

MARX AND ENGELS ON IRELAND—III.

[We continue this month the third instalment of the *Correspondence of Marx and Engels illustrating their attitude on Ireland*. The extracts have been made by T. A. Jackson, who has also provided an Introduction and explanatory Notes. The letters printed in this instalment have been specially translated from the German edition of the *Correspondence between Marx and Engels* now being published by the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute.]

THE letters in this instalment are of a character to speak for themselves with the minimum of comment. It only needs here to be stated that the central point around which these letters turned was the agitation raised by Marx through the International Working Men's Association in favour of an Amnesty to the Fenian prisoners—who were treated as common felons, and with even more than the usual barbarity meted out to the most brutalised types.

Marx, besides being indignant at this barbarous treatment of political prisoners, saw also that an acquiescence in this iniquity would rivet still closer the ideological and other ties which kept the British workers in political dependence upon the middle class "Liberal" and "Radical" party then in power in the person of Gladstone, the Prime Minister. It was in keeping with this whole outlook that he should seek to use the occasion to the full as a means (a) of getting the British workers into action, (b) of directing that action towards a complete break with the pseudo "humanitarian" and "progressive" middle class parties and politicians, and (c) bringing the British workers and the revolutionary Irish Republicans into practical co-operation against their common enemy—the rulers of Britain.

As a result of Marx's prompting and the energy of the London workers—English and Irish—a highly successful demonstration was held in Hyde Park on the Sunday immediately before the meeting of the Council (referred to in Marx's letter of November 18, 1869) at which Marx opened the discussion on his resolutions.

The upshot of the agitation was that, after the usual evasions, Gladstone was at length compelled to grant the Amnesty demanded.

Moreover with this debate there became apparent that cleavage between Odger, Applegarth and Co.—the chiefs of the "Junta" which had till then all-but-absolutely dominated the trade union, and proletarian-democratic movements—and the revolutionary-radical tendency

¹For further details see the pamphlet by Ralph Fox: *Marx-Engels-Lenin on the Irish Revolution*. (Modern Books, 3d.).

championed by Marx, which afterwards found expression in a definitely Socialist movement.

Odger, up to this time, had been popularly regarded as the most advanced type of Democratic Republican possible. He was, in fact, the prototype of the "Atheist Shoemaker" of pious legend. His fame was enshrined in a comic song highly enjoyed in its day in which, along with a string of other unlikely happenings, the singer declaims :

May the Queen have Odger
For a second-floor lodger,
If ever I cease to love !

Tried by the acid test of Marx's resolution denouncing the Government's policy on Ireland Odger and Applegarth were brought squarely in face of the dilemma—to break either with their petty-bourgeois political patrons, or with the militant proletariat and the International. It was characteristic of them, and their like, that they should evade the direct choice thus presented to them. They were "not opposed in principle," but they "had doubts" about the wording, about the expediency of antagonising the "great and good" Gladstone, and so on.

Mottershead, whose material roots were more with the petty-bourgeois Radical "Patriotic" Clubs, and less with the Trade Unions, was more frank. He openly opposed—on "patriotic" grounds.

Marx's prescience was vindicated when some eighteen months later, Odger and Applegarth seized the occasion of the Paris Commune, and the Address thereupon which Marx wrote for and published in the name of the I.W.M.A., to sever their connection finally with that body, and abandon all pretence at being other than petty-bourgeois politicians.

ENGELS TO MARX.

MANCHESTER.

November 17, 1869.

DEAR MOHR,

I am still finding much that is useful on Ireland here, Wolf Tone's memoirs, &c.—that is to say, in the catalogue. As soon as I ask for the books in the library they are not to be found, like the Wakefield. Some old boy or other must have taken out the whole lot together and returned them en masse so that the crowd of them are lying hidden somewhere or other. In any case the things must be found.

The bourgeois thinker and sage is Goldwin Smith, *Irish History and Irish Character*. Ireland is destined by providence to become a grazing land, the prophet, Leonce de Lavergne, has foretold it, ergo pereat (therefore down with) the Irish people !

MARX TO ENGELS.

November 18, 1869.

DEAR FRED,

I am sending you to-day a packet by book-post containing: (1) the Irish volume of pamphlets, Ensor especially of some value; (2) *Social-Democrats* and the *Volksstaat*; and (3) three copies for you, Moore, and Schorlemmer, of the Report of the Basle Congress. I do not know if I have already sent you these. In that case the copies can be distributed to other people.

The *Beehive* has entirely suppressed Eccarius' report of the last session on the pretext that it received it too late. The real reason was (1) that it did not want to advertise the fact that the General Council was opening a discussion on the Irish question in the following session; (2) because in the report there was something unacceptable to it (*i.e.*, to Mr. Potter) about the Land and Labour League. Mr. Potter, you must know, stood with a great show as candidate for the committee of that League and has been rejected.

Last Tuesday I opened the discussion on point one: the attitude of the British Ministry to the Irish Amnesty question. I spoke for about an hour-and-a-quarter, *much cheered*, and then proposed the following resolution.

Resolved:

That in his reply to the Irish demands for the release of the imprisoned Irish patriots—a reply contained in his letter to Mr. O'Shea, &c.—Mr. Gladstone deliberately insults the Irish nation;

That he clogs political amnesty with conditions alike degrading to the victims of misgovernment and the people they belong to;

That having, in the teeth of his responsible position, publicly and enthusiastically cheered on the American slaveholders' rebellion, he now steps in to preach to the Irish people the doctrine of passive obedience;

That his whole proceedings with reference to the Irish Amnesty question are the true and genuine offspring of that "policy of conquest," by the fiery denunciation of which Mr. Gladstone ousted his Tory rivals from office;

That the General Council of the International Working Men's Association express their admiration of the spirited, firm and high-souled manner in which the Irish people carry on their amnesty movement;

That these resolutions be communicated to all branches of, and working men's bodies connected with, the International Working Men's Association in Europe and America.

Harris (O'Brienite) rose to second. But the president (Lucraft) pointed to the clock (we could only stay to eleven); so it was adjourned till next Tuesday. However, Lucraft, Weston, Hales, &c., in fact the whole council declared provisionally their agreement in an informal way.

Another O'Brienite—Milner—said that the wording of the resolution was too feeble (that is to say, not declamatory enough), besides, he wanted all which I had said in justification of it to be included in the resolutions themselves. (A fine story this!)

So there will be a further debate on Tuesday, just time for you to tell me, or rather write what you want changed or inserted in the resolutions. In the last event, if you, for example, still want a paragraph on the amnesty in the whole of Europe, Italy for example, write the thing in the actual form of a resolution.

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ENGELS TO MARX.

MANCHESTER.

November 19, 1869.

DEAR MOHR,

I hope Eccarius will force Potter to include the thing still, late as it is, just because of the Land and Labour League.

I think that an addition regarding the amnesty in the rest of Europe would only weaken the resolution since, apart from Russia (which, standing alone, would be very good), we would have to exclude Prussia on account of the men sentenced for the Guelph conspiracy. But I would like to polish up the wording a bit: on line 2 I would insert "imprisoned" before the word "victims," or add something to make it clear at a glance who was meant. On line 3 it is a question whether you can talk about "the teeth of a position," and instead of "steps in," I would say "turns round."

Lizzy passed you a vote of thanks for the resolution (carried), and is annoyed that she cannot be there on Tuesday.

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MARX TO ENGELS.

November 26, 1869.

DEAR FRED,

But now damn Carey! Three cheers for O'Donovan Rossa!

The session last Tuesday was most fiery, warm and violent. Mr. Muddlehead (Mottershead, or what the devil the fellow is called), a Chartist and old friend of Harney's, had brought Odger and Applegarth

with him as a precaution. On the other side, Weston and Applegarth were missing because they were at an Irish dance. *Reynolds's* had published my resolution in its Saturday issue together with an *abstract* of my speech (as well as Eccarius could do it, he being no stenographer), and *Reynolds's* had banged it right on the front page after his leading article. This seems to have terrified Gladstone's admirers. Hence the appearance of Odger and a *long rambling speech* from Muddershead which Milner (himself an Irishman) struck damn on the head. Applegarth sat beside me and so did not dare to speak *against it*; he spoke rather *for it*, obviously with an uneasy conscience. Odger said that if a division were forced, he must vote for the resolutions. But unanimity would be better and feasible through some slight modifications. Thereupon, since I want to get him right into it, I suggested that he put forward his amendments at the next session! At the last session, although many of our most reliable members were away we could have got the resolution through with only one opposing vote. Tuesday we will be in full force.

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MARX TO KUGELMANN.

LONDON.

November 29, 1869.

DEAR KUGELMANN,

You probably have seen in the *Volksstaat* the resolution I proposed against Gladstone on the question of the Irish Amnesty. I have now attacked Gladstone—and it has made a sensation here—in exactly the same way as I attacked Palmerston earlier. The demagogic *refugees* here prefer to attack the continental despots from a safe distance. But I don't get any joy in attack except when I'm face to face with the tyrant (*vultu instantis tyranni*).

Nevertheless, my intervention in this question of the Irish Amnesty, as well as my further resolution at the General Council to discuss the relations of the English working class to Ireland and to frame resolutions on it, naturally had other objects than just to speak loudly and decidedly for the *oppressed* Irish against their *oppressors*.

I have been more and more forced to the conclusion—and it is only a matter of getting this conclusion into the heads of the English working class—that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it divorces its policy in regard to Ireland in the most definite way possible from that of its ruling class and until it not only makes a united front with the Irish but even takes the initiative in the dissolution of the Union imposed in 1801 and replaces it by a federal relation. And, moreover, this must be done not as a matter of sympathy with Ireland but as a

demand based upon the interests of the English working class itself. If not, the English people remain in the leading strings of the ruling class, because it is necessarily making a united front with it against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England itself will still be hampered by the quarrel with Ireland and the Irish, who in England itself form a very considerable portion of the working class. The *first condition* of emancipation here—the fall of the English propertied oligarchy—remains impossible of fulfilment, since their positions here cannot be stormed so long as they still control their strongly-entrenched outposts in Ireland. But over there, as soon as the matter is placed in the hands of the Irish people themselves, as soon as they have to deal with their own law-givers and rulers, as soon as Ireland is autonomous, then the destruction of the landed aristocracy (to a great extent the same individuals as the English landlords) is incomparably easier there than here, because, in Ireland, it is not only a simple economic question but at the same time a *national* question, because the landlords there are not as in England the traditional dignitaries and representatives but the mortally detested oppressors of the nation. Not only is the internal development of England paralysed by its present attitude towards Ireland, but also its external policy, especially in relation to Russia and the U.S.A.

Then if the English working class unconditionally throws altogether its decisive weight into the scales of social emancipation, then here is the lever ready to its hand. In actual fact the English republic under Cromwell was wrecked on—Ireland. Once bitten, twice shy! (non bis in idem!). The Irish have played the British Government a splendid trick by their election of a *convict-felon*, O'Donovan Rossa, as member of parliament. The government newspapers immediately threatened another suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, a "renewed reign of terror," &c. As a matter of fact, England *has never ruled Ireland in any other way and cannot rule it in any other way* so long as the present Union persists except by the most hideous reign of terror and the most revolting corruption.

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NOTES.

WAKEFIELD—"An Account of Ireland, Statistical and Political." By Edward Wakefield. 2 vols. London. 1812.

DE LAVERGNE, Leonce Guilhard (1809-80)—Orleanist politician and economist.

THE BEEHIVE—1862-1876, a Journal of Trade Union and Democratic politics edited by George Potter, one time secretary of the London Bricklayers' Union.

O'BRIENITE—A follower of William Smith O'Brien (1803-1864), the aristocratic republican who led (and totally ruined) the Irish rising of 1848. He was never more than mildly tinged with Mazzinian humanitarian-democracy, and after the '48 period figured more as a romantic memory than a figure of importance. At the date mentioned his memory (and his "gentlemanliness") was used as a counterpoise to the most militant Fenianism.

LIZZY—Engel's wife, Elizabeth Byrne, an Irishwoman.

APPLEGARTH, Robert (1833-1923)—Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners; was with Odger and Allan (A.S.E.), one of the leaders of the dominating group of Trade Union officials whom the Webbs' called the "Junta"—but who were in their day just as often called "the Clique" or "the Dirty Pack." In 1864 the agitation for the franchise being at its height, the radicalism of the workers having been excited by the American Civil War and its reactions upon Britain (as well as by Fenianism), and the Trade Unions themselves being threatened with suppression,—because of all these things the "Junta" were glad to lend countenance to the I.W.M.A., and serve on its General Council. By the end of 1869 all these causes of impulsion having lapsed with the extension of the franchise, they were reverting to the more congenial line of development of petty-bourgeois Parliamentary wangling.

DAMN CAREY !—The previous portion of the letter discusses an American economist of that name.