist only, as a catalyst for Revolution on a larger stage. The smashing of Orange power will be as necessary a part of the Irish Revolution as will be the destruction of all more directly clerical power of all denominations. Northern Ireland (not just its Parliament) is an expression of Orange power; any successful revolution will sweep it away. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Ireland will cover all 32 counties, whether by themselves, or as part of a greater proletarian unit of the British Isles, Europe, or as we intend, as soon as possible the whole world.

It is these facts that decide our territorial basis of organisation.

(To be concluded)